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This dissertation pinpoints empathy deficit as a major social issue in the United States and it argues that schools could help address this root problem by offering humanity training. As an example of how humanity training could be implemented in higher education, “The Souls of Good Folk” is offered as a pedagogy of humanity for the composition classroom. This pedagogy uses Cornel West’s derivative philosophy of prophetic pragmatism as a lens of cultural criticism and community action. Furthermore, the pedagogy employs W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* as an example of prophetic pragmatism enacted in the real world. It expands Du Bois’s trajectory from a focus on Blacks to a generalized “good folk.” Du Bois’s book is not used as a blueprint for social transformation, but analyzing it could inform ways of addressing social problems.

“The Souls of Good Folk” critical pedagogy uses the word *souls* to represent people’s actions and the phrase “good folk” to represent anyone who shows society what needs improving and possibly offer ways of doing it. Good folk include marginalized people, cultural workers, grassroots activists, teachers, artists, musicians, and others that help America see itself in efforts to make appropriate changes. The work of good folk is reviewed in this classroom as literature and tangible examples of how to enhance society. The composition classroom is the site for this pedagogy due to its focus on critical

literacy – actively and questioningly engaging with the text to read underlying messages  
– which is needed to help solve social problems.

Teaching through a prophetic pragmatist framework is critical academic work, for it helps produce responsible democratic citizens and it sustains local communities. The prophetic pragmatist classroom is an experiential learning laboratory that combines traditional teaching methods with progressive, hands-on approaches to make experience paramount to the learning process. The main objectives of this pedagogy are for students to understand social issues comprehensively and to find creative, empathetic ways of addressing these problems.

THE SOULS OF GOOD FOLK: PROPHETIC PRAGMATISM  
AS A PEDAGOGY OF HUMANITY IN THE  
COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

by

Temeka L. Carter

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

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To God, my parents, Edmond and Dianna Bell, and my family, Joseph, Chloe, Crystal, and Antoinette, for always being sources of inspiration and support.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of  
The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Members \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Final Oral Examination

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Although much racial progress has been made leading to the twenty-first century, many social issues prevail. Given the success W.E.B. Du Bois achieved by analyzing the plight of Blacks to promote a more humane, democratic America, I believe composition teachers that are interested in improving social conditions could take a similar, broader approach in the classroom. The title of this critical instruction is a derivative of Du Bois's book *The Souls of Black Folk*, which is used as a basis to argue for a new way of thinking about composition studies. The trajectory has expanded from Black folk to a generalized "good" folk to meet twenty-first century social challenges. Whereas race relations were a major problem of the twentieth-century, today many additional issues need regulation to ensure tolerance and fairness in society. The blanket-term "good folk" is used to represent advocates of better conditions for the marginalized members of society. Good folk are the ones that show us *what* needs to be done and possibly *how* things should be done in society. In *Souls*, Du Bois utilized his experiences as a black man to inform society of the need for humane, respectable interaction between the races. His plea for humanity included different methods to educate society about the contributions and value of *all* its members. His distinctive approaches could help inform teachers of critical pedagogy how to promote social change and goodwill.

This dissertation, “The Souls of Good Folk: Prophetic Pragmatism as a Pedagogy of Humanity in the Composition Classroom,” pinpoints empathy deficit as a major social problem in the United States and it shows that a pedagogy of humanity could help students develop into democratic citizens. It expands Du Bois’s work and it uses Cornel West’s derivative philosophy of prophetic pragmatism as a lens of cultural criticism and community action. The main objectives of this pedagogy are for students to articulate social issues and find authentic, creative, and empathetic ways of contributing to this democracy. It is important to note that Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* is seen primarily as a theoretical framework, a way of approaching social justice. It is not used within this dissertation as a blueprint for social transformation, but it can help in moving beyond divisive realities. Each of us could play a vital role in improving society if only we put aside our apprehensions and cared enough, if only we could love enough. The words empathy, humanity, and love are used synonymously throughout this dissertation to represent a community that thrives on mutual respect and togetherness in efforts to evolve.

Chapter one establishes the empathy deficit as being sort of a huge crack that is rippling throughout the infrastructure of American democracy and it shows that humanity training in schools is a method of mending it. An overview is given for the need to cultivate humanity and ways to achieve this task are provided. Key terms and phrases are defined to unpack this complex, critical instruction, such as “pedagogy of humanity,” “good folk,” and “prophetic pragmatism.” Furthermore, the importance of using Du Bois’s book *The Souls of Black Folk* as way of approaching social justice in the twenty-

first century is discussed. The introduction shows that over the course of a century Du Bois's argument for humanity is still relevant. An explanation is provided for why this curriculum is well suited for a composition classroom and how it serves the university community at large. The framework is established from which I argue that humanity training could reduce the empathy deficit by equipping students with necessary, basic tools to creatively solve social problems. Consequentially, this pedagogy could help encourage a more democratic, progressive society.

The second chapter establishes the theoretical context of engagement by discussing Cornel West's derivative philosophy of prophetic pragmatism, why it was established, and why it is used as the major framework within this curriculum. The entire chapter shows how the interrelated ideas of select pragmatists influenced society generally and the development of prophetic pragmatism specifically. This overview includes the following philosophers: Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalist movement, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, W.E.B. Du Bois, John Dewey, Jane Addams, and Cornel West. Furthermore, the work of Jane Addams and friends at Hull House in Chicago is provided as a real-world example of how prophetic pragmatism encompasses diversity, community, and activism in ways that could influence public policy.

The third chapter examines W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* as an example of prophetic pragmatism. Discussed are the ways in which Du Bois exemplifies the tenets of this philosophy to help cultivate humanity. Even though his methods are used primarily to address twentieth-century issues of racism, they could significantly

inform the social work of twenty-first century prophetic pragmatists. Important aspects of Du Bois's work include a historical perspective for present context and future projections of social evolution. The historical foci consist of Du Bois's acknowledgement of America's turbulent epistemological, scientific, and cultural past (with regards to racism). This divisive tradition established an unfair society in which Du Bois found himself. His twentieth-century contextual analyses include arguments that Blacks deserve justice for helping to define America through their many spiritual and cultural contributions. This analysis incorporates his usage of the terms "veil" and "double-consciousness" as tropes that describe the different physical and psychological "worlds" that Blacks and Whites inhabit. Furthermore, Du Bois's logical, ethical, and emotional pleas for the races to work together are viewed as future projections for a racially harmonious, democratic society.

The fourth chapter more fully develops the theoretical concepts for this critical pedagogy of humanity called "The Souls of Good Folk." It explores how the empathy deficit should be addressed in schools by merging concepts of cultural criticism, humanity training, and community service. Concepts such as epistemology, critical thinking, community, empathy, good folk, and experience are explored. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the opportunity and responsibility of the prophetic pragmatist teacher and schools. It explores educational theory, which suggests that people in class and in the world learn in similar ways and the importance of reviewing a situation holistically – past, present, and future. The three general ideas that are emphasized include: (1) to realize that we live in a world of diverse opinions, rather than solely diverse ethnicities;

(2) to develop better negotiating skills between individuals of different persuasions; and  
(3) to creatively solve social problems and learn more about ourselves in the process.

The fifth chapter unpacks “The Souls of Good Folk” pedagogy and shows that teachers can create a community-activist experience by combining many different theoretical approaches, such as: dialogic discourse, group work, speeches, journal writing, community and service learning, ethnography, and technology. It establishes the entire curriculum as experiential and collaborative learning that strengthens basic skills for critical thinking and community development. I discuss specific methods of learning that can be used within a composition classroom to help cultivate humanity and democratic social action and show how each method could work independently and collaboratively, making it comprehensive, holistic, and pragmatic. This chapter also includes a conclusion, which shows how prophetic pragmatism is reflected and reinforced in society. It proves that this pedagogy of humanity is not just important to higher education, but it is also important to the world.

### **Empathy Deficit as a Major Social Problem**

When every major intersection in American cities appears occupied with panhandlers, one can become so conditioned to this phenomenon as to render the behavior normal and the persons invisible. Tossing money into a roadside collection plate is the least some people can offer a seemingly insurmountable problem. While many feel sorry for downtrodden individuals and are thankful that misfortune bypassed them, others choose to ignore the vagrant landscape each time they drive. Whether acknowledged or

disregarded, the reality is that creative solutions are needed to curb the escalating rates of poverty and other issues that plague our society. In seriously considering the plight of the disenfranchised, theorists could indicate many contributing factors that landed them dispossessed. Identifying all the culprits involved in a growing epidemic is acclaimed and important academic work. However, in deconstructing social problems, theorists are generally absolved of any real connections to their subjects. On the one hand, appropriate distance allows for objectivity necessary to make acute prescriptions. While on the other hand, remote distance from the realities these people face can encourage an us-and-them mentality, which I believe, is at the core of ineffectually addressing the problems. President Barack Obama would suggest that this mentality is called an “empathy deficit,” and America is suffering from it.

During a 2007 commencement speech at Southern New Hampshire University, Obama shared with the audience his major lesson in empathy. Once, as a college freshman, he and his buddies had partied so hard that they trashed the dorm room to the point of the cleaning lady tearing up when she saw the mess. When his girlfriend at the time heard about it, she said to him, ‘That woman could’ve been my grandmother, Barack. She spent her days cleaning up after somebody else’s mess.’ Obama considers this his “first lesson of growing up: The world doesn’t just revolve around you.” He defines “empathy” as “the ability to put ourselves in someone else’s shoes; to see the world through those who are different from us – the child who’s hungry, the laid-off steelworker, the immigrant woman cleaning your dorm room” (“Barack’s Lesson” 31). In an effort to combat what Obama calls “empathy deficit,” every citizen should learn

about the interconnectedness of the world community and work in some capacity to improve life for everyone.

An ideal society – free of war, sickness, and poverty – may never be achieved. However, if more people were empathetic to the plight of others, then life in general would improve. It is often said that injustice persists in the world because of good people that do nothing about it. Few people aspire to become change agents, or self-proclaimed revolutionaries, for the word “revolutionary” has a pejorative stigma attached to it. The word suggests that one is a troublemaker, martyr, rebel, or outcast. Instead of assuming that one would live in strife if social advances are attempted, we could all benefit from changing our perceptions of what is involved in social change. Addressing the “empathy deficit” and promoting interdependence versus independence are essential strategies for improving the overall quality of life in the United States and abroad.

Although youthful self-indulgence is almost expected, Obama demonstrated in the account of his early college days that any person can transcend reckless behavior and become empathetic to the plight of others. This social maturity, or personal evolution, requires an honest self-evaluation and a willingness to change. And, it is in accordance with one of Socrates’ claims, “The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being,” even though he had difficulty in convincing people to examine the self and others (Plato 38 A). Obama clearly understands this challenge and during his talk warns students, “As you go on in life, cultivating this quality of empathy will become harder, not easier. There’s no community service requirement in the real world; no one forcing you to care” (31).



## **Laying the Foundation: Addressing the Empathy Deficit**

In addition to family and community influence, schools could serve a major role in training students to become more humane, democratic citizens. Even though our highly competitive, capitalistic society encourages self-interest, it would be a travesty if undemocratic attitudes persist without critique or change. Therefore, humanity training is needed in schools to teach students how to become empathetic and tolerant of others. Schools could play a major role in training students to live communally in this increasingly complex, diverse world. Tackling hard issues such as racism or poverty within a classroom environment may be viewed as less intimidating than having similar conversations in the work place or on a train ride. Even though dissimilar opinions are aired within a classroom, this setting is generally viewed as a safe haven compared to conversing with complete strangers in passing. The teacher's presence, in addition to seeing peers as intellectual companions, may enhance a feeling of security and sense of well being within students. Furthermore, classroom discussions could inspire important negotiation and collaboration methods for real world application. Schools should take a more active civic role in teaching students to become democratic citizens. By doing so, they could influence future leaders and policy makers to be compassionate and pragmatic in decision-making processes. Most importantly, they could teach ordinary citizens how to work cooperatively and do extraordinary things to benefit society.

“The Souls of Good Folk” is a pedagogy that employs theory and experience that inform the cultivation of humanity. It is a comprehensive approach to teaching that merges traditional and progressive educational methods for the purpose of creatively

solving social problems. This critical pedagogy is offered as suggestions on how students can become conscious of themselves and the world in efforts to make meaning of their lives. It would allow students to make connections with the past and present for future projections. Once students understand the ways in which humans are intricately connected, they could learn to become democratic citizens and agents of social change. More than anything else, a pedagogy of humanity could generate an awareness of the ways in which people interact with others, by considering how actions impact others and vice versa. It would help deflect self-absorption and greed by promoting interdependence as a primary method of building community. It would show how each of us is intricately connected to others in society. It is designed to encourage students to care about more than themselves and their circle of inclusion.

A pedagogy of humanity is a teaching style that promotes the quality or state of being humane, values the contributions of all humans, regardless of perceived differences, and shows the benefit of working together to enhance society. This pedagogy could be exhibited through various philosophical methods in the classroom, with one comprehensive approach being cultural criticism. More narrowly focused areas of study might center on women, homosexuals, and the working class. Trying to engender social responsibility through the classroom is not a new concept, for the first American colleges and universities incorporated a civic mission to prepare their students to engage meaningfully with the world. The need to renew this concept to meet twenty-first century social challenges is discussed at length later within the dissertation. The term “good folk” is used throughout this dissertation to represent individuals who work in any capacity to

improve the quality of society. They are the marginalized people or the wretched of the earth, cultural workers, grassroots activists, artists, musicians, and the like, that help America see itself in efforts to propel social evolution.

### **Pragmatism and Cultural Criticism for Humanity Training**

Humanity training is an indispensable social resource needed in a diverse global society. I define humanity as the ability to live civilly among others, finding common ground at the same time respecting differences. Issues of humanity are prevalent throughout *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois understood it as a means for social progress and democracy. With its emphasis on dissecting Black folk's disenfranchisement to promote humanity in America, *Souls* could be effectively taught in many humanities courses because of the focus on understanding the human condition. Through its use of critical or analytical methods instead of empirical approaches, the humanities department could play an important role in promoting democracy by offering texts like *Souls* that express the need for equal access and value of human life. In her book *Cultivating Humanity*, Martha Nussbaum says,

If literature is a representation of human possibilities, the works of literature we choose will inevitably respond to, and further develop, our sense of who we are and might be. (106)

Therefore, the literature one chooses plays a vital role in fostering “an informed and compassionate vision of the different” (89). She suggests that today's humanities departments break away from flawed traditions and overcome “defects of vision and

receptivity” by adopting a “radical political agenda” where all groups are valued and rendered visible. “It is always radical, in any society, to insist on the equal worth of all human beings” (112). What is needed is an inclusive approach to literature that sustains and evolves our conception of a democratic society. Furthermore, literature coupled with community service could meet twenty-first century demands for positive social change.

