Journal of Negro Education

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Source: *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Winter, 1990), pp. 29-44
Published by: Journal of Negro Education
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2295290
Accessed: 14/06/2011 08:26

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Leadership and a Critical Pedagogy of Race: Cornel West, Stuart Hall, and the Prophetic Tradition

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Two precipitous moments within the current historical juncture give the development of a critical pedagogy of race a new urgency for educators in general and African American educators in particular. The increase in the disproportionate level of material wealth, economic dislocation, and intergenerational poverty suffered by African Americans signalled the first moment. It witnessed the frenetic and, at times, savage immorality of the Reagan years as evidenced by Reagan's direct attacks on the underclass which his administration's policies helped create and in the disintegration of social programs and the general retreat from civil rights that occurred during his tenure in office. Other characteristics informing that moment included: changes in the structure of the U.S. economy, the declining inner-city labor market, moderately high national unemployment rates, a drastic decline in the number of unskilled positions in traditional blue-collar industries in urban areas, the increasing numbers of youth competing for fewer and fewer entry-level unskilled jobs, the automation of clerical labor, the movement of the African American middle class out of the once multiclass ghetto (in which a small number of secure and economically stable families helped to keep basic institutions such as churches, schools, stores, and recreational facilities relatively viable; see Wilson, 1987), the shifting of service sector employment to the suburbs (Kasinitz, 1988), the increasing assault on human intelligence by the architects of mass culture, an increasing dependency on social cues manufactured by the mass media to construct meaning and build consensus on moral issues, and the strengthening of what Piccone (1988, p. 9) has called the "unholy symbiosis of abstract individualism and managerial bureaucracies." These and other conditions have resulted in the emergence of rapidly disintegrating and ever more isolated pockets of African American urban poor (see Wilson, 1987).

Critical social theorist, philosopher, and theologian Cornel West (1988a) maintains that while the deindustrialization of American capitalism has led to the devastation of the African American industrial working class and has been shattering to the African American population at large, the rapidly growing African American underclass has felt its impact most severely. Increasingly, West contends, the African American mid-

Journal of Negro Education, Vol. 59, No. 1 (1990)
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dle class has distanced itself both economically and geographically from those African Americans consigned to the new underclass. He described the former as "highly anxiety-ridden, insecure, willing to be co-opted and incorporated into the powers that be, [and] concerned with racism to the degree that it poses constraints on upward social mobility" (p. 276). By contrast, members of the African American underclass were described as embodying a kind of "*walking nihilism* of pervasive drug addiction, pervasive alcoholism, pervasive homicide, and an exponential rise in suicide" (p. 276).

The White-controlled media (often backed by victim-blaming White social scientists) have ignored the conditions that West cited as responsible for bringing about such nihilism, and they have generated the racially pornographic term, "wilding," to account for recent acts of violence in urban centers by groups of young African Americans. Cooper (1989) has pointed out that the media have tended "to broad-stroke young, African American males as subhumans who rape, pillage, and throw themselves into an urban bacchanalia invoked by a gold-chained hip-hop god named Tone Loc" (p. 28). Thus, the postmodern image which many Whites now entertain about the African American underclass is one of violently hybrid groups spawning mutant Willie Horton-type youths who, in the throes of bloodlust, roam the perimeter of the urban landscape, randomly hunting Whites with steel pipes.

Of course, the problem of race and domination goes beyond both the real and imaginary context of underclass African American youth. A second moment of critical concern has to do with recent advances in social theory. Postmodern discourses such as structuralism, deconstructionism, poststructuralism (see Sarup, 1989), and reconstituted and extended critical theories such as Giroux's (1988b) "border pedagogy" or West's (1989) "prophetic pragmatism" are gaining prominence. "Critical pedagogy," an approach to understanding schooling which is based upon the traditions (or, more appositely, the "epistemological ruptures"; Hall [1986, p.33]) of critical theory, the sociology of knowledge, cultural studies, and critical ethnographic studies, among others (e.g., McLaren, 1986a, 1989), has achieved theoretical ascendancy over the last two decades.

While many of these new theoretical approaches, upon appropriation and development by critical educational theorists (e.g., Giroux, 1988b), have profound emancipating possibilities, others carry with them mordantly pessimistic and distinctively reactionary potential (see Giroux, 1988b; McLaren, 1987; and Giroux and McLaren, 1989a). It is to the emancipating strands of this new social theorizing, as they relate to education, that the balance of this article will be directed.

Toward a Critical Perspective of African American Oppression

Currently, many African Americans are deeply involved in constructing a collective ethos of solidarity which can be applied to the struggle for social justice. Although constitutive communities of resistance to cultural and social domination are forming, the pressing task of liberating

the African American underclass and working class is largely being lost. In no arena is this drama more apparent than in the theater of human struggle known as the school.

There is an urgent need to address African American oppression specifically by examining what West (1988a) called the "racial problematic" or "the materiality of racist discourses, the ideological production of African subjects, and the concrete effects of and counterhegemonic responses to the European (and specifically White) supremacist logics operative in modern Western civilization" (p. 17). From West's (1987, pp. 74–90) explication of the conservative, liberal, left-liberal, and Marxist theories of African American oppression, an approach can be advanced for understanding racial oppression which utilizes some of the best insights within the current array of postmodern theoretical perspectives. By linking an exploration of this problematic with Hall's (1981) concept of "teaching race," an outline, albeit an admittedly provisional one, of a critical pedagogy of race can be attempted.

THEORIES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN OPPRESSION

Conservative Views

West has argued that conservative views of African American oppression focus on two primary areas: discrimination in the marketplace and individual personal judgments. Accordingly, the conservative discourse valorizes neoclassical economics and utilitarian psychology, and it contends that Whites treat Blacks differentially because Whites have acquired certain "tastes" with respect to them. These tastes, which may be based upon faulty, unconvincing, or irrational "evidence," shape White people's judgments about people of African descent.

The *market version* of the conservative perspective on African American oppression suggests that opposition to African American employment opportunities is an economic mistake which mitigates against the maximization of profits and goes against the grain of good market logic. Thus, White employers must be taught that their bad racial tastes often contradict their own economic self-interests. This view further contends that the logic of the marketplace will "purify" White racism at a profit—not only for White employers and White workers but also for African Americans.

Another conservative discourse, the *sociobiologist version* of African American oppression, has been articulated by White researchers such as Jensen (1969) who maintained that African Americans are genetically inferior with respect to intellectual performance. Such social Darwinism has served to justify the racist tastes of White employers. It has provided a means for them to rationalize Black unemployment and extol the virtues of the meritocracy; e.g., "the best and the brightest" in our society secure the most lucrative jobs while those representing "lesser" races must secure employment from the "leftovers."

The *culturalist version* of the conservative perspective holds that African Americans as a race suffer not from cognitive deficiencies but from the "affliction" of "cultural deprivation." Employment, business, and

education thus become arenas of competition in which African Americans are placed at a distinct disadvantage because of the qualitatively inferior character of their socialization (which, apparently, devalues hard work, patience, deferred gratification, and persistence). Proponents of the culturalist view exhort African Americans to assume "culturally appropriate" identities; to readjust their social relations with Whites; and to speak, through their devalued and marginalized subjectivities, a discourse of the "Great White Father."

West has pointed out that missing in all of these conservative views of African American oppression is an acknowledgment of the institutional structure and power relationships of the marketplace. Moreover, the conservative perspectives give scant attention to the social and historical structures of oppression such as slavery, state repression, and second-class citizenship.

Liberal Views

According to West, the liberal perspective for understanding and contesting African American oppression draws upon the same neoclassical, egoistic model that undergirds the conservative perspective. However, at the very least, liberal views address the institutional restrictions that are the by-products of Whites' racist tastes. The *market version* of the liberal perspective acknowledges the institutional racial barriers (especially in areas such as employment and education) in the marketplace and supports state intervention into racist employment practices. The liberal *culturalist version* calls attention to the inhibiting impediments of African American culture and stresses the importance of job training and programs such as Head Start. The *neoconservative version* incorporates both the market liberal and culturalist conservative perspectives.