Pragmatists would say that negotiating exactly *how* social change is best attempted and exhibited could be determined with experience. Best practices are not the main issue yet. First, it is important to generate awareness and empathy regarding the social improvements that are needed, and this comes through cultural criticism. In *Cornel West: The Politics of Redemption*, Rosemary Cowan suggests there is a distinct connection in Cornel West’s mind linking pragmatism and cultural criticism. She says, “In fact he claims that American pragmatists *are* cultural critics whose work has political consequences; they are concerned with the meaning of America in response to specific social and cultural crises and strive to present new interpretations of the world” (37-38). Given this context, the words pragmatism and cultural criticism can be used synonymously.

As cultural critics, pragmatists have the opportunity to help engender humanity, empathy, and love in the world. Pragmatists posit human agency at the center of cultural criticism. If something needs to be made or remade, including one’s self, pragmatists believe that humans have the ability to effect the appropriate change. Creativity and ingenuity are needed for America to live up to its original charter and further progress. Utilizing cultural criticism (pragmatism) within the discursive space of a classroom could

best serve humanity because of its far-reaching implications beyond individual students, extending out into the communities and the world.

A curriculum centered on cultural criticism (pragmatism) would require students to engage the subject matter by establishing legitimate claims with their cohorts and to come to terms with personal and public realities. Due to a multitude of social conditionings, it is expected that each person will interpret reality differently. However, major objectives are to challenge despondence and cynicism and to expand current ways of knowing. Cowan echoes West, a Princeton educator and social critic, in saying, “Retention of hope in the midst of pessimistic experience promotes agency and recognition of the contingency of the self and society.” A pedagogy of humanity could help students think communally and holistically with regards to civil and human rights for all. Cultural criticism (pragmatism) could be a useful method to articulate or to call to the world its problems in hopes of a response in the form of social action. When used as a lens for social engagement instead of mere disparagement, cultural criticism (pragmatism) has the ability to transform society.

It is equally vital to assure individuals that every person is capable of contributing something to enhance the world. It is imperative that we put our thoughts and beliefs into action to improve society. This requires embracing the pragmatist philosophy of evaluating the consequences of our actions to determine its usefulness in the world. This assessment comes with the understanding that in the process experiences may redefine our initial thoughts and beliefs. West reminds us that “these strategies are never to become end-in-themselves, but rather to remain means through which are channeled

moral courage and human desperation in the face of prevailing forms of evil in human societies and in human lives” (“On Prophetic Pragmatism” 167).

### **Prophetic Pragmatism in the Composition Classroom**

Because of its action-oriented, non-essentialistic, ‘back to the drawing board’ approaches, general pragmatism principles could be well implemented into any course of study that seeks to arrive at change. However, a *prophetic pragmatist* agenda is enhanced with a social awareness aspect that should be requisite to any serious civic work. In “The Limits of Neo Pragmatism,” West says,

Prophetic pragmatism gives courageous resistance and relentless critique a self-critical character and democratic content; that is, it analyzes the social causes of unnecessary forms of social misery, promotes moral outrage against them, and organizes different constituencies to alleviate them, yet does so with an openness to its own blindnesses and shortcomings. (186)

Unlike linear philosophies, prophetic pragmatism offers teachers and students a more universal ethical framework. In “On Prophetic Pragmatism,” West states that this philosophy is “all inclusive because it is a commitment to individuality and democracy, historical consciousness, and systemic social analyses and tragic action in an evil-ridden world that can take place in-through usually on the margin of – a variety of traditions” (170). Within the prophetic pragmatist orientation, experiences of both the socially disenfranchised and also the individuals that advocate positive change can be explored to generate new truths. Similar to Du Bois’ work in *Souls*, one of the prophetic pragmatist ideas is to create a paradigm shift from negatively thinking about the socially disenfranchised, to placing an emphasis on positive reinforcement. This could be

achieved through critiquing social infrastructures that allow debilitation and focusing on the critical work necessary to improve situations.

Not only would study and discussion of social issues in a classroom help students filter through complex problems, but reflection and synthesis of their experiences would aid as well. This in-depth analysis could enhance personal awareness and also provide vital insight to posing creative solutions to problems. Therefore, prophetic pragmatism would be well suited within a composition classroom, for its critical inspection of language, student-centeredness, dialogic discourse, and reflection opportunities. This class would promote writing as a major vehicle of human agency and social change. Its broad teaching design allows it to accommodate humanity training, or a pedagogy of humanity.

Prophetic pragmatism makes it possible for people to deal with personal and social tragedies, disappointments, and hurts in creative, productive manners. In a “Conversation with bell hooks,” West and hooks discuss prophetic pragmatism as a philosophical framework that allows people to theorize tragic experiences in such a way that the tragedies are understood beyond the emotions connected to it (*West Reader* 544). West cites blues and jazz as musical examples that fuse together past experiences in light of a trajectory of hope in efforts to cope and move ahead. West considers this music as “improvisational, undogmatic, creative” ways that address circumstances and still allow people to survive and strive. In this regard, people learn various methods that allow the suffering to speak, without wallowing in pessimism or cynicism. Feelings of helplessness and victimization abate once people come up with ingenious approaches to problems.

Inevitably, this supports a more democratic, peaceful society.

A significant way to arrive at solutions to social problems is to constantly dialogue about issues that plague society, especially as it pertains to race, class, and gender. Through cultural criticism and prophetic pragmatism, West is hopeful that America comes to terms with its turbulent, inequitable history. He says we need a discussion about differences in order to expand a sense of community. Many others make a similar beckoning call. For example, during the 2007 presidential election, there was much debate about Senator Barack Obama's perceived difference – biracialism, liberal education, and transcontinental lineage– that caused some Americans to believe he was to be feared. His uniqueness called forth many questions from all sides of the public. Some accused him of being a Muslim, a terrorist, a socialist, an elitist, too Black, or simply not Black enough. The misrepresentations of Obama escalated when tapes of his pastor's fiery, critical sermons were repeatedly aired on every major news outlet and the Internet. After the controversy stirred, Obama was compelled to give a speech on race to the nation in response to allegations that he shared the views of his radical pastor, Rev. Wright.

Critical attention was drawn to Obama's biracialism during the presidential campaign despite his team's efforts to center on ideas and values rather than racial issues. Through his speech, "A More Perfect Union," Obama revealed his experiences as being what I call a curious case of acute miscegenation, living amidst multiethnic and multicultural worlds. For him, it is as an amazing journey to deeply understanding himself as well as various sides of the public spectrum. His multicultural background has



taught him to value a person's character, beyond his or her ethnicity, and to focus on common principles, such as family, social, and moral values. The majority of people resonated with Obama's values, hopes, and aspirations for this country and elected him as the first Black American President of the United States.

Once elected President, Obama fulfilled his promise to have one of the most ethnically diverse cabinets in history, appointing a mixture of Hispanic, Black, Asian, and White members. Obama filled his team with highly capable, respected people who do more than fill a racial quota. His appointees are experts in their fields and, like Obama, they are known for their pragmatism. One newly confirmed member, the nation's first Black Attorney General, Eric Holder, has recently stirred major controversy for his straightforward, clear-eyed method of fighting racial invisibility, which West would consider *prophetic* pragmatism. Holder spoke out against race relations in this country while giving remarks about the significance of Black History Month to his staff at the Department of Justice. Without making the correlation, Holder articulated the essence of W.E.B. Du Bois's book, *The Souls of Black Folk* in two sentences. He said, "One cannot truly understand America without understanding the historical experience of black people in this nation. Simply put, to get to the heart of this country one must examine its racial soul" (2009). However, the bulk of the controversy stemmed from his additional comments, "Though this nation has proudly thought of itself as an ethnic melting pot, in things racial we have always been and continue to be, in too many ways, essentially a nation of cowards." As chief law enforcement officer of the federal government, the attorney general says that in efforts for this country to truly progress, we average

Americans must “have frank conversations about the racial matters that continue to divide us.” As an example of a prophetic pragmatist, Eric Holder asks Americans to “use February of every year to not only commemorate black history but also to foster a period of dialogue among the races” by finding ways to “force ourselves to confront that which we have become expert at avoiding.”

These two current examples, of President Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder, are used to further illustrate the need for humanity training in this country. Not only is race a major obstacle impinging social advancement, but other areas of inequality debilitate the nation as well. Since it is difficult to foster meaningful discussions of complex social issues among average citizens, schools are essential loci for providing humanity education. Incorporating the philosophical framework of prophetic pragmatism in the classroom would address human concerns and also inspire action to effect social change. Using prophetic pragmatism as a pedagogy of humanity would allow people to articulate social ills and creatively address them, while also promoting evolutionary love and empathy.

Many years of scientific, hermeneutical, and cultural work go into developing the prophetic pragmatism framework that is used with “The Souls of Good Folk.” Cornel West merged the ideas of theorists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and Jane Addams to inform what I consider to be one of the best approaches to cultivating empathy, love, and humanity. The next chapter discusses why these select pragmatists are recognized for their significant work in aspiring American democracy to live up to its creed as being equality and justice for all.

## CHAPTER II

### THE EMERGENCE OF PROPHETIC PRAGMATISM

#### **Cornel West: A Call for Social Accountability**

Countless traditions have changed over time and they will continue to change within a progressive society like the United States, regardless of detractors. Embracing the implications of any sort of change can be a frightening experience and it requires a certain sagacity, vulnerability, and courage. People generally hold on to rituals because it allows them to comfortably make sense of the world and their place within it. Rituals are not altogether bad practices, but closing oneself off to new life experiences can encourage a circumscribed, dogmatic approach to life. Many progressive philosophers warned against the type of social recidivism that pervades century after century without constructive criticism. These groups believe traditions that are qualifiable and practical in nature should be embraced, instead of aimlessly practiced because ancestors established a regimented method. They urged their compatriots to learn from new experiences and to view traditions as simply foundational methods upon which to build rather than static concepts.

Princeton educator and social critic Cornel West is part of a long trajectory of trail-blazing philosophers who established their own paths, redefining and reinventing theories as they moved along. In this chapter, I discuss pragmatism and the key

philosophers within the genealogy that led to West's derivative philosophy *prophetic pragmatism*. Each of the showcased pragmatists builds upon the notions that human knowledge evolves through continuous experimental and experiential processes that inform epistemological, social, or personal change. I show that together, their ideas represent tenets of prophetic pragmatism that can help America become a more democratic, effective nation. Eventually, I argue that using a prophetic pragmatism framework in the classroom could help cultivate "good folk" in society. These are the folks who, like the pragmatists, help society see itself in efforts to produce change.

### **Pragmatism Defined**

Pragmatism is one of those ambiguous words like "hope" that could mean a thousand different things, depending on who is asked to define it. Merriam-Webster dictionary offers a common understanding of pragmatism as:

An American movement in philosophy founded by C. S. Peirce and William James and marked by the doctrines that the meaning of conceptions is to be sought in their practical bearings, that the function of thought is to guide action, and that truth is preeminently to be tested by the practical consequences of belief.

In *Cornel West: The Politics of Redemption*, Rosemary Cowan clarifies that,

"Pragmatism is not a philosophy or a school of thought, but rather a way of doing philosophy." She then tries to explain the huge concept of pragmatism by offering three succinct tenets of it, which includes the following:

(1) It rejects universal conceptions of truth and reality that hint at some notion of

a “God’s eye-view.” (2) Pragmatists thus reject philosophy’s traditional obsession with finding Truth and focus [sic] instead on a proliferation of truths that are in the making by humanity; truths are human products arising from experience... We do not discover these truths through theorizing but by trying out ideas in our individual and common lives. Once discovered, truth proves its worth by “working.” Thus what is true is simply the best interpretation we have to date, and potentially better truths may be established in the future on the basis of new and unforeseeable social practices. (3) The purpose of inquiry, from a pragmatist perspective, is not an attempt to embody the True or the Good but an effort to solve problems and shape a satisfactory world. Thus the point of imaginative thinking is to help us shape the world, so seeking not simply to explain reality but to improve it. The ultimate philosophical goal of pragmatism is thus improved experience. (36)

West understands pragmatism as an evasion of epistemologically centered philosophy. He defines it as “a future-oriented instrumentalism that tries to deploy thought as a weapon to enable more effective action.” For him, pragmatism advances “a conception of philosophy as a form of cultural criticism in which the meaning of America is put forward by intellectuals in response to distinct social and cultural crises” (*American Evasion* 5). Therefore, pragmatism is distinguished from European philosophies because knowledge is applied as being action oriented instead of static (Johnson 14).

At the beginning of his book *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, West justifies his involvement in this paradigm by declaring, “...the best of the American pragmatism tradition is the best America has to offer itself and the world” (9). He continues by explaining his primary objective in writing the book, “...a thorough re-examination of American Pragmatism, stripping it of its myths, caricatures, and stereotypes and viewing it as a component of a new and novel form of indigenous American oppositional thought and action, may be a first step toward fundamental change and transformation in America and the world” (9).

Throughout this book, West discusses himself as a pragmatist and pays homage to individuals who influenced him the most. Although West refers to some people that are not generally recognized in the pragmatism genealogy, he gives legitimate reasons for including them. For instance, he identifies philosopher and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson as laying the framework for pragmatism as a leader among the nineteenth century American Transcendentalists. West's book cover features a picture of a tree, with Emerson as the trunk and thinkers he influenced as the different branches. Although the roots are far reaching into the soil, Emerson's work is regarded as foundational for establishing American philosophy. Furthermore, West highlights W.E.B. Du Bois as a public intellectual who greatly contributed to pragmatism. He esteems Du Bois for his American optimism, belief in democracy, and tireless efforts to improve social conditions. Even though West highly regards pragmatism as "the most influential stream in American thought," he believes it would benefit from a radical change (150). He is deeply impressed with many pragmatists but perceives a void in each of their approaches. He feels the need for a more comprehensive structure that considers the experiences of everyone in society – especially women and minorities – to inform knowledge. In efforts for pragmatism to apply to all issues and all persons within society, West believes it should offer "an explicit political mode of cultural criticism." With a distinct civic objective, pragmatists could offer meaningful insight to social progress. Essentially, if West combined all the ideas he most appreciates from respective pragmatists, this radically changed form of pragmatism would "recapture Emerson's sense of vision – his utopian impulse – yet rechannel it through Dewey's conception of creative democracy

and Du Bois's social structural analysis of the limits of capitalist democracy" (150).