Left-Liberal Views

The left-liberal perspective of African American oppression, because it incorporates some sense of historical consciousness, also tends to cast dispersion on neoclassical economic perspectives. It professes to be more keenly sensitive to the complexity of political struggles within the evolving site of capitalist economic relations. Left-liberal discourse, while often adopting a structuralist-functionalist sociological perspective, situates the racist tastes of White employers and workers in an historical context. It takes into consideration the institutional barriers against which African Americans have historically struggled throughout slavery and the "subsequent decades of Jim Crow laws, peonage, tenancy, lynchings and second-class citizenship" (West, p. 78). The left-liberal view focuses on African American income, strata, and social positions rather than on their class location. Proponents of this view generally support public policies such as full employment, affirmative action, and public works programs.

Marxist Views

Rejecting classical, orthodox, or "infantile" Marxism with its "monocausal unilinear predictive science of history" and its "homogeneous,

teleological narrative of past and present events," West (1987) gleans two important principles from Marxism that provide partial explanations of African American oppression. The first, Marxism's *principle of historical specificity:*

> impels us to examine the various conditions under which Afro-American oppression emerged, the ever-changing structural constraints under which Afro-Americans have accommodated and resisted multiple forms of oppression and the crucial conjunctural opportunities (the 1870s, 1920s, and 1960s) which Afro-Americans have either missed or seized. (p. 80)

This principle urges the highlighting of "economic, political, cultural and psychosexual conflict over resources, power, images, language and identities between Black and other people as among Black people themselves" (p. 80).

The second tenet that West appropriates from the Marxist legacy is the *principle of the materiality of structured social practices over time and space.* He uses this principle to highlight the materialistic and historical aspects of Marxist theory regarding both the extradiscursive formations (modes of production, state apparatuses, and bureaucracies) and discursive operations (religions, philosophies, art, laws, etc.) of social life. West cited the works of W. E. B. DuBois, Oliver Cox, C. L. R. James, Eugene Genovese, Stuart Hall, and Orlando Patterson as some of the best work on race within this tradition. Outside of these theorists and a few others, however, West indicates that Marxist theories of African American oppression generally have been guilty of class reductionism. West further asserts that Marxist theorists "simply subsumed Afro-American oppression under class exploitation and viewed complex racist practices as merely conscious profiteering—or divide-and-rule strategy—on behalf of capitalists" (p. 82).

According to West, the Marxist *class super-exploitationist* perspective contends that African Americans are "subjected to general working-class exploitation owing to racially differential wages received and/or to the relegation of Black people to the secondary sector of the labor-force" (p. 83). By contrast, the *class nationalist* view, the perspective most widely accepted by practicing African American Marxists, explains African American oppression in terms of class exploitation and national domination. The latter view posits that African Americans form an oppressed national minority within American society while the former views race primarily, if not solely, in economic and class terms. However, by West's assessment, the class nationalist perspective is problematic in its "historical racial definition of a nation, its flaccid statistical determination of national boundaries and its illusory distinct Black economy" (p. 84).

Thus, for its articulation of racially-structured capitalist societies as "complex articulated totalities," West considers the *class racialist* or *class ethnic* perspective to be a promising corrective to much of the conservative, liberal, and Marxist theorizing about African American oppression. This perspective, he notes, rejects the reductionism, economism, and a priorism of past and current Marxist theory; that is, such a perspective is critical of theories which posit the economy as the prime factor in the social relations of oppression and the working class as the central agent of revolutionary reform. It further attempts "to give historically-concrete

and sociologically-specific Marxist accounts of the racial aspects of particular societies" (p. 84).

West's own neo-Gramscian or *genealogical materialist* (e.g., Foucauldian) analysis of African American oppression is indebted to the class racialist or class ethnic perspective. His genealogical, micro-institutional, and macro-structural approach can be put to productive use in formulating a critical pedagogy of race. It consists of three characteristics:

(1) a genealogical inquiry into the discursive conditions for the possibility of the hegemonic European (i.e., White) supremacist logics operative in various epochs in the West and the counterhegemonic possibilities available;
(2) a micro-institutional (or localized) analysis of the mechanisms that inscribe and sustain these logics in the everyday lives of Africans, including the hegemonic ideological production of African subjects, the constitution of alien and degrading normative cultural styles, aesthetic ideals, linguistic gestures, psychosexual identities, and the counterhegemonic possibilities available;
(3) a macro-structural approach that accents modes of overdeterminated class exploitation and political repression of African peoples and the counterhegemonic possibilities available (West, 1988, p. 21–22).