Therefore, to fill the perceived void and radically change the dynamics of how knowledge is assessed, West added to the philosophy by branding his own form called prophetic pragmatism. West states the prominent tenets of prophetic pragmatism as:

a universal consciousness that promotes an all-embracing democratic and libertarian moral vision, a historical consciousness that acknowledges human finitude and conditionedness, and a critical consciousness which encourages relentless critique and self-criticism for the aims of social change and personal humility. (*American Evasion* 232)

West believes personal humility and self-critique are necessary inward steps toward assessing the external problems of the world. In order for social change to be enacted in the world, change must happen within oneself. It is important for each of us to reflect on whether we perpetuate or assuage corruption, bigotry, and hate. Injustice cannot persist if people actively work to diminish it. Prophetic pragmatism as a philosophical framework in the classroom could help students attain certain personal and social skills needed for a more humane, dynamic society.

### **Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalism Movement**

Before acknowledging the more accepted father of pragmatism, Charles Sanders Peirce, West begins his pre-pragmatism genealogy in *American Evasion* with Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalism movement. For, herein lies the first major intellectual shift in America. Emerson's early works "Nature" and "The American Scholar" are thought to have laid the foundation for American Transcendentalism. "Nature," his anonymously published essay written in 1836 and "The American Scholar,"

a speech he gave a year later to the Phi Beta Kappa Society in Cambridge, helped Americans further break away from hegemonic ideas. Although his explanations of Transcendentalism are dense within these works, Emerson essentially encourages his contemporaries to see the world anew. Although he loved books and considered them to be great resources and inspiration, in “The American Scholar” he cautions readers to not let any book be the final authority on the truth. He encourages every person to read books, but to use independent thinking and experience to help decide or generate truths. Emerson felt that the scholar should be seeking action and studying nature, thus making “life his dictionary.” He says, “When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men’s transcripts of their readings” (1533). Therefore, Emerson urged America to wean itself from Europe’s predominant religious and philosophical influences to progress individually and as a nation.

The very concept of breaking away from establishments and creating new paths is both democratic and American in nature. Journalist J. A. Saxon, writing in a transcendentalist publication called *The Dial*, mentions that the very ideal of the United States is “transcendental,” for “its right to be a nation was broadly and unequivocally legitimated upon the instinctive truth of the principle of the equality and brotherhood of universal man” (101). Even though the United States was founded on democratic ideals that suggest every person, man or woman, is created equal, American Transcendentalists worked to make this creed more than a notion but an actual practice in society. According to Philip F. Gura in *American Transcendentalism: A History*, Transcendentalists attempted to “reenergize and redirect what they increasingly regarded as the country’s



misguided and faltering democratic experiment” (xv). He defines these radicals as “one of the nation’s first coherent intellectual groups: movers and shakers in the forefront of educational reform; proselytizers for the rights of women, laborers, prisoners, and the indigent and infirm; and agitators for the abolition of slavery” (xi). American Transcendentalists sought intellectual reform and a better way of practicing democracy. They helped usher in a school of “new thought,” which was a group of ideas that refuted hegemonic doctrine. By doing so, they molded a uniquely “American” cultural and intellectual identity. Rather than passing along antiquated written information as *the* truth, transcendentalists believed in everyone’s ability to assess and create knowledge based on relevant interaction or experience. In other words, they believed people could “transcend” empirical belief structures and tap into mental and spiritual messages that help answer questions such as “What is authority?” and “What defines truth?” People were skeptical of the Transcendentalists because of their call for change and reform in society.

There are many important leaders and tenets of Transcendentalism that could be explored. However, the focus here is to show how Emerson’s ideas helped spark other “new thought” type groups and movements, and more importantly, to show his connection to pragmatism. In *The Primal Roots of American Philosophy*, Bruce Wilshire says, “To understand the emergence of pragmatic modes of thinking in the last half of the nineteenth century requires an understanding of the groundswell of crisis to which it is a creative response” (175). The antebellum period from which pragmatism emerged was a time of social transformation, dominated by antislavery and abolitionism. In *The*

*American Mind: An Interpretation of American Character and Thought Since the 1880s*, cultural historian Henry Steele Commager argues that pragmatism resonated in the United States because it was a “democratic philosophy, held every man a philosopher, gave every man a vote, and counted the votes of the simple and the humble equal to those of the learned and the proud” (93). Therefore, pragmatism resonated with many people during this era as a theoretical vehicle of democratic hope and social progression.

In *Cornel West: The Politics of Redemption*, Rosemary Cowan shows that Emerson could be viewed as an honorary pragmatist, since “his beliefs attend to pragmatism’s dominant themes, namely optimism, moralism, individualism, and an emphasis on human agency” (39). Furthermore, “In place of philosophy Emerson pursued cultural criticism that offered both a legitimation and critique of America; he sought to enhance his *ideal* of America through critique of the selfishness and low moral standards found in “actually existing” America” (39). Instead of displaying overt political involvement, Emerson was more interested in improving moral rectitude. According to Cowan, Emerson “considered all morality to be experimental; no vice or virtue is final but rather initial, and so we must learn to abandon our present moral standards in the light of better ones” (39). This evaluation, for Cowan, is a crucial concept “for later pragmatists who point with Emerson to the futility of a search for the certainty of enduring truths, emphasizing instead the value and necessity of continual reassessment of one’s beliefs” (39). Because Emerson viewed the world as being constantly in transition, he emphasized the need for “contingency and human experimental power to overcome the limitations of the world” (39).

Emerson's belief in every man's ability to generate new ideas helped to reform epistemological social thoughts. By calling for a new, fresh way of looking at the world, Emerson consequently inspired generations of philosophical pioneers and groups of all persuasions. One such group, The Metaphysical Club, attracted accomplished lawyers, scientists, and philosophers such as: Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Joseph Warner, Chauncey Wright, Nicholas St. John Green, Francis Ellingwood Abbot, and John Fiske. According to Louis Menand in *Pragmatism: A Reader*, "the name, 'metaphysical club' was a generic name in the nineteenth century for a philosophical discussion group" (xvii). Nevertheless, Peirce suggested in his writings that even though their respective club existed for less than a year, the ideas discussed helped develop the origins of pragmatism.

### **Charles Sanders Peirce: The Father of Pragmatism**

Many scholars agree that Charles Sanders Peirce, a scientist, philosopher, phenomenologist, and logician, ushered in pragmatism with his two papers, "The Fixation of Beliefs" and "How to Make Our Ideas Clear." It wasn't until later that the humanistic implications of this philosophy would be realized through the work of other pragmatists that expanded his initial concepts. Peirce promoted theories of inquiry and probabilities in science, instead of certainties. According to Bruce Wilshire in *The Primal Roots of American Philosophy*, Peirce's "greatness as a philosopher, and his profound influence on other philosophers, owes in large part to his seeing the limits of logic and science" (12). In "The Fixation of Beliefs," Peirce discusses the relationship between habit, belief, and doubt. He suggests that habits are self-preserving methods for our

beliefs. In contrast, he explains doubt as being a necessary irritation that is motivation to investigate our beliefs. This method of inquiry is seen as primarily pragmatic; however, his explanations of pragmatism formation during this time are generally considered dense. In an attempt to clarify the definition of pragmatism, he delivered a series, “Lectures on Pragmatism,” at Harvard in 1903. Although Peirce used his “pragmatic maxim” or “maxim of logic” to establish meaning in purely scientific ways, the pragmatic principles he established were considered more broadly as a philosophical attitude by his friend and Emerson’s god-son, William James.

### **William James: Pragmatism Popularized**

In *Pragmatism: A Reader*, Louis Menand indicates that psychologist and philosopher William James was the person who actually introduced the term “pragmatism” to the world, rather than Peirce. In his 1898 lecture at Berkeley, “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” James expanded Peirce’s way of understanding scientific concepts, which he called the “principle of Peirce, the principle of pragmatism,” and applied it to real-life or general philosophy (xiii). The “principle of Peirce, the principle of pragmatism” is defined in Menand’s book as:

To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object...we need only consider what effects of a conceivably practical kind the object may involve – what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, then, is for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all.

Menand believes that James introduced pragmatism into philosophy to “open a window, in what he regarded as an excessively materialistic and scientific age, for faith in God”

(xiv). As a Harvard professor and an international academic superstar, it only took James a few years to expand pragmatism into a worldwide intellectual movement through his 1907 publication, *Pragmatism*.<sup>1</sup> In it, he says that a pragmatist,

turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power. (25)

He credits Peirce for “the principle of pragmatism,” thus making both men central to the origins of pragmatism.

Moving away from a scientific application of pragmatism, James felt that philosophers should try and figure out what makes any belief true. For him, the purpose of choosing one belief over another is to determine the practical differences it makes in the real world. He persistently inquired about truth’s *cash-value* in terms of practical experience (James 259, 268). Therefore, he promoted pragmatism as being a method of applying philosophy or having discussions as opposed to static, dogmatic concepts. Commager illustrates his respect for Jamesian pragmatism by saying, first, “James believed, passionately, that truth was not something that was found, once and for all, but was forever in the making, that it was not single and absolute but plural and contingent” (93). One of James’s students in particular took a special interest in pragmatism and went

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<sup>1</sup> In “One Hundred Years of Pragmatism,” James Campbell expresses a different opinion. He contends that pragmatism was never the *most* influential philosophy in America; instead, he says it was prominent for a brief ten-year stint between 1900-1910. Additionally, he believes that James’s publication of *Pragmatism*, which forced the topic of truth, helped to stunt the growth of pragmatism, bringing the useful academic discussion to an end (3).

on to apply the philosophy in groundbreaking, humanistic ways that informed new concepts of race relations in the twentieth-century. This student was W.E.B. Du Bois, a renowned scholar and first Black American graduate of Harvard University whose book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, is an inspiration for this dissertation.

### **W.E.B. Du Bois: Pragmatism Expanded to Humanity**

In addition to discussing Emerson, Peirce, and James in *American Evasion*, West mentions a lesser-known pragmatist, a Black scholar and sociologist named W.E.B. Du Bois. James, who was in the process of developing pragmatism, mentored him at Harvard. Determining whether or not Du Bois is a pragmatist is an ongoing, complicated debate, for strong arguments are made on all sides of the dispute. Positioning him exclusively within *any* school of thought can be difficult, since his accomplishments are vast, multifaceted, and far-reaching. His educational training at Fisk, Harvard, and University of Berlin allowed him to become familiar with the contending philosophies of his day. In “W.E.B. Du Bois and Black Humanity,” Anthony Monterio says that Du Bois primarily “engaged the competing claims of pragmatism and European epistemology.”

He explains that:

Scholars differ about where Du Bois came down philosophically. Robert Gooding-Williams, David Levering Lewis, and Shamoan Zamir argue that Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind* exerted a strong and enduring influence on him. Arnold Rampersad and Cornel West, on the other hand, claim that Du Bois remained a Jamesian pragmatist. (615)

Ultimately, Du Bois’s work is considered a fusion of many theories that deeply impressed him, from Africa, Europe, and America. Similar to his mixed heritage, Du Bois was not

ingratiated into only one social or academic world. Instead, he represented parts of the whole and consequently, this position left him feeling marginalized and fragmented. Much of Du Bois's work was about understanding himself – the two-ness of being an American and a Negro – as it was deconstructing society. Improving race relations was of major concern to Du Bois and it became his life's work to show the humanity and worth of Blacks. For this reason, he is considered a member of many philosophical trajectories, as an Afrocentrist, historian, sociologist, communist, pragmatist, and civil rights leader. Du Bois's 1968 autobiography makes reference to the lasting impression James made on his thinking and shows how his early work reflected the impact of pragmatism. While studying philosophy at Harvard from 1888 to 1890, he took an unforgettable course on psychology and ethics from James. He later described himself as “a devoted follower of James at the time he was developing his pragmatic philosophy” (131). Du Bois recognized James for “turning him away from the sterilities of scholastic philosophy to realist pragmatism” (131). Du Bois's social application of pragmatism throughout *The Souls of Black Folk* enabled the book to become a powerful vehicle that challenged *a priori* reasons on race in America. He is thought to have confronted race like no other pragmatist had.

As one who deeply believed in the principles of an American democracy, Du Bois supported this uniquely American philosophy that reflected the country's creed. Although racism was a major obstacle that permeated every element of society, Du Bois embraced pragmatism because the philosophy symbolized an opportunity for radical progress. His methods can be quite instructive today in mediating other social issues such as poverty,

sexism, and homophobia. For this reason, my dissertation is a derivative of Du Bois's work. In a similar manner that Cornel West expanded pragmatism to prophetic pragmatism, I expand the focus of Du Bois's book to take a more comprehensive social application. My title, "The Souls of Good Folk," is a critical pedagogy of humanity that considers the *why* and *how* of Du Bois's social application of pragmatism. Analyzing Du Bois's work could inform society of how to tackle other social problems for democratic change. A major way to reach society is through the educational system. John Dewey is one of the first pragmatists to implement pragmatism in education for a civic mission. His work with Jane Addams and the Hull House, in particular, helped to inform his work at the University of Chicago. Du Bois also worked with Addams and Hull House extensively.

### **John Dewey: Pragmatism Expanded to Education**

In *American Evasion*, West discusses John Dewey as another recognized pragmatism leader that influenced him.<sup>2</sup> Dewey is known as a philosopher, educational reformer, and psychologist who advocated for democracy, experience, and morality in society. He shared many values with Emerson, such as belief in democracy. However, Dewey encouraged social engagement as a means for self-development, whereas Emerson believed a person could achieve moral rectitude in isolation. Even though Peirce's views on ethics, politics, and religion were speculative, Dewey found him and James quite useful. "Like them he rejected the notion of infallible knowledge and stressed

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<sup>2</sup> Even though Dewey was not a self-described pragmatist, he is generally recognized within the genealogy.



the need to revise norms in light of experience, but saw this reworking as a social or communal process,” says Cowan. But because Dewey valued “collective collaboration,” he “supplemented their interest in individuality and personality with a consideration of social structures, political systems, and economic institutions.” For him, “achieving one’s individual potential and shaping the broader social and political context go hand in hand” (40-41).