THE DISMANTLING OF WHITE SUPREMACIST LOGIC

West's genealogical dismantling of the White supremacist logics—including the *Judeo-Christian racist logic, "scientific" racist logic,* and *psychosexual racist logic*—is especially useful. West asserts that the Judeo-Christian racist logic is grounded in the Biblical story of Ham who, upon failing to cover his father Noah's nakedness, brought forth divine wrath upon his descendants. Within this logic, the "blackening" of Ham's progeny was a form of punishment for Ham's rejection of paternal authority. The basis for "scientific" racist logic rests upon Greek ocular metaphors, Cartesian emphasis on the primacy of the subject, and Baconian ideas of observation, evidence, and confirmation. Scientific racist logic is undergirded by its emphasis on observing, measuring, and comparing parts of the human body within the context of classical, Eurocentric aesthetic and cultural norms. Such logic spawns notions of people of African descent as ugly, culturally deficient, and intellectually inferior. Psychosexual racist logic arises from a European cultural emphasis on phallic obsessions, Oedipal projections, and anal-sadistic orientations. Within this logic, men and women of African descent are associated with dirt, odious smell, and feces. They are viewed as being endowed with extraordinary sexual prowess, as "either cruel, revengeful fathers, frivolous, carefree children, or passive, long-suffering mothers," and as "walking abstractions, inanimate things or invisible creatures" (p. 23).

While West's hypotheses build upon the most comprehensive theories of African American oppression and extend them significantly, they nevertheless must be challenged for their unfortunate lack of emphasis on gender oppression and their failure to represent what McCarthy (1988, p. 274) calls "the *qualitatively* different experiences of Black women." West must be faulted for not expatiating the history of feminism among

African American women or their relentless resistance to oppression. Despite this serious shortcoming, West's position moves significantly beyond the "parallelist position" identified by McCarthy (1988) in which racial oppression is simply *added* to class and gender oppression. McCarthy, who emphasizes the systematically contradictory or "nonsynchronous" operation of race, class, and gender at the level of daily practices (in schools, workplaces, and so forth), also asserts that: "individuals or groups in their relation to economic, political, and cultural institutions such as schools do not share an identical consciousness and express the same interests, needs, or desires at the same point in time" (p. 275). West's typology is not only sympathetic to McCarthy's but it also provides a mechanism for analyzing the nonsynchronous aspects of racial domination.

TEACHING RACE: THE PERSPECTIVES OF STUART HALL

Stuart Hall's (1981) pedagogy of race begins by stressing the need for teachers to avoid producing a classroom atmosphere so "unmistakably anti-racist that the natural and 'commonsense' racism which is part of the ideological air that we all breathe is not allowed to come out and express itself" (p. 59). Hall's position on the teaching of race, like that of West, says a great deal about the economic, political, and ideological aspects of race as a form of production. Moreover, in his insistence that any pedagogy for the teaching of race must challenge teachers to make a very real connection with the "concrete social, political and economic issues which touch the students' lives, which they experience directly," Hall echoed one of the central tenets of critical pedagogy (see Freire, 1973; Giroux, 1983; Apple, 1988; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Giroux & McLaren, 1989). This is an important but not surprising development given Hall's pathfinding work over the years in the areas of critical social theory and cultural studies (cf. Hall, 1976, 1981, 1984, 1985).

However, Hall's work cannot be accused of giving priority to race over class. Hall describes as the "specificity of difference" the ways that race, class, and gender interact. While he acknowledges the important relationship between the economic and social structures of capitalism to the phenomenon of race, he also stresses that the complexity of race as a form of production cannot be attributed solely to capitalism. He attributes the "deep-seated structure" of racism and sexism to their "transposition from historically and culturally created differences to fixed natural or biological or genetic differences" (p. 64). In Hall's view, the ideologies of racism and sexism are more easily able than the ideology of classism to "ground themselves in the evidence of nature" and to appear as natural, commonsensical, or ordinary when, in reality, they are both historical and symbolical constructions. Though Hall contends that racism is more comparable to the ideology of sexism than to the ideology of class, he maintains that, invariably in both racism and sexism, the powerful process of naturalization prevails.

Hall (1981) notes some important themes to which a pedagogy of race must be attentive, among them: race as an indigenous theme in political life, the connections between the rise of indigenously racist political

movements and the workings of a wider reactionary-populist politics, and the role of the media. He maintains that raising the issue of "mere difference" in the classroom is insufficient; rather, students must be led to question "why some of those differences have consistently become historically pertinent" (p. 67). Of considerable importance to Hall in developing a pedagogy of racism is understanding the "languages" of racism that society has made available to its citizens. Racist languages, Hall asserts, can lead to various racist formations (i.e., working-class racism, trade union racism) and to distributions of racist ideologies which "differ in their extent, in their modality, in their grip on people's imaginations" (p. 68). Hall also warns against presenting an idealized picture of a multicultural or ethnically varied society. Such a picture, in his opinion, fails to reveal just how racism "has acted back within the working class itself" (p. 68) and how it often combines with sexism within the African American population itself:

> [I]f you try to tell the story as if somewhere around the corner some whole constituted class is waiting for a green light to advance and displace the racist enemy and constitute a nonracist society, you will have done absolutely nothing whatsoever for the political understanding of your students. Of course, you can also tell the story in a way which so undermines the possibility of building and developing social and political movements around those issues that the only conclusion is deep pessimism. One always has to walk a very fine line here. (p. 68)

In Hall's view, confronting racism is more than "some sort of moral duty which white people with good feelings do for blacks" (p. 69). For Hall, it constitutes an important means for understanding the workings of society, the processes by which teachers' and students' subjectivities are developed, and the ways in which our power as educators is formed. Further, confronting racism implies that the object of analysis in a pedagogy of race is not only the informal lived culture of the oppressed, in all its ruptures and contradictions, but also the nature of teacher power and authority. By extension, Richards (1983) writes:

> [A]nti-racist teaching necessarily brings into question the formation of subjects and will inevitably involve challenges to elements of the informal culture in which those we teach participate: jokes and routine insults are obvious examples. Clearly teachers must include themselves in forms of anti-racist education and not just in order to persuade those we teach to allow a redefinition of the boundary between the public and the private. But, beyond that, we do need to work explicitly on the nature of our power, the construction of one's own particular authority as a teacher. (pp. 68–69)

The Production Of Racist Subjects

Conceptualizing racial oppression through the critical formulations of West and Hall provides a means for understanding how racist subjects are produced within a complex, articulated totality which involves various ideological perspectives, discourses of racism, and racist formations. These components must be understood on two levels: locally, within institutions such as schools; and structurally, within the larger social order where certain operant forces may, in certain instances, be overdetermining (e.g., gender and class exploitation). Race, gender, and class oppression can then be viewed as nonsynchronous developments experienced differently by different individuals at different historical moments and often in culturally contradictory and nonuniform ways. Thus, racism

can no longer and by no means be seen as "free-floating." Instead, racism must be seen as a set of structured social practices which reproduce themselves through individuals who are imprisoned by historically conditioned regimes of discourse, by market-logic interests, and by the interests of dominant groups. Racism, therefore, must be described as *structured* (through historically and ideologically loaded discourses, social practices, relations of production, gender, and social class) and as *structuring* (through the individual's active, yet often contradictory, participation in these discourses, relations, and practices) while it often is simultaneously *destructured* (through both formal and informal resistance to these discourses, relations, and practices).

The works of West and Hall have been cited primarily as a means of addressing the need for a critical pedagogy of race for public schools; however, the issue of developing a critical pedagogy of race is not limited to elementary or high school programs. It also relates directly and urgently to higher education. The often volatile contemporary debates over the future of the current literary canon is a case in point.