As a testament to his notions of collaboration, Dewey integrated scientific-based pragmatism within the arts and humanities. In *The Primal Roots of American Philosophy*, Wilshire explains this concept of science being “the art of using instruments to arrange Nature so that precise predictions about its behavior can be made and tested” (98). Dewey believes that science should be treated as one of the arts, for this blending necessarily reflects the art of life. He regarded change, in any form, as part of a life’s natural progression and made an ardent effort to promote social change. For this reason, Dewey partnered with fellow pragmatist George Herbert Mead to launch the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools. Their hands-on and experiential approaches to learning helped to establish friendships with others in the same line of work. One notable person that Dewey worked with extensively is Jane Addams. The Hull House she and a friend established was fertile ground for much of Dewey’s research of pragmatism in education.

### **Jane Addams and Hull House: Real-World Application of Pragmatism**

Although many scholars regard her work as *feminist* pragmatism, social reformer and organizer Jane Addams is one of the few women considered part of the pragmatist tradition. Prior to her work, general philosophy was heavily dominated with male

influence that often overlooked the concerns of women and minorities. Through her work in the Hull House, Addams developed friendships with several pragmatists and came to embrace the philosophy. In 1889, she and friend Ellen Gates Starr founded Hull House in an industrialized, working-class, largely immigrant Chicago neighborhood. This became the first settlement house in the United States, modeled after the East London Toynbee Hall established only a few years earlier in 1884. During this era, settlement houses were known for providing social services and education to the urban poor, usually through charity rendered by wealthy patrons, citizens, and scholars. The idea was for graduates to conduct social work in deprived areas of the city and learn through interacting with the affected persons.

In “Gendered Social Knowledge: Domestic Discourse, Jane Addams, and the Possibilities of Social Science,” Dorothy Ross conveys that Addams’ “care ethics” or feminism began well before her identification with pragmatism. She says, “By 1899, pragmatism gave [Addams] the language to frame a theoretical justification of the settlement that realized her collegiate ambition for gendered knowledge” (245-46). Addams is highly regarded for popularizing a gender and class-consciousness through implementing the theories that pragmatists established. Therefore, pragmatists such as William James, W.E.B. Du Bois, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead took interest in her work and eagerly supported her vision. Many of them worked with her on several city and national initiatives and remained friends for many years. Dewey and Mead were associated with the University of Chicago School of Pragmatists and offered academic support to the Hull House. Their work with Addams informed their Laboratory Schools

and helped them later establish the departments of sociology and social work at the University of Chicago.

In “Socializing Democracy: Jane Addams and John Dewey,” Charlene Haddock Seigfried mentions Addams’ first book, *Democracy and Social Ethics* as having a profound affect on James and Dewey. She says, “James called it ‘one of the great books of our time’ because of its ‘sympathetic interpretation to one another of the different classes of which society consists’”(219). She believes that Dewey draws on his experiences with Addams to inform many concepts within his book *Democracy and Education* and he views Hull House as the model of an ideal community. Of the relationships with the pragmatists, the one between Addams and Dewey was most extensive. “Addams helped Dewey start an innovation school for children at the University of Chicago; Dewey gave lectures at and visited Hull House often; Addams invited Dewey to join its Board of Trustees in 1897; Dewey and his wife named a daughter after Addams,” says Louise W. Knight in *Citizen: Jane Addams and the Struggle for Democracy* (240).

Addams worked tirelessly to establish a mutually respectful, culturally diverse democratic community instead of promoting the fashionable “melting pot” idea of America. Especially important to the pragmatist tradition, Addams used her knowledge and influence to advocate the perspectives of the socially disenfranchised in public policy making decisions. She was associated with Theodore Roosevelt’s Progressive Party in 1912, which propelled other social workers to construct a well-developed political strategy and get involved in partisan politics to platform their agendas.

Addams embraced the settlement house idea but rejected her view of its philanthropic, self-righteous designs of simply providing services to the underprivileged. For her, Hull House was not a charity. She and her colleagues learned profoundly from the community and both parties' lives were enhanced in the process. This respectful, progressive, and reciprocal attitude set Addams' work apart from what many considered a social experiment or a living laboratory. She fought hard to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with the community, where data was not collected merely for university purposes. She called for cooperation *with* the community in solving problems, which required listening and learning from the residents. In "Jane Addams and Social Reform: A Role Model for the 1990s," Karen Shafer Lundblad says, "Hull House became a center for research, empirical analysis, study, and debate, as well as a pragmatic center for living in and establishing good relations with the neighborhood" (663). Addams considered Hull House "a living, dynamic educational process" whereby she "was the pupil, and her neighbors were her teachers" (663). This living arrangement allowed Addams to generalize that "education ought to be perceived as a mutual relationship between teacher and pupil under the conditions of life itself and not the transmission of knowledge, intact and untested by experience" (663). Her willingness to work cooperatively with the perceived "subjects" made for meaningful democratic interaction and this experience drew much attention from other pragmatists.

In the introduction to *Citizen*, Knight mentions that Addams brought with her to Hull House "a commitment to Tolstoy's theory of nonresistance, Jesus Christ's theory of love, and the social Christian theory of cooperation, confident that if she kept those

commitments, she would accomplish good” (4). However, these theoretical principles alone would not be enough. She soon realized that theory had to be coupled with experience to make meaning to assess an appropriate course of action. Therefore, she began studying experience “as she had once studied the great classics of Western civilization” (4). Careful study and reflection upon her experiences working with marginalized citizens through the Hull House brought forth important insight to Addams’ understanding of democracy. These ponderings and assessments were a major emphasis of her first book, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902). She essentially wrote about how living democratically changes a person ethically. Democracy, she wrote, is “a rule of living and a test of faith in the essential dignity and quality of all men.” This is developed, she proclaimed, through a sense of connection with others. “The identification with the common lot,” she observed, “is the essential idea of Democracy.” She believed that “all men are hoping and are part of the same movement of which we are a part” (5). Consequently, Addams became a leader among her pragmatist colleagues, embracing diversity and justice for all.

Her ethical position and willingness to collaborate across ethnic lines was a major attraction for W.E.B. Du Bois, who had been ostracized by most of his white male colleagues due to racism. With regards to racial discrimination, Knight says, “Although Addams did not fully grasp the complexities of racism in the 1890s, she had long understood racial prejudice to be a crucial social issue.” Knight believes this awareness stemmed from her father’s opposition to slavery and was perhaps later realized “while doing volunteer work in Baltimore among elderly poor black women and young black

women in training for domestic service.” Moreover, Knight suggests that Addams’ empathy with Blacks’ social condition was a result of her “moral universalism” (389). With similar concerns about democracy and improving society, he began a comfortable working relationship with Addams and the Hull House in 1896 while conducting research for the city of Philadelphia called *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. Du Bois found solace in working with female sociologists and even co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P) with many of its members. In “W.E.B. Du Bois and the Women of Hull-House, 1895-1899,” Mary Jo Deegan makes it clear that Du Bois worked with Addams and Hull House for many years. Unfortunately, such relationships between black and white sociologists at the turn of the twentieth-century are often ignored in history books.

As an influential, well-educated woman, Addams was able to offer a valuable female perspective to the male-centered world of philosophy. In “Socializing Democracy: Jane Addams and John Dewey,” Charlene Haddock Seigfried makes a clear distinction between Addams’ work as pragmatist and that of classical pragmatists, in two major ways:

In the first place, she explicitly draws on a wider and more diverse range of experiences in her reflections, particularly those outside of the white, male class, such as factory and domestic workers, various ethnic groups of recent immigrants, and poor and working-class women. In the second place, she develops a pragmatist account of experience from women’s experiences, particularly those of early generations of white, college-educated women like herself and other women settlement members who were beginning to redefine their roles outside the home, as well as those of the inner-city working-class women of diverse ethnic backgrounds, including a usually neglected segment of this population – namely, poor, elderly women. As a result, she demonstrates the radical consequences of

taking the pluralism, perspectivism, and finite limitations of human understanding seriously. (221-222)

Addams believed that the female perspective of attending to social issues rendered important insights into understanding humanity and improving democracy. In *Democracy and Social Ethics*, she writes:

We are all involved in this political corruption, and as members of the community stand indicted. This is the penalty of democracy, - that we are bound to move forward or retrograde together. None of us can stand aside; our feet are mired in the same soil, and our lungs breathe the same air. (256)

Because of her tireless promotion of social progress, Addams viewed everyone as her teacher. She reflected on lessons and experiences to inform her methodology. Whether considered *feminist* pragmatist or traditional pragmatist, her all-inclusive, collaborative attitude in improving the community is something worth emulating in the twenty-first century. Like Addams, Cornel West fuses Christian ethics with philosophy and experience to inform ways of achieving social progress. West synthesizes what he deems as key proponents of pragmatism and expands the philosophy to offer prophetic pragmatism.

### **Cornel West: Prophetic Pragmatism**

Since West has many qualms with the development of pragmatism and points out its major deficiencies, in *Cornel West: The Politics of Redemption* Rosemary Cowan asks, “What is so valuable about the pragmatist tradition that he goes through such convolutions to reinherit it for his own purposes?” (51). She criticizes West for “pointing

to both organicism and rupture” in the way he describes his relationship to pragmatism and does not feel as if he can have it both ways. Cowan finds contradiction in West’s suggestion that his work “fits organically into a developing tradition while simultaneously breaking sharply with that tradition.” What Cowan does not consider is that to break away from a flawed tradition and offer an alternative position is exactly what defines organic pragmatism, even if the break or evolution happens to be *within* its own genealogy. West maintains his position as contributing organically to the pragmatism genealogy in the same method as he is recognized as an organic intellectual. In his essay “On Prophetic Pragmatism,” West defines an organic intellectual as:

one who revels in the life of the mind, yet relates to collective praxis. An organic intellectual, in contrast to traditional intellectuals, who often remain comfortably nested in the academy, attempts to be entrenched in and affiliated with organizations, associations, and, possibly, movements of grassroots folk. (172)

Therefore, West relates to the collective notion of pragmatism both independently and interdependently. He uses scholarly ideas coupled with experience to enhance relationships in the community.

Contrary to what Cowan believes, pragmatism is a philosophical *organism* that is constantly developing, expanding, and evolving. Therefore, new insight and amendments allow it to remain organic, yet expansive. West gives reason for offering prophetic pragmatism in his essay “The Limits of Neopragmatism.” He says, “the tradition of pragmatism is in need of a mode of cultural criticism that keeps track of social misery, solicits and channels moral outrage to alleviate it and projects a future in which the potentialities of ordinary people flourish and flower” (187). As an organic pragmatist,



West exhibits these philosophical beliefs by coming up with a creative solution to fulfill the problem he articulates, which is the lingering void he finds within the pragmatist genealogy. Keith Gilyard weighs in on the argument in *Composition and Cornel West* by saying, “More pressing for West than any philosophical conundrum is that in his mind pragmatism as a whole reflects the Deweyan flaw of not fully accounting for class and has been soft in terms of political action connected not only to class struggle but also in terms of racism and sexism” (13). Even though West seems critical of the forefathers’ general inattention to matters of race, class, and gender, he remains a staunch supporter, for pragmatism is more closely aligned with his own beliefs than any other philosophical method he has come across. Plus, as an important element, pragmatism is a uniquely American philosophy that has the potential to enhance the way we view democracy. West supports the basic tenets of what many original pragmatists propose, but he expands their concepts to appeal to a more inclusive world politics. West embraces what he views as similar ethical qualities in other key pragmatists. Some of these impressions include: Emerson’s creative democracy; Peirce’s evolutionary love; James’s faith in God; Du Bois’s concern for the wretched of the earth; Dewey’s collective collaboration; and, Addams’s dedication to social progress.

West respects Dewey’s political engagement and the risks he took as a college professor to be involved in various social projects. Likewise, West is well positioned within and outside of the academic circuit and has taken professional risks. He has ventured into mainstream politics as a public intellectual and pop cultural icon, appearing as a regular guest on shows such as “Real Time with Bill Maher.” As an example of a

professional risk taken by West, many people are familiar with the public disagreement between West and then-Harvard University President Lawrence Summers. It is suggested that Summers found West's civic engagement detracting from his duties as a professor. West later wrote about the ordeal in *Democracy Matters*, in which he summated the argument as indicative of:

A market-driven technocratic culture has infiltrated university life, with the narrow pursuit of academic trophies and the business of generating income from grants and business partnerships taking precedence over the fundamental responsibility of nurturing young minds. (186)

Due to their different opinions, West left Harvard and was eagerly invited to teach at Princeton in the Center for African American Studies and in the Department of Religion, where he currently teaches.

In *Cornel West & Philosophy: The Quest for Social Justice*, Clarence Shole Johnson reminds us that it is primarily because of their political connection that West considers himself a Deweyan, rather than a Peircean or Jamesian, pragmatist. Johnson quotes West explaining his position, "The thoroughgoing historical consciousness and emphasis on social and political matters found in John Dewey speaks more to my purpose than the preoccupations with logic in Pierce and the obsessions with individuality in James" (15). Like Dewey, West believes that philosophy should be "transformational rather than foundation, directing its critical acumen and imaginative energy to the resolution of concrete social and political problems" (Cowan 40-41). Therefore, both Dewey and West support Emerson's notion of a culture of creative democracy. "With its roots in the American heritage and its hopes for the wretched of the earth," West believes

that prophetic pragmatism “constitutes the best chance of promoting an Emersonian culture of creative democracy by means of critical intelligence and social action” (“On Prophetic Pragmatism” 150). West explores its definition as:

To speak then of an Emersonian culture of creative democracy is to speak of a society and culture where politically adjudicated forms of knowledge are produced in which human participation is encouraged and for which human personalities are enhanced. Social experimentation is the basic norm, yet it is operative only when those who must suffer the consequences have effective control over the institutions that yield the consequences, i.e., access to decision-making processes. (151)

To expand an Emersonian culture of creative democracy means being socially and politically engaged in efforts to repair civil inequities. Here, Emerson’s notion of creative democracy appears synonymous with West’s understanding of democracy as a verb instead of a static ideal. In *Democracy Matters* Cornel West defines his usage of the word “democracy” by saying:

Democracy is always a movement of an energized public to make elites responsible – it is at its core and most basic foundation the taking back of one’s power in the face of the misuse of elite power. In this sense, democracy is more a verb than a noun – it is more a dynamic striving and collective movement than a static order or stationary status quo. Democracy is not just a system of governance, as we tend to think of it, but a cultural way of being. (68)

When viewed as an action verb, the word democracy takes on a new life form with infinite possibilities, instead of it being considered a social ideal that has already been achieved. Furthermore, Du Bois expanded the Emersonian culture of creative democracy when writing *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois’s belief in democracy inspired him to become a spokesperson for struggling people, or as West affectionately terms them, “the

wretched of the earth.” His book, a social experiment, allowed him to speak to the power structures as well as to afflicted individuals whose personalities were improved by this publication.

West finds Peirce’s notion of evolutionary love an underlying principle for his optimism in pragmatism. In his essay “Evolutionary Love” Peirce talks about love as being the greatest evolutionary agency of the universe. Peirce claims to have borrowed his “agapism” or theory of evolutionary love from John’s Gospel in the Christian *New Testament* because he saw a direct correlation with scientific evolution. He believes that growth happens when a living organism is lovingly attended to. Therefore, regardless of a dire environment or unfortunate circumstances, growth can happen where love abides. Peirce insists that evolutionary progress is not generated by competition among selfish individuals. Rather, it comes from every person merging his talents with consideration of his neighbors. West draws a direct correlation of this audacious, unyielding love ethic with the level of care and honesty exhibited by prophets within the Christian and Jewish religious traditions. In *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, West defines a prophet as one who “sees what others might ignore and draws it to attention.” Additionally, he believes, “The mark of the prophet is to speak the truth in love with courage – come what may” (223). With regards to the historical context of a prophet, the attributes can be likened to a modern day social activist. Although many are concerned about the fate of either a prophet or activist, one cannot arbitrarily determine either destiny by mere social temperament. Even though martyrs have been made out of many people who imagined a better life, others have made significant improvements without meeting their demise.

Although the *prophetic* aspect of prophetic pragmatism is epistemologically centered on Christian and Jewish religious traditions, one does not have to be religious to utilize it. West combines the religious tradition of the prophet with pragmatism for existential and political purposes. He explains:

On an existential level, the self-understanding and self-identity that flow from this tradition's insights into the crises and traumas of life are indispensable...It holds at bay the sheer absurdity so evident in life, without erasing or eliding the tragedy of life... on the political level, the culture of the wretched of the earth is deeply religious. To be in solidarity with them requires not only an acknowledgment of what they are up against, but also an appreciation of how they cope with their situation. (171)

West believes that his approach to pragmatism directly condemns oppression, irrespective of person, place, or creed. Its primary objective is progress, which calls for social dichotomies to work together and negotiate through differences. The voices of all – rich and poor, religious and agnostic, feeble and strong – are needed to effect change. Prophetic pragmatism requires a willingness to candidly and lovingly examine, articulate, and address problems with everyone and for everyone. Furthermore, it seeks transparency of government and opposition to power structures that are not held responsible for their actions. Most importantly, it is not prescribed to *any* group or movement and it is used primarily as a social and political lens to help make creative, democratic improvements within society.

According to West, prophetic pragmatism “purports to be not only an oppositional cultural criticism, but also a material force for individuality and democracy.” The phrase ‘material force’ is used to describe “a practice that has some potency and effect or makes

a difference in the world” (*West Reader* 170). Prophetic pragmatism upholds the lives and experiences of struggling people and advocates that their plight be valued within the social infrastructure. A progressive agenda requires that people work in concert, instead of in opposition, with each other. Learning how to effectively communicate across lines of race, class, and gender is requisite to cultivating empathy, humanity, and essentially, love.

The best we believers of social progress can do is to examine our forerunners’ strategies and try many approaches to the problems. Fear should not hold us hostage and cause us to forfeit a well-deserving life experience. People should not be so afraid to speak out against injustices as to relegate themselves to an uninspired life of misery and shame. Desolate situations should affect each of us deeply enough that we feel compelled, even obligated, to take action and right the wrongs that we see in our communities. When people exhibit this type of love, both they and society evolve. Of course, no one should commit every waking moment to championing social causes. Otherwise, the opportunity to enjoy the beauty and wonder this world offers is dismissed. A major life goal for each of us to ascertain is the promotion of love – of oneself, others, and the earth – to the point that we become bold and courageous to defend it. Promoting love helps to cultivate humanity, which consequentially reduces the world’s empathy deficit. For all the above stated reasons, I argue that prophetic pragmatism, a universal love ethic, should be implemented in the classroom as a critical pedagogy to help cultivate humanity.

## CHAPTER III

### DU BOIS AND *THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK*

#### **Framework for Pedagogy of Humanity**

The inspiration for my pedagogy of humanity called “The Souls of Good Folk” comes from two major sources: W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* and Cornel West’s prophetic pragmatism. My acquired title shows the expansion of issues surrounding “Black Folk” to help regulate problems experienced by *all* marginalized groups. I argue that prophetic pragmatism used as a philosophical framework in the composition classroom could help cultivate humanity. Through this lens, I combine humanity training with community service to engender social responsibility within students. This specific chapter on Du Bois shows him as an *example* of a prophetic pragmatist whose work helped to cultivate a more humane twentieth-century society. As a prophetic pragmatist, Du Bois’s work upholds many of the philosophical tenets. It includes a historical perspective for present context and future projections. Even though Du Bois’s methods are used primarily to address racism, I show that his work is still relevant in the twenty-first century. Viewing *Souls* today could inform methods of mediating other social issues such as poverty and sexism. Another example provided is the composition classroom as a legitimate academic space that could accommodate

different learning methods required for cultural criticism and democratic social action.

These dynamics are discussed within the next two chapters.

According to David Levering Lewis in the foreword of *W.E.B. Du Bois: An Encyclopedia*:

*Souls* transformed race relations in the United States with what now seems instantaneous speed, and by redefining the terms of a 300-year-old interaction between Blacks and Whites, reshaped the cultural and political psychology of peoples of African descent not only through the Western hemisphere but on the African continent as well. (ix)

This book of socio-political essays stands as a testament that one man's efforts toward social progress can immensely affect the world. *Souls* can be read and deconstructed in many ways, for Du Bois uses many methods of persuasion to convince readers that a fair and tolerant society is possible. The historical foci consist of Du Bois's acknowledgement of America's turbulent epistemological, scientific, and cultural past (with regards to racism). This divisive tradition established an unfair society in which Du Bois found himself. His twentieth-century contextual analyses include arguments that Blacks deserve justice for helping to define America through their many spiritual and cultural contributions. This analysis incorporates his usage of the terms "veil" and "double-consciousness" as tropes that describe the different physical and psychological "worlds" that Blacks and Whites inhabit. Furthermore, Du Bois's logical, ethical, and emotional pleas for the races to work together are viewed as future projections for a racially harmonious, democratic society. On a micro level, these foci are important in understanding how Du Bois negotiated the fair treatment of Blacks. Viewing this work on



a macro level could validate the rights of all marginalized citizens and encourage social change.

### **Du Bois as a Pragmatist**

Influenced by pragmatist William James's teachings while a student at Harvard University, Du Bois embraced core pragmatism principles and applied them to the treatment of the Black community. Pragmatism dispels the notion that absolute truth exists in the world and it challenges us to constantly rethink our ways of knowing. When thoughts, beliefs, and actions are no longer purposeful, then pragmatism informs us that we should adopt new ones. Conceived as a scientific research principle by Charles Sanders Peirce and popularized as a philosophical attitude by William James, Du Bois was the first pragmatist to expand pragmatism to issues of humanity. Although Jane Addams was a contemporary who worked mainly with immigrants, she was neither initially aware of the philosophy nor did she consider herself a pragmatist. It was later that she realized her work as applying principles of pragmatism to inform societal changes.

It is believed that most of the major concepts in *The Souls of Black Folk* – such as double-consciousness and veil – were spurred by Du Bois's work with his pragmatist mentor William James at Harvard. While this may be true, however, his unique social positioning – a Black man with a Euro-American training and heritage – allowed him to clearly see the problems of racism upon entering Harvard. In his article, "Echo and Narcissus: The Afrocentric Pragmatism of W.E.B. Du Bois," Richard Cullen Rath claims that "Even before arriving at Harvard, Du Bois had outlined the two polarized worlds in

which black and white folk lived” (478). Furthermore, Du Bois realized that the contributions of Blacks to the American culture “has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood” by the dominant society (*Autobiography* 200). Du Bois set out to tackle the root or history of racism by addressing it epistemologically and scientifically. Formal training with James and others simply gave Du Bois the essential tools necessary to name the social disenfranchisement that he and other Blacks knew all too well.

In “W. E. B. Du Bois and the Study of Black Humanity: A Rediscovery,” Anthony Monteiro suggests, “As Du Bois strode from Harvard to assume his place in the world, his motto might have been that of a fellow alumnus of Berlin University, Karl Marx: “Until now philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it” (615). This motto is evinced in a 1956 letter to Herbert Aptheker, an internationally known American Marxist historian and political activist, where Du Bois reflects on his philosophical development. He conveys that he went to Harvard seeking Truth, “which I spelled with a capital.” He continues, “For two years I studied under William James while he was developing Pragmatism; under [George] Santayana and his attractive mysticism and under [Josiah] Royce and his Hegelian idealism” (394). Out of these two years he tells us, “I then found and adopted a philosophy which has served me since; thereafter I turned to the study of History and what has become Sociology” (394). At Harvard, Du Bois learns how to spell “truth” with a lowercase and he now realizes that a proliferation of combined “little” truths help to inform understanding. “Several times in the past,” he begins:

I have started to formulate it, but met such puzzled looks that it remains only partially set down in scraps of manuscript. I gave up the search of “Absolute” Truth; not from doubt of the existence of reality, but because I believe that our limited knowledge and clumsy methods of research made it impossible now completely to apprehend Truth. I nevertheless firmly believe that gradually the human mind and absolute and provable truth would approach each other and like the “Asymptotes of the Hyperbola” (I learned the phrase in high school and was ever after fascinated by it) would approach each other nearer and nearer and yet never in all eternity meet. I therefore turned to Assumption – scientific Hypothesis. I assumed the existence of Truth, since to assume anything else or not to assume was unthinkable. I assumed that Truth was only partially known but that it was ultimately largely knowable, although perhaps in part forever unknowable. (395)

Through Du Bois’s study of history and his development of sociology, it appears as if he maintained a pragmatist methodology. His statements – of turning to “Assumption” and realizing that truth, with a capital, does not exist, yet constantly searching for new truths – sound quite Jamesian. James was interested in knowing the effect of theories. He wanted people to gauge the consequences of ideas. In this letter to Aptheker, Du Bois further discusses his pragmatist influence, “The Jamesian Pragmatism as I understood it from his lips was not based on the ‘usefulness of a hypothesis,’ as you put it, but on its workable logic if its truth was assumed” (395). Essentially, Du Bois wished to express his philosophy more simply. “Rather than philosophy as speculative philosophy, he sought to turn it into an active part of social science research, what he called “applying philosophy” (Monteiro 604). Through applying philosophy and assessing the results, Du Bois became a critical social scientist on a quest to improve race relations.

Du Bois contributed greatly to the pragmatist tradition, irrespective of the debate on his philosophical positioning. In “What’s the Use of Calling Du Bois a Pragmatist?” Paul C. Taylor makes the argument that Du Bois can be considered a pragmatist in a

broad understanding of the word. He agrees with other scholars that many who fought for black liberation associated themselves with pragmatism. “If we’re to cite pragmatists as resources in the struggle to critique and reclaim such notions as freedom and democracy,” Taylor says, “it is important to remember that they understood these notions in expansive ways” (103). He believes:

Democracy was not just an external arrangement; it was a form of life in which politics, culture, personality, and pedagogy overlapped and reinforce each other. And freedom meant more than absence of interference; it meant an open-ended future of multifaceted experience and self-development. (103)

Although Du Bois is not considered exclusively pragmatic, his work with James at Harvard familiarized him with the philosophy. James’ pragmatic influence is especially noted throughout Du Bois’ early works. Taylor says:

Declining to see Du Bois as a pragmatist not only obscures important aspects of his work and life but also reinforces our willingness to overlook important aspects of pragmatic thought and practice. Reading Du Bois pragmatically, then, is doubly illuminating. It reveals aspects both of Du Bois and of pragmatism that we might otherwise miss. Whatever its intrinsic worth, this double revelation is extrinsically valuable because it may help restore to us some important resources – or, perhaps better, instruments – for dealing with current social problems. (100)

At best, Du Bois can be considered a meliorist, believing in world progress through human efforts. Taylor says:

Reading Du Bois pragmatically, then, means reading him as a meliorist. This opens us to seeing the chastened hopefulness of his struggle with Americanism. And this shows us a tragic sensibility worth emulating as we fight on against the new American imperium and aristocracy. (102-103)

Therefore, others who aim to advance the world should also adapt a meliorist approach. According to James, meliorism is characteristically pragmatist. In “Pragmatism and Religion,” he tells us that pragmatism represents a meliorist middle ground between pessimism and optimism. He provides the following statement to clarify his position:

“[T]here are unhappy men who think the salvation<sup>3</sup> of the world impossible. Theirs is the doctrine known as pessimism. Optimism in turn would be the doctrine that thinks the world’s salvation inevitable.” Meliorism, by comparison, “treats salvation as neither necessary nor impossible. It treats it as a possibility, which becomes more and more of a probability the more numerous the actual conditions of salvation become.” He concludes: “It is clear that pragmatism must incline towards meliorism.” (125)

In efforts to attend to the current economic and political climate, Taylor echoes West and reminds us, “In these times, we need a determined skepticism about appeals to the idea of America. And we need a steadfast meliorism to “fight on” against these appeals, to continue the struggle against what is done under their cover” (102). Having a determined skepticism allowed Du Bois to objectively evaluate the topic of racism epistemologically, scientifically, and historically to achieve understanding and to advance the cause judiciously. This pragmatic principle reflects the teachings of Charles Sanders Peirce as well. A sense of determined skepticism could be understood in “Fixation of Beliefs” when he discusses the pragmatic relationship between habit, belief, and doubt. He explains doubt, determined skepticism, as being a necessary irritation that is motivation to investigate our beliefs. As a pragmatist, Du Bois doubted the justifications for race-

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<sup>3</sup> In the passage, James suggests that his readers “interpret the word ‘salvation’ in any way you like, and make it as diffuse and distributive...as you please.”

based discrimination and exhibited a meliorist approach to creatively addressing the issues. Due to his cultural pronouncements, many revere his work as that of a prophet.