Decentering the Canon

It is extremely important for critical educators to challenge the supremacist logic embedded in the assertions of Hirsch (1987) and others who advocate the cognitive superiority of Standard English and Western culture within the school curriculum. Such a position steadfastly ignores the social situatedness and ideological nature of language as well as the relationship of power to knowledge. It also fails to acknowledge the cultural and political significance that has been attached to mastering dominant-group discourses. As counterpoint, Macedo (1988) notes that different English dialects "decode different world views" and the "semantic value of specific lexical items belonging to black English differs radically, in some cases, from the reading derived from the standard, dominant dialect" (p. 127). Macedo further asserts that while the affirmation of African American English does not, of necessity, preclude the need to acquire proficiency in the linguistic code of the dominant group, African American English can become "a powerful tool [for] demystifying the distorted reality prepackaged for [African Americans] by the dominant curriculum" (p. 128).

Equally disquieting in this debate is Bloom's (1987) exclusionary position that knowledge of classical, Eurocentric literary works is the only knowledge immutable and sacred enough to be included in the official curriculum. In Bloom's effete paradise (which, of course, is populated mainly by White European bourgeois males and belles-lettristes from Harvard), including figures such as Richard Wright, Toni Morrison, Ralph Ellison, Alice Walker, or Zora Neale Hurston in the pantheon of acclaimed literary masters would be tantamount to treason. These African American writers, whose works are replete with brilliant vernacular ascriptions and moving narratives of struggle and hope have broken down the temporal and spatial aesthetic conventions of the "white male Brahmins" (Baker, 1984). As such, according to Bloom and other White males of similar sentiment, they must be excluded from the canon.

Similarly excluded would be manifestations of the creativity that Baker (1987) has called "renaissancism," or African American "mastery of form and the deformation of mastery," and the "discovery of [African Americans'] *successful* voices as the always already blues script—as the salvific changing same—in which a new world's future will be sounded" (p. 106).

Echoing the positions of both West and Hall, Gates (1987) has urged educators to "master the critical traditions and languages of Africa and Afro-America" (p. 45) and, thus, prevent the emerging reformed canon from becoming a "self-willed never-never land in which [African Americans] see no true reflections of [their] black faces and hear no echoes of [their] black voices." In Gates's view, attempting to appropriate the discourses of African American communities by using Western critical theory may result in the substitution of "one mode of neocolonialism for another" (p. 43). Appropriately, Gates has advanced the idea of redefining theory from within African American culture itself by "refusing to grant the racist premise that theory is something that white people do" (p. 44).

Caution, however, must be sounded against a too-hasty dismissal of critical pedagogy simply because its roots are buried in Eurocentric critical theory. Rejecting certain Eurocentric and patriarchal dimensions, an African American critical pedagogy can appropriate the best of this tradition while extending and refining other aspects to fit the context of the African American struggle for freedom and social justice.

Critical Leadership in the Prophetic Tradition

A critical pedagogy of race cannot exist without a revitalized and critical conceptualization of educational leadership. Those involved in educational leadership must engage in a discourse which systematically critiques the institutional, political, and social mechanics that perpetuate the asymmetrical power relations and other aberrations of democracy that currently dominate school curriculum and practice (cf. Dantley & Quantz, 1989). Such a discourse can no longer be couched in the language of totality and uniformity. Instead, it must employ a language that accurately depicts what is happening in schools—the language of struggle, revolution, and radical change which presents education as an agency of social responsibility, community, and egalitarian interests.

While a critical pedagogy of race must speak to what West defines as a "reality *that one cannot not know*. . .the ragged edges of the Real, of *Necessity*, not being able to eat, not having shelter, not having health care" (Stephanson, 1988, p. 277), it must also speak (though perhaps not unproblematically) to those who may live other racial, cultural, and economic realities but who share in the struggle for social justice and human freedom. Giroux (1988b), has stressed that educators who are members of the dominant culture take the following factors into consideration:

> As teachers we can never speak inclusively as the Other, though we may be the Other with respect to issues of race, class, or gender, but we can certainly work *with* diverse Others to deepen their understanding of the complexity of the traditions, histories, knowledges, and politics that they bring to the schools. (p. 178)

This perspective suggests not only the need for all educators to acknowledge in the school curricula and elsewhere the diverse voices, experiences, histories, and community traditions that increasingly characterize American society but also the need to devise a means of articulating—within and between these differences—the shared political ends of a democratic society (Giroux & McLaren, in press).