### **Du Bois as a Prophet**

The plethora of accomplishments made by Du Bois could be considered a sheer act of God, for some liken his works to that of the biblical character Moses in leading his people out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land. The metaphorical Promised Land that Du Bois foresaw for Black Americans was a democratic society that rendered *everyone* equal and valuable. Many consider Du Bois a prophet because in *Souls* he prophetically states, “The problem of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the problem of the color line” (5). He knew this problem all too well because, although he was the first Black American to graduate from Harvard University and was afforded many social opportunities, he lived and witnessed racism’s unpleasant realities on a consistent basis. In *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*, Robert B. Stepto suggests, “Although his prophecy is not divinely inspired, he uses the language of divine inspiration to become the spokesman of a movement for social equality.” He continues:

*The Souls* is not a social scientific study or the verbal tracings of a muckracker; rather, it is a book of prophecy. In the narrative, data become metaphor, rough winds become melodious songs, swamps occasion meditations, and, through art, Du Bois may place his life and voice amid his culture’s pantheon of named and nameless articulate heroes. (91)

Du Bois was often called a social scientist. *Souls* is both a social scientific study and a book of prophecy. In a sense, I believe most pragmatists can be considered prophets due to the nature of the work. Pragmatists have to see beyond general conceptions in efforts

to inform new and different ways of thinking. I suppose distinguishing factors of a prophet could be their depth of inquiry and level of inclusion when making projections. In the tradition of an Emersonian culture of creative democracy, Du Bois presented the world with different knowledge about Blacks. His book allowed suffering to speak to the power structures in hopes of a positive outcome. Therefore *Souls* was a social experiment that allowed Du Bois to posit empathy toward Blacks in hopes of yielding a humane, democratic response.

In “W. E. B. Du Bois and the Struggle for the African-American’s Soul,” Alton B. Pollard III writes:

Du Bois was indeed a prophet... His social thought represents a moral and intellectual call to arms in the fight against imperialism, anti-Semitism, and oppression based on race and gender. Equally important for our moment, as a proponent of African diasporic pride, Du Bois celebrated cultural pluralism as a tenet of his faith in the democratic ethos. (370)

He spoke for the “marginalized and excluded by bringing to the agora of America concerns messages of distress, of increasing alarm and ultimately of condign reproach, says David Levering Lewis (*Souls* 19). Du Bois’s social experiences allowed him to empathize with Black and White America. His knowledge of both races helped inform messages of humanity and democracy.

### **Du Bois as a Prophetic Pragmatist**

Because Du Bois was outspoken and concerned with race relations in the American democracy, Cornel West considers him neither *just* a pragmatist nor *just* a prophet, but a prophetic pragmatist. Du Bois’s full acknowledgment as a pragmatist is

contentious; however, West definitively includes him within his hybrid philosophy. For West, prophetic pragmatism is a mixture of traditional pragmatism with radical universal love. Reflecting on his form of pragmatism, West commented:

I have dubbed it ‘prophetic’ in that it harks back to the Jewish and Christian tradition of prophets who brought urgent and compassionate critique to bear on the evils of their day. The mark of the prophet is to speak the truth in love with courage – come what may. (*American Evasion* 233)

The prophet sees what others might disregard and brings it to attention. The tenets of his ideas are:

a universal consciousness that promotes an all-embracing democratic and libertarian moral vision, a historical consciousness that acknowledges human finitude and conditionedness, and a critical consciousness which encourages relentless critique and self-criticism for the aims of social change and personal humility (*American Evasion* 232).

As a prophetic pragmatist, Du Bois drew attention to racial discrimination and spoke with conviction about humanity’s misgivings and its ability to self-correct.

The social inequalities toward Black Americans at the turn of the century were baffling to Du Bois. As the first Harvard educated Black man who was cultured in the American North and Europe, and who lived in the South for a while, Du Bois wanted to improve race relations. Attending to this painful social dynamic in America prompted him to participate in the 1900 Paris Exhibition to show the world how Blacks were fairing thirty-five years since the Civil War and to also expose their plight as second-class citizens. His award winning “The Exhibition of American Negroes,” which contained hundreds of photographs and documents listing occupations, education, property and



business ownership, wealth, and paid taxes, effectively showed that Blacks were an important, productive part of the American society. But even these accomplishments did not merit Blacks the same basic rights as other citizens and many were terrorized and killed simply because of their skin color. Du Bois and others realized the need for a more persistent campaign to guarantee full rights for Blacks.

Three years after his presentation at the 1900 Paris Exhibition, Du Bois published one of the most important books of the twentieth century, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Reprinted many times and discussed for over a century, the book's major attraction lies in its timelessness. The success of *Souls* is achieved in the many appeals that Du Bois makes for humanity and civil rights. Because of the general denigrating beliefs held about Blacks, Du Bois challenges every reader of *Souls* to change their attitudes in efforts to improve the social consequences for all Americans. Although much social advancement has occurred since the Jim Crow Era, this spiritual and political text is as relevant today as when originally made available. Du Bois promoted the idea that we are all human beings with similar human strivings. He articulated that each of us contributes to this country in important ways and our actions influence each other's experience. As a prophetic pragmatist, Du Bois passionately spoke against racism and asked America to live up to her creed. He advocated for the experiences and cultures of everyone to inform the structuring of a fair society. In order to truly understand America, Du Bois felt that the historical experiences and offerings of Blacks had to be considered. In other words, in order to truly understand America's soul, one must also examine the souls of Black folk.

## **The Notions of Soul and Agency**

When most people think of the word “soul,” religious or philosophical references come to mind. These varying ideas are applied to Du Bois’s book title *The Souls of Black Folk* as well. I do not believe Du Bois’s book pits the souls of Blacks *over* the souls of other groups. He does not suggest that Blacks are morally or spiritually superior. Therefore, one has to carefully dissect how the word “souls” is used within the text. Several theorists suggest the term means that which is within a person and outwardly exhibited. Given that rationale, I understand the term “soul” to be synonymous with words such as “heart,” “essence,” “inner being,” or “works.”

To better understand the souls of Blacks, Du Bois asks his readers to consider the sorrow songs or Negro spirituals, which had a profound effect in shaping the country. The melodious songs of Blacks were appreciated in the larger society. Often, Blacks who could sing well were afforded opportunities to perform in front of large audiences both stateside and abroad, even though the audiences were either segregated or exclusively White. The music that Blacks created was generally accepted and it influenced other musical genres. However, Du Bois invites us to look at the deeper implications of these songs.

In *Souls* Du Bois showed the spiritual and aesthetic worth of Blacks in the form of their sorrow songs. Du Bois claims that the sorrow songs were the “singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people” (205). As Cheryl A. Wall perceives the meaning of the sorrow songs in “Resounding *Souls*: Du Bois and the

African American Literary Tradition,” they were a critique of the institution of slavery yet an unyielding hope in social justice. She says:

By the time he wrote *Souls*, Du Bois had discerned in the sorrow songs the slaves message to the world, a message that conveys a profound critique of the institution of slavery itself. This critique was the “real poetry and meaning” of the spirituals, the one that lay beneath “conventional theology and unmeaning rhapsody” (210). His interpretation moved the spirituals beyond the domains of religion or entertainment.<sup>4</sup> For Du Bois, the songs not only protest exploitation but inscribe the disruption of family (“mother and child are sung, but seldom father”) and emotional exile (“the mountains are well known, but home is unknown”) (211). At the same time, the spirituals convey the message of hope, “a faith in the ultimate justice of things” (213). (Wall 224-225)

The notion that slaves held a spiritual and political consciousness that was displayed throughout their sorrow songs, plays into the concepts of soul and *agency* that Du Bois studied as an undergraduate at Harvard. Richard Rath tells us “he began to develop his notion of soul by inference from gaps in Western philosophy’s treatment of *agency* – the ability to act intentionally” (470). Therefore, “If we track the development of his ideas on the soul through his apprenticeship under James and through the anthropological literature that he afterward read, the African ideas he presented as American in *The Souls of Black Folk* and elsewhere cease to appear only a mystical, romantic hodgepodge of folk beliefs. They emerge as a powerfully coherent theory of agency” (Rath 470-471).

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Gilroy notes that “for their liberal patrons the music and song of the Fisk Jubilee Singers offered an opportunity to feel closer to God and to redemption” and a sense of moral rectitude in light of their political reformism. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 90. Well aware as he was of this response and its political usefulness, Du Bois wanted to complicate it by insisting on the political consciousness of the slaves and their descendants as well as the abolitionists and theirs.

Rath provides a lengthier explanation of how Du Bois used soul and agency in

*The Souls of Black Folk:*

A theory of agency is a theory of how *will* is attached to effects in the world. Although today the word soul has fallen from grace in some Western circles, its secularized referent, *agent*, is still important to several scholarly discourses. An agent, or soul, is that which is capable of acting with both volition and intent. It is a cause in itself, not simply a determined reaction predictable from inputs. Although James had ostensibly set aside metaphysical questions in order to develop his psychology during the latter half of the 1880s, his metaphysical concerns are foregrounded in Du Bois's 1888 notes. At Harvard Du Bois learned that *souls* mediate will and effect. The soul was the bridge that allowed ideas to affect the material world. (471)

By emphasizing Black folks' soul or agency in his book, Du Bois utilized a major pragmatist concept of being action oriented. Rath tells us that Du Bois's study with James "reinforced his conviction that history did not unfold along a predestined track; it reflected both the pressure of necessity and the force of striving wills." Furthermore, "he employed James's conviction that relations, although invisible, were powerfully real" (463). Du Bois tells us in *Souls* that each race group has profoundly brilliant gifts to share with the rest of the world. Therefore, these gifts need to be acknowledged and valued holistically as key components the world needs in efforts to progress. Because these gifts are derived and displayed differently is an occasion for celebration, instead of reason for judgment through a status quo lens. One could argue that Du Bois's insight of including all races in the formulation of knowledge is a basis for multicultural, whiteness, and also cultural studies.

Black folks' souls presented a double meaning in the book, of political and spiritual consequences that manifested in the material world. Du Bois showed that the

sorrow songs were a form of agency, highly intelligent actions that represented a paradox of protest and comfort. Even if the explicit meanings of the songs were indecipherable, one could gather that these utterances, many with Biblical inferences, served a higher purpose. Overtime, the Negro spirituals (sorrow songs) laid the foundation for decidedly American musical traditions, such as Blues, Jazz, and Rock and Roll.

### **Scientific Method of Social Research**

#### A Historical Look at Racism: Epistemologically and Scientifically

Throughout *Souls* Du Bois acknowledged America's turbulent history. He clearly understood and articulated issues surrounding the most pressing social issue of his day - race relations – and made an accurate prediction that, for America, “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line” (5). He spoke to the world, but more directly, he addressed a country that was founded on the principles that “All men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”<sup>5</sup> He felt that America misrepresented itself as a world leader because of the contradictory messages that surfaced. Even though a certain image was projected, America did not act in accordance with all of its citizens. Du Bois wanted the barriers dismantled that denied Blacks humanity and kept America from progressing as a unified race nation. He protested segregation by saying:

Work, culture, liberty, - all these we need, not singly but together, not successively but together, each growing and aiding each, and all striving toward that vaster ideal that swims before the Negro people, the ideal of human

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Declaration of Independence 1776

brotherhood, gained through the unifying ideal of Race; the ideal of fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro, not in opposition to or contempt for other races, but rather in large conformity to the greater ideals of the American Republic, in order that some day on American soil two world-races may give each to each those characteristics both so sadly lack. (*Souls* 15)

As a believer in the American democracy, Du Bois asked the nation to uphold its founding principles for all people and he viewed Blacks as its major test in honoring this creed. Blacks deserved the rights to develop themselves intellectually and socially, not in isolation, but along with the other races. Du Bois made clear that the progression of Blacks would not be in contempt for others. Instead, he articulated that this development would benefit the entire nation. Although the law listed basic human rights for everyone, most Blacks experienced the hypocrisy that dictated two very different social experiences: an America for Blacks and an America for Whites. One of his goals was to convince mainstream America of Black people's humanity, despite their social disenfranchisement. Outside of interacting with Blacks as subordinates, most White Americans had little knowledge or consideration of their personal lives and feelings. These suppressed, shared, and often-indescribable notions had never before been articulated to the masses in such an explicit manner. In the first chapter, Du Bois states his purpose for writing *Souls*:

I have sought here to sketch, in vague, uncertain outline, the spiritual world in which ten thousand Americans live and strive.... Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century. (5)

As an accomplished Black man who had delved in both racial worlds, Du Bois envisioned Blacks and Whites interacting respectfully. However, he knew that much training was needed to abate stereotypes, biases, prejudices, and fears. Therefore, Du Bois acted as an intermediary, set out to ease racial tensions and misunderstandings.

Du Bois's work on race relations posed a challenge and threat to the status quo, which existed in a Eurocentric world where all knowledge and thinking placed Whites at the center of importance and other ethnic groups as subordinate or irrelevant. Monteiro informs us that, "Social science as a study of human agency was, by definition, not concerned with Africans" (613). Because Du Bois was dissatisfied with the way race was interpreted in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, he set out to change racism epistemologically and scientifically.