WEST AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN PROPHETIC TRADITION

Although West is primarily a theological scholar, his work offers an empowering pedagogical alternative for leaders in education. Of prime interest is his articulation of the African American prophetic tradition. According to West (1987), this tradition includes "protracted and principled struggles against forms of personal despair, intellectual dogmatism, and socioeconomic oppression that foster communities of hope" (p. 38). It rests upon the supposition that those persons who suffer oppression are capable of transforming their circumstances as they "engage in relentless criticism, and self-criticism, and project visions, analyses, and practices of social freedom" (p. 38).

West portrays African American prophetic practices within the tradition as having essentially three characteristics: a deep-seated moralism, an inescapable opportunism, and an aggressive pessimism. As well, these practices are deeply entrenched in notions of ethical and moral behavior; that is, individuals and groups are measured by moral or "righteous" standards. Essentially, West concludes that, from the African American point of view, an individual's or group's motivations must be grounded in an ethical rationality to impact the functions of organizations and individuals in society with any success: "[A]fter the most intense scrutiny—some ultimate sense of a morally grounded sense of justice ought to prevail in personal and societal affairs" (p. 41).

The inescapable opportunism that West delineates in African American prophetic practices is a direct result of the African American struggle for economic survival. According to West, such opportunistic scrambling for resources, while often unprincipled—and not because African Americans are unscrupulous by nature—is a response to "the design and operation of the American social system [which] requires that the quest for democracy and self-realization be channeled into unfair competitive circumstances" (p. 42). West maintains that only when more democratic arrangements in the social and political spheres are manifested will the African American quest for social, economic, and political satisfaction be met in an ethical, principled fashion.

West further concludes that while the African American prophetic tradition seeks a critique of social and political forms, its third feature, profound pessimism, informs and inspires the African American quest in uncanny ways. As the inconsistencies and dialectics of racial domination and oppression become increasingly clearer to African Americans and as their efforts to overcome marginalization are sabotaged (sometimes blatantly but, more often than not, surreptitiously), that sense of pessimism has a way of awakening a renewed zeal. In effect, West claims, it restores, in a spiritual sense, African Americans' courage to renew

their struggle to appropriate the hegemonic traditions and to resist those societal forms that simply do not make sense to them, namely, those that exclude them, that predict and label them, and that sonorously silence them.

In West's contention, this struggle is extremely evident where African Americans and schooling are concerned. Although West focusses chiefly on the means by which the African American church has provided the impetus for radical social reform, his perspectives are of significant importance for educators. In his analysis, West (1981) maintains that the African American church historically has served to resolve the tensions and establish the agenda for equal appropriation of democratic forms in this society. He further states that the African American church possesses a clear sense of the "not yet" as well as a systematic critique of the "as is." In short,

> black churches were the major public spheres in Afro-America where strategies of survival and visions of liberation, tactics of reform and dreams of emancipation were put forward. Black Christian discourse became the predominant language wherein subversive desires and utopian energies of Afro-Americans were garnered, cultivated, and expressed. (p. 44)

Leadership centered on the ideas of West and Hall has the power to move educational leadership from the sterile, passionless practice of antiseptic administration to a vigorous and impassioned mobilization for greater democracy, equality, and community. Is there not a way in which this theological treatise can be applied to what goes on in the nation's school buildings and classrooms? Cannot other institutions be put into service as bastions of emancipation for African Americans? Cannot the public schools answer West's call "to overcome the structural constraints in the U.S. economy that relegate the underclass to permanent status—a status reflected in rising levels of unemployment, declining labor-force participation rates, escalating numbers of female-headed households and growing welfare recipients" (p. 51)?

West's challenge can be accomplished if school leaders attempt to understand more fully, more critically, and more relationally the cultural contexts in which African American children are socialized, engage in a critical exploration of African American life in schools, and attempt to understand and appropriate pedagogically the fundamentals of the African American prophetic tradition. This will require acknowledgment of the historical struggle of African Americans for a pervasive moralism in American social and political forms. It will require an awareness of the inspirational aggressive pessimism that has characterized African American prophetic practice as well as the realization that such practices must continue to serve as the cultural mainstays of the African American tradition.