Epistemologically, *The Souls of Black Folk* challenged the fundamentals of Eurocentricism by exposing a bias trajectory of knowledge and by introducing important contributions of Africans. Scientifically, the book showed that race is not biological, but instead a human construct. He showed that Blacks were not biologically inferior to Whites. Du Bois then placed this race-based epistemological and scientific history within a twentieth century context and articulated the social conditioning of racism that lead to the color line, veil, and double-consciousness. Therefore, as a pragmatist, he turned away from fixed principles and delved into experience, cognition, and action to generate new truths on race relations. Monteiro says:

Hence, Du Bois' practices of social science rupture the boundaries and limitations of White world social science and its racial assumptions. As well it acknowledges

truth while seeing all truths as contingent and provisional. It draws on Hegelian phenomenology and Jamesian pragmatism but brilliantly proposes a new phenomenology that challenges the “normal” way of seeing the African world and deploys a different science based on the humanity of the African. It is my contention that the revolutionary move was to assert as necessary to the social sciences the humanity of the African, but in so doing, Du Bois moves beyond them to what becomes a human science, liberated from notions of racial supremacy and civilizational hierarchy. (608)

In *Souls*, Du Bois sought to change the epistemology of race by showing the humanity of Africans and their contributions to America, during and after slavery. “What the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and modern science are to European thought,” Monteiro tells us, “Africa is to Du Bois.” In his work, Du Bois:

sets aside the tropes of European superiority, views them from the standpoint of an African, and asserts that Africa as civilization and modern practice and lifeworld is strategic to the study of the African American and the Black world universally. As he insisted in his Harvard valedictory, Europe is but one way and does not represent a universal or superior approach to knowing. In the conflict of ideas, Du Bois proposes another way, an African way of knowing and being in the world. (610)

Du Bois’s proposition here can be likened to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s message in “The American Scholar.” As a pragmatist, Emerson asked readers to expand concepts of knowledge beyond Europe and to also generate new truths based upon experience. Books, according to Emerson, should only serve us as tools and not be considered the final truth. Like Emerson, Du Bois dispelled the notion of a Eurocentric hegemony. However, he suggests that knowledge from Africans be included in the repertoire of scholarship. During this time, no other pragmatist was deeply concerned with African-centered issues. If Blacks were mentioned, the comments were generally pejorative and



embarrassing. For this reason, Du Bois is thought to have been pragmatist's most important political activist. In *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, Cornel West tells us that Du Bois expanded pragmatism to include a viewpoint on the:

impetus and impediments to individuality and radical democracy, a perspective that highlights the plight of the wretched of the earth, namely, the majority of humanity who owns no property or wealth, participate in no democratic arrangements, and whose individualities are crushed by hard labor and harsh living conditions. (147-48)

Du Bois used pragmatist tenets to help Americans, in particular, see race differently. He challenged *a priori* reasons on race relations and showed that social opportunities should be extended to all citizens.

As a devoted social scientist, Du Bois set out to scientifically explain human race relationships. He vehemently opposed racist scientific reasoning, such as eugenics and social Darwinism, as a justification for the enactment of racist social practices. He aimed to prove that Africans were civilized, intelligent beings, worthy of full participation in all aspects of society. While studying at Harvard and the University of Berlin, Monterio tells us:

Du Bois considered the possibility of subjecting to scientific inquiry the problem of race in the modern world. He studied race in relationship to the African American people, whom he identified early on as Africans. The intellectual core of what became a unique Du Boisian episteme of race was a reconceptualization of Africa. Du Bois, sometimes openly, often subtly, sought out ways to reconceptualize the social, cultural, and civilizational universe from an African-centered standpoint. Forthrightly, he would insist in a 1904 review of *The Souls of Black Folk*, "One who is born with a cause is predestined to a certain narrowness of view, and at the same time to some clearness of vision within his limits with which the world often finds it well to reckon (Du Bois, 1904/1996, p. 304)." (608-609)

Because of the elevated racial dissent during the nineteenth century, many critics point to Charles Darwin, social Darwinism, and evolution theories as imploding society with racialism, imperialism, and eugenics. In *The Descent of Man*, Charles Darwin stated, “At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilised [*sic*] races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace throughout the world the savage races” (201). This statement, among others, has been thought to support Nazi ideology although Darwin was known to sympathize with other races. Monterio summarizes the social Darwinism and hereditarian research program that Du Bois vehemently opposed. His analysis of the period is quoted at length:

Francis Galton’s [Charles Darwin’s half cousin who discovered eugenics]<sup>6</sup> discoveries in statistics translated social Darwinism into what would pass for a scientific research program. Statistics were, Galton thought, methods for proving that selective breeding could produce superior races. In 1869 he published *Hereditary Genius*, designed to convince the skeptical public of the superior hereditary endowments of certain eminent British families. Smedley (1988) indicates, “Arguing that there is a physiological basis for psychological traits, he invented techniques for measuring what he thought was intelligence, along with the bell shaped curve for demonstrating its ‘normal distribution’” (p. 266). Du Bois had experienced an even more lethal form of social Darwinism in Germany in the classes of the German ultranationalist and racist Heinrich von Treitschke. For along with normal social Darwinism, German academics combined it with the concept of the superman, which was taken up by Nietzsche. This was the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s legacy to the 20<sup>th</sup> on race, extending the positivist philosophical bent to measurement of human genetic inheritance. For most White Americans, these views expressed both common sense and experience. They became the dominant ideological and research paradigms in race matters within Anglo-American social science and research of the time. Each actively supported racism and class subordination and was strongly anti-immigrant. Social structure and social behavior were viewed as the consequences of inherited genetic characteristics. As the official scientific explanation of their age, they dominated political and social discourse, a problem that Du Bois early in his career attributed to society’s lack of

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<sup>6</sup> The insert is my own.

scientific knowledge, which he traced to the conceptual and methodological poverty of the social sciences, a situation he hoped to change. (614)

This lengthy passage is important in rendering insight into the twentieth century temperament on race, science, and knowledge. Essentially, European social scientists devised schools of thought that privileged their historical, social, and intellectual experiences over all other race groups. Furthermore, Monteiro says, “To be human, and thus worthy of scientific consideration, meant being European” (612). Therefore, Du Bois was accurate in stating that the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line. For the most part, society had become indoctrinated into believing that Whites ruled the world, and anything offered by “others” was substandard. Unfortunately, remnants of the bell curve and genetic inheritance are still in circulation today.

#### Twentieth-Century Racism: Du Bois’s Present Context

Du Bois acknowledges the history of racism in America and he places his plea for humanity within the present context of a Twentieth-Century legal segregation system of Jim Crow laws. Within *Souls*, Du Bois addresses a major question posed to him and other Black folk, “How does it feel to be a problem?” Instead of internalizing this accusation, he tried to understand the deeper implications, which might suggest that Blacks somehow did not contribute as productive citizens. Furthermore, the very presence of Blacks might pose a problem for an America that had not prepared for a post-slavery, post-racial society. The status quo systematically rejected any notion of viewing Black intelligence, ability, beauty, and character equally. As a result of social ostracism, Blackness as a problem was imprinted into the psyche of Americans and reinforced in many ways.

Herein lies the *real* problem – the hegemony of resistance and fear that dictated Blacks to stay in “their place” or else suffer the consequences. Blacks themselves were not the problem; their tragic social and economic condition was. The problem was their substandard, racist treatment, which caused some Blacks to become socially conditioned to think of themselves as innately inferior to Whites.

In *Cornel West & Philosophy: The Quest for Social Justice*, Clarence Shole Johnson says, “The most significant effect on African diasporic peoples of the assault on Black humanity is the undermining of their self-confidence and the questioning of their abilities and potentialities” (49). Throughout *Souls*, Du Bois made strides to not only define Blacks to America, but he also had to define Blacks to themselves. The racially prejudiced social conditioning enabled many Blacks to develop an inferiority complex, thereby perpetuating a cycle of debilitating practices. In efforts to correct the damage, Du Bois articulated the many contributions Blacks offered society, equivalent to that of Whites. He hoped Blacks would develop more self-assurance, represent themselves well, and also become respected by their detractors.

Du Bois argued for the justice of Blacks and other minorities because they helped define this country through their many contributions. He assumes a respectful tone in saying:

We the darker ones come even now not altogether empty-handed: there are to-day no truer exponents of the pure human spirit of the Declaration of Independence than the American Negroes; there is no true American music but the wild sweet melodies of the Negro slave; the American fairy tales and folk-lore are Indian and African; and, all in all, we black men seem the sole oasis of simple faith and reverence in a dusty desert of dollars and smartness. Will America be poorer if she replace her brutal dyspeptic blundering with light-hearted by determined

Negro humility? or her coarse and cruel wit with loving jovial good-humor? or her vulgar music with the soul of the Sorrow Songs? (16)

Du Bois dispels the myth that Blacks are empty-handed people bereft of cultural and spiritual values. Blacks gave of themselves greatly, in addition to the obvious slave work that laid the foundation for America's prosperity and positioning in the world. He takes great pride in showing exactly how they had contributed to the nation – reverence for democracy, music, folklore, faith, humility, and humor – which all indicate that America would be lacking without Blacks. He asks the reader to value these renderings as they value the meaning of America. In the last chapter of the book, Du Bois reiterates the gifts that Blacks bestowed upon America and asks:

Your country? How came it yours? Before the Pilgrims landed we were here. Here we have brought our three gifts and mingled them with yours: a gift of story and song – soft, stirring melody in an ill-harmonized and unmelodious land; the gift of sweat and brawn to beat back the wilderness, conquer the soil, and lay the foundations of this vast economic empire two hundred years earlier than your weak hands could have done it; the third, a gift of the Spirit. (162)

In addition to showing that Blacks helped define America through their contributions, Du Bois describes the different physical and psychological “worlds” that Blacks and Whites live in. He uses two powerful metaphors, “veil” and “double consciousness,” to describe a hegemony of social ostracism and judgment that so aptly describe the Black American existence. The veil metaphor was an enclosed Black world that represents the stark contrast and separation between the Black and White America.

Du Bois is precise in his description of the veil because as a Black man, he too lives within it. His social positioning is verified when he says, “And, finally, need I add

that I who speak here am bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil?" (6). He candidly discusses his initiation into the veil as a child, once he realized the significance of his Black skin. He describes this awareness as, "Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil."

(*Souls* 10)

Du Bois comes from behind the veil of the third person to explain this strange social dichotomy. As a tour guide for his readers to explore Blackness, he writes:

Leaving, then, the world of the white man. I have stepped within the Veil, raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses, - the meaning of its religion, the passion of its human sorrow, and the struggle of its greater souls. (5)

Especially due to slavery, American Blacks were quite aware of the White man's world.

As a measure of transparency and reasoning, Du Bois thought it necessary to step into the world of the metaphorical veil and raise it. Henry Louis Gates Jr. renders insight on the veil in the introduction of *Souls*:

Thus, particularly for Du Bois, the veil offers the opportunity to see and to report to America the truth of a divided nation. Although the veil can certainly serve as a metaphor for mourning, veiled figures (particularly women in Victorian fiction) have the opportunity to pass unnoticed, to observe without being observed, and to conceal their identity. (xxviii)

Social subordination caused most Blacks to go unnoticed, to observe the White culture without being observed. The exposure of Blacks' social condition served many purposes. More than anything, it showed that Blacks were humane beings that prevailed within an

unjust system. Du Bois suggests that it was not an altogether bad experience for Blacks by saying:

I have called my tiny community a world, and so its isolation made it; and yet there was among us but a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief, at burial, birth, or wedding; from a common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages; and, above all, from the sight of the Veil that hung between us and Opportunity. (5)

In this passage, the capitalization of the words “veil” and “opportunity” show personifications that characterize an us-and-them dichotomy, the distinct Black and White experiences that affords one group privilege while concealing it from the other group. Despite their segregation, Blacks found solace and support among each other, which allowed them to flourish within their own rights.

In *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*, Werner Sollors points out that even though the veil metaphor functions to separate Blacks from the American culture at large, it gives them “a more profound vision and higher destiny” (49). Furthermore, he makes a religious connection and discusses two allusions to the veil in the Hebrew Scriptures: “Du Bois imaginatively adapted two biblical images of the veil as a division within the Temple [Exodus 26.33] and as the cover that the divinely inspired Moses wore when he came back from Mount Sinai and spoke to the people [Exodus 34.3-35].” Sollors and many others make a spiritual connection to Du Bois’s use of the veil.

Gates explains in the book’s preface:

Du Bois’s veil metaphor – “and he saw himself – darkly as through a veil” (14) – is an allusion to St. Paul’s famous phrase (“For now we see through a glass, darkly”) in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13.12 and Isaiah 25.7),

and Du Bois's use of it suggests, among all things, that the African American's attempt to gain self-consciousness in a racist society will always be impaired because any reflected image coming from the gaze of white America is necessarily a distorted one, and quite probably a harmful one as well. (xxvii-xxviii)

As aforementioned, the veil was not altogether bad for Blacks, for it served a dual purpose. Although it appeared ostracizing and socially debilitating, it also served as a curtain to shun Blacks from "the gaze of white America." This respite from Whites allowed many Blacks to cultivate their skills and talents without reservation and criticism. The veil allowed Blacks an opportunity to nurture each other and develop strategies to cope with their opposing social forces.

In addition to the veil metaphor, Du Bois articulated another concept that furthermore described Blacks' fragmented position in America: double-consciousness. Gates tells us:

Scholars suggest that Du Bois first encountered the concept of double consciousness through his Harvard professor, William James, the term itself – most probably coined by Emerson – appeared in the title of two works in psychology in 1895 and 1896. Du Bois drew upon this concept from psychology to define the peculiarity marginal status of the African American citizen. (ix-x)

Du Bois defines the double-consciousness of Blacks as:

After the Egyptian and the Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always



looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, A Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (*Souls* xxvii)

Du Bois wrote *Souls* to offer Blacks a form of consolation and to address the 'amused contempt and pity' they were subjected to by the world. The gaze rendered to Blacks by others was unjust and psychologically damaging, especially since they had made much progress since slavery and Reconstruction. His book documents and validates their 'dogged strength' as a people determined to succeed, despite their dual and fragmented realities. The introduction of *Souls* offers additional insight to Du Bois's usage of double-consciousness and its profound effects:

The conversation that Du Bois initiated about the "duality" of African Americans – their double consciousness – became a signal contribution to the notion of the fragmentation of the self, a defining condition of modernism. The once audacious idea that all identities are multiple is now a commonplace. Once a problem to be solved, the multiplicities of identities is now understood to be a basic aspect of human existence. And *The Souls of Black Folk* not only played a major part in initiating this discourse, but its resonant use of metaphor enabled it to transcend even the urgent occasions for which these essays were written. (x)

The dual headings in each chapter of *Souls* – with the exception of the Forethought and the Afterthought – are rhetorical reinforcements of the duality that exists in America. In *The Art and Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois*, Arnold Rampersand makes claims about Du Bois's usage of double verses in the chapters:

The first, with one exception, is a piece of verse written by an accepted author of the Western poetic heritage. The second is a few notes from one of the fourteen well-known sorrow songs, the gifts of black people to America. Taken together,

the lines of verse signify the strivings of the souls of white folk toward lofty ideals; they reflect the spiritual dignity and artistic capacity of the white world. The sorrow songs deployed beneath them remind the reader of the community of soul which transcends race and color. (71)

The duality in America was not just extended to Blacks' social and psychological positioning. Throughout *Souls*, Du Bois asks the entire nation to see itself, to acknowledge the proverbial elephant in the room, to take ownership of the racism that no one really wanted to acknowledge or discuss. This distinctly prophetic pragmatist tenet of drawing attention to social issues is applied in efforts to discover the meaning of America. Du Bois wanted America to see itself in a larger schematic, through the eyes of Blacks and others. Du Bois hoped this newfound information would guide action toward a more democratic, satisfactory society for all its citizens.

#### Du Bois's Future Projection of Race Relations

In *Souls*, Du Bois informs his readers of the historical plight of Blacks from slavery through the Reconstruction. Pragmatism informs us that in efforts to evolve, we must know from whence we came. Essentially, we must clearly recognize and assess the facts. In this aspect, Du Bois applied pragmatist principles to reason with his readers. He wanted them to deeply understand the progress Blacks had made in society, thirty-five years removed from slavery. According to Rath:

Du Bois considered the distinctiveness of African's American experience a product of history, not biology. He considered "the Negro Problem" to be not one, "but rather a plexus of social problems...[that] have their one bond of unity in the fact that they group themselves about those Africans whom two centuries of slave

trading brought into the land.”<sup>7</sup> He advocated fostering the best qualities that historical events had forged in the “Negro Race” rather than aiming at a European-derived standard. (466)

If given an equal opportunity, he argued that Blacks could progress further and contribute more to society. This notion comes across in his 1897 paper before the American Academy of Social and Political Sciences. In it, Du Bois says the Negro “is a member of the human race, and as one who, in the light of history and experience, is capable to a degree of improvement and culture, is entitled to have his interests considered according to his numbers in all conclusions as to the common weal” (Du Bois, 1897/2000b, 24). Du Bois advocated for Blacks’ human and civil rights, in accordance with the Constitution of this democracy. In arguing for shared ownership of this country, Du Bois says:

Actively we have woven ourselves with the very warp and woof of this nation, - we fought their battles, shared their sorrow, mingled our blood with theirs, and generation after generation have pleaded with a headstrong, careless people to despise not Justice, Mercy, and Truth, lest the nation be smitten with a curse. Our song, our toil, our cheer, and warning have been given to this nation in blood-brotherhood. Are not these gifts worth the giving? Is not this work and striving? Would America have been America without her Negro people? (162-163)

He challenged historical racist social practices due to indoctrination and socialization. Blacks lived within the veil and experienced double-consciousness because of systemic racism such as slavery and Jim Crow laws. Even though slavery laws forbade Blacks to receive an education, the consequences of this travesty overtime became misinterpreted. The larger society translated this breach of human rights into stereotypes

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<sup>7</sup> W.E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, quoted in W.E.B. Du Bois, *Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing my Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (New York, 1968), 200.

that Blacks either lacked the mental capability to learn or they lacked the desire and were naturally shiftless, lazy beings. Mostly, Blacks were demonized as being ignorant, carefree, and animalistic. These denigrating beliefs were reinforced on multiple levels in society. Most notable are the offensive characters within blackface minstrel shows, where actors would cover their faces in black paint and perform certain archetypes of American racism. These images persisted for over a century and played a major role in establishing racist images, attitudes, and perceptions worldwide.

Du Bois knew that in efforts for Blacks to see themselves in a positive light and flourish as a people, historically racist laws and practices had to be contested. In *Souls*, Du Bois explains the plight of Blacks:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, – this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (11)

Du Bois pragmatically showed his readers that in light of the metaphorical veil, color line, and other social impediments that divided society, Blacks somehow prevailed. However, for history to chart a new course, liberation must be achieved for all Blacks. If society engaged in respectful relationships with Blacks and other minorities, Du Bois argued that this interaction would benefit everyone. In spite of what seemed a bleak

reality, Du Bois remained steadfast and hopeful of a transformed, more democratic society.

### **What *Souls* Offers Composition Studies in the Twenty-first Century**

A major benefit of studying *Souls* is that I believe it is a concrete example of Cornel West's derivative philosophy of prophetic pragmatism. Through *Souls*, Du Bois allows suffering to speak to the power structures to elicit democratic change. Since my pedagogy uses a prophetic pragmatism framework for humanity training, *Souls* can be analyzed to inform different approaches to addressing social problems in the twenty first century. An added element of using this book as an example in a composition classroom is that it reinforces the power of effective communication to incite action. Students could rhetorically analyze the ways in which Du Bois uses language to persuade his readers of Blacks' humanity. Rhetorical analysis, whether oral, visual, or print, helps students pay close attention to how they use language. Within a class centered on a critical pedagogy of humanity, the usage of language in its many forms is vital for effectively communicating social change.

The same holistic methods that Du Bois used to confront racism – an understanding of the past for present contextual analysis in efforts to make future projections – could be applied to other social issues such as class, gender, and sexuality. One could study the epistemological and scientific history of an issue to better understand why specific social constructs presently exist. By critically thinking through past and present cultural issues, composition students could develop a meliorist approach to problem solving, of believing in social progress through human interaction. Like Du

Bois, students could become social scientists on a mission to investigate how to resolve problems that infect the nation. The pragmatic tenets within the book reveal how Du Bois gave voice to the wretched of the earth as well as to the educated and proud. As a meliorist, Du Bois's work shows a deep belief in the American democracy and the advantage of turning away from fixed principles for inquiry. His advocacy of societal interdependence and valuation of all races is a worthwhile methodology for radical evolution.

Through offering a pedagogy of humanity in the composition classroom, it is my objective to give students a method of *doing philosophy* that helps transform notions of difference in efforts to engage them in civic work. I am inspired by the work of Du Bois and West to take a meliorist approach to problem solving. Because of them and other “good folk” that help society see itself, I believe in the potential for peace and justice in America. As a prophetic pragmatist teacher, I work in conjunction with individuals, organizations, and associations that address the need for social engagement that benefits *all* citizens. Together, we strive to develop compassion in the world by valuing *all* persons of race, class, and gender. It is my hope to help cultivate a more democratic, peaceful society through measures that creatively improve social conditions. Like Du Bois, I hope to challenge my students to expand their thinking on how knowledge is acquired and disseminated. I want them to fully comprehend that no particular group should dominate the trajectory of knowledge (science, religion, etc.) and claim it as Truth, with a capital “T.” The experiences of *all* people, regardless of group affiliation, contribute significantly to defining and redefining the world. Therefore, each of us should

turn away from fixed principles and delve into experience, cognition, and action that could generate new ways of understanding social interactions.

The next chapter shows the influences of general pragmatism and the work of Du Bois and West, specifically, to inform classroom practices that could lead to empathy and civic engagement. Pragmatism tenets are applied to social issues in efforts to arrive at many little truths that, when analyzed, could inform meaningful democratic action. The prophetic classroom emphasizes the importance of experience and reflection in education.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SOULS OF GOOD FOLK: A PEDAGOGY OF HUMANITY

#### **Education as Philosophy of Experience**

Due to existing social problems in America, I believe the nation is suffering from a lack of compassion toward others or what President Obama calls an empathy deficit. Schools could help address this root problem by offering humanity training that encourages civic participation for creatively solving social problems. Training students for humanitarian work could begin as early as pre-school and it could occur through many different approaches. As an example of how to implement this training in higher education, I offer a pedagogy of humanity for the composition classroom called “The Souls of Good Folk.” The composition classroom is the site for this pedagogy because of its focus on critical literacy, reading and writing that promotes critical thinking. These class requirements would effectually ground and enhance other cognitive skills. In a speech to college students, then-Senator Barack Obama says, “Reading is the gateway that makes all other learning possible, from complex word problems and the meaning of our history to scientific discovery and technological proficiency” (“Bound to the Word” 50). He believes, “It’s not enough just to recognize the words on the page anymore. The kind of literacy necessary for the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires detailed understanding and complex comprehension” (51). The composition classroom develops critical literacy



ability – reading oneself and the world – which is needed to help solve community problems. In efforts to apply critical literacy to social issues, Cornel West’s prophetic pragmatism is used as a philosophical framework to help cultivate humanity and encourage civic engagement. It expands regular pragmatism to include decidedly political and cultural agendas to improve social experiences for all citizens.

Prophetic pragmatism serves as a lens in this pedagogy because it is not grounded in one particular school of thought or doctrine. This philosophical framework is an unbiased attempt at understanding some of our social challenges in efforts to render insights to more effectively addressing them. In “The Limits of NeoPragmatism,” West speaks of the philosophy in existential, communal, and political terms. He says,

The existential dimension is guided by the value of love – a risk-ridden affirmation of the distinct humanity of others that, at its best, holds despair at bay. The communal dimension is regulated by loyalty – a profound devotion to the critical temper and democratic faith that eschews dogmatism. The political dimension is guided by freedom – a perennial quest for self-realization and self-development that resists all forms of oppression. (187)

Prophetic pragmatism encourages a meliorist approach to viewing the world, a concept that humans can work together for social advancement. Meliorism, in a sense, describes what Obama says in one of his speeches, “In the face of impossible odds, people who love their country can change it” (Murray 6). Prophetic pragmatism reinforces the notion that much could get accomplished if one adopts a meliorist approach to problem solving. This philosophy embraces change for the good of society, irrespective of partisanship, race, class, and gender. Furthermore, one does not have to be religious to practice it. Prophetic pragmatism requires a willingness to be objective and inclusive, while viewing

a subject for understanding and implementation. In *Cornel West: The Politics of Redemption*, Rosemary Cowan says:

West wants his pragmatism to be more than just an interesting academic fad or conversation piece, but rather a material force for changing the world, and suggest that the distinctive feature of pragmatism vis-à-vis other philosophical traditions is its emphasis on the “ethical significance” of the future and a belief that human beings can make a difference in the world. (51-52)

West believes that cultural criticism and self-critique are vital if social change is to be achieved.

The work of W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* is discussed as an example of prophetic pragmatism enacted in the real world. In “Echo and Narcissus: The Afrocentric Pragmatism of W.E.B. Du Bois,” Richard Rath explains that Du Bois learned at Harvard that “*souls* mediate will and effect” and it was “the bridge that allowed ideas to affect the material world” (471). Likewise, I use the word *souls* in my inspired title to represent people’s actions. The phrase “good folks” is an expansion of Du Bois’s focus on Blacks’ social condition in the twentieth century for a more inclusive perspective. I use “good folks” to represent *anyone* that shows society what needs improving and possibly offers suggestions of how tasks could be accomplished. These folk include marginalized people, cultural workers, grassroots activists, teachers, artists, musicians, and others that help America see itself in efforts to make appropriate changes. Du Bois’s work is not viewed as a blueprint for social transformation, but analyzing it could inform a holistic approach - past, present, and future projections – to addressing social problems.

Whereas Du Bois focused primarily on improving race relations towards Blacks

in *The Souls of Black Folk*, my pedagogy is aimed at social progression in many different areas. Du Bois's book is a revolutionary, foundational cultural critique of America by a marginalized citizen. Prior to his publication, the majority society merely speculated about the racist dichotomy experienced by Blacks. Du Bois's work is pivotal in improving race relations in America and abroad because for the first time, a Black person eloquently articulated the problem of racism and cogently validated Blacks' gifts and contributions to the world. Through Du Bois's work, Blacks were able to view themselves positively and also gain respect with other ethnic groups. Therefore, he was instrumental in cultivating more humane interaction between Blacks and Whites. Furthermore, his book increased empathy and promoted civic engagement. Reading Du Bois's book could lead one to empathy because of the holistic approach it takes. He traces many problems associated with the "color line" for both race groups, instead of presenting the situation as affecting only one community. The following quote by Jane Addams in *Democracy and Social Ethics* accurately describes how Du Bois engendered empathy within his readers. She says:

We are all involved in this political corruption, and as members of the community stand indicted. This is the penalty of democracy, - that we are bound to move forward or retrograde together. None of us can stand aside; our feet are mired in the same soil, and our lungs breathe the same air. (256)

As a scholar, writer, and cultural worker who improved social conditions, Du Bois's work could be considered "good," charitable, or evolutionary. "The Souls of Good Folk" pedagogy is designed to analyze the work of others like Du Bois who make a positive difference in the world. Through examining the works of lesser-known citizens to

acclaimed individuals, students can learn to cultivate empathy, service, and democracy. In other words, students may become motivated to enhance their communities if they see examples of other people contributing. Although the media rarely show positive actions of citizens, teachers can help promote democracy and civic engagement in the classroom through a progressive civic agenda.

While the specific conception of my pedagogy might be a new approach to humanity training, the rationale for it supports John Dewey's twenty-year analyses of the needs, problems, and possibilities of the educational system. In *Experience & Education* he argues for a new educational structure that considers the whole teaching and learning experience, rather than simply juxtaposing traditional and progressive methods and choosing sides. For him, neither of these methods is better or worse. He advocates the combination of both approaches to inform the direction of education as a whole. Therefore, he supports a philosophy of education centered on a philosophy of experience. He poses an important question:

What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul: loses his appreciation of things worth while, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desire to apply what he has learned and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur?  
(49)

Dewey believes that education works effectively when there are signs that the participant is growing intellectually and morally. I believe that using a prophetic pragmatism framework could help students discover what Dewey says is “the connection

which actually exist *within* experience between the achievements of the past and the issues of the present” (23). Furthermore, Dewey says:

Just as the individual has to draw in memory upon his own past to understand the conditions in which he individually finds himself, so the issues and problems of present social life are in such intimate and direct connection with the past that students cannot be prepared to understand either these problems or the best way of dealing with them without delving into their roots in the past. (77)

Therefore, we must make acquaintance of the past as a *means* of understanding the present. For example, in *The Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois used the history of Black Americans and his personal experiences to understand the racist twentieth century society in which he found himself. Therefore, Du Bois became acquainted with the past simply as a *means* for understanding his present situation. Likewise, students of prophetic pragmatism should make connections with the past for dealing effectively with the present.

“The Souls of Good Folk” critical pedagogy allows for meaningful learning experiences of past, present, and future implications. Students have the opportunity to investigate the interdependent nature of social issues and to also pose solutions to problems. The idea is for students to become more empathetic, democratic citizens after having a contextual understanding of social problems, culprits, and casualties. The pedagogy is designed to deconstruct issues