Therefore, with regard to the education of African American children, educational leaders must view these cultural forms as fundamental elements of educational reform. As school leaders encourage the dismantling of the unidimensional, monocultural curricula, which currently is replete with White supremacist logics that both overtly and covertly cripple vast numbers of African American students, the educational reforms that blue-ribbon panels and governmental task forces have been

unable to even successfully imagine—let alone develop and implement—will begin to take shape.

CONCLUSION

We have argued for the acceptance of a critical pedagogy of race as a form of discursive production whose purpose is to drive emancipating knowledge into the realm of the possible and to replace despair with "radical hope" (McLaren, 1989a). Such a critical pedagogy of race mitigates against the conflation of equity with "becoming White," knowledge with certainty, difference with deviance, and the institutional and power arrangements such conflation serves. Moreover, it works against economies of knowledge predicated from a masculinist vantage point being placed in the service of the dominant culture.

A critical pedagogy of race involves what Hooks (1989) has called "coming to voice. . .as an act of resistance. . .where one moves from being an object to being a subject" (p. 12). Indeed, Hooks's feminist classrooms virtually resonate with critical pedagogical fervor. They are places "where there is a sense of struggle, where there is a visible acknowledgement of the union of theory and practice, where we work together as teachers and students to overcome the estrangement and alienation that have become so much the norm" (p. 51).

Achievement of the goal of building a critical pedagogy of race and a more empowering and critical form of educational leadership also requires establishing new modes of subjectivity and forms of social praxis to assist the marginalized and excluded in their own historical remaking (McLaren, 1988). These practices openly contest the politics of racism, sexism, and class domination as variously specific and (sometimes) mutually informing processes. By refusing the ahistorical and depoliticized pedagogies which reduce students to voiceless and powerless cultural objects, a critical pedagogy enlists students as authors of their own meanings (see Giroux, 1988a). It enlists educators to struggle "to change history through an identification with the people, the knowledge, the culture—the life—that imagination has made subject to its laws" (Cottom, 1989, p. 102).

A new language of educational reform, what Baker (1984, p. 200) has called "writing the culturally specific," is required. That language must speak to both the specificity of lived experiences and to the lived sense of difference which students experience based upon their race, gender, and class. It must problematize the social relations of oppression and the structures of moral choice to give collective direction to the task of transforming not only the schools but also the larger economic, social, and cultural systems of power and privilege. For the sake of a future free from the deformation of race, class, and gender exploitation, this critical language of teaching race (and its vocabulary of critical self-understanding) must wage a battle for liberation from the cracks and margins of the cultural present.

For African Americans, a critical pedagogy of race must articulate their collective experience by establishing "a mode of *sounding* reality that is identifiably and self-consciously black and empowering" (Baker,

1987, p. 71). Efforts to silence or marginalize the generative themes and social practices of the African American prophetic tradition or to obstruct their natural progression negate the very crux of the African American struggle. Unless we educators wish to buttress the very ideologies that are undermined by an emergent African American critical consciousness and become exegetes of political impotence, we must develop a mode of sounding reality that speaks directly to the politics of difference. We must give voice not only to raced and gendered selves but to a multiplicity of social selves.

Admittedly, such a critical pedagogy seeks to bring disorder to the customary categories of thought and to the conceptual spaces through which social reality is routinely engaged. Achievement of its goals will not be easy. In West's (1981) words:

> We want to change or transform the world as it is but that is something which has to be done, it isn't something which is written down and guaranteed by the conditions which we inherit. There are no guarantees against the growth of a popular racism, but there is always, in the factual everyday struggles of those who resist racism, the possibility of an anti-racist politics and pedagogy. (p. 68)

In order to achieve the type of pedagogy advocated herein, we educators must reject the fixity and hideboundness of present pedagogical approaches which transform us into custodians of sameness. Neither as diabolically powered philosopher-kings nor as pawns ideologically aligned to the cultural barbarism of the "New England male Brahmin," we must begin the task of pedagogical and social change. We must begin to resituate our work, our projects, and our missions at the junction that signifies "change, motion, transience, process. . .motion and meaning yet to be deciphered" (Baker, 1984, p. 202). The prophetic practices contained in the rich legacy of the African American tradition can serve as our guide.

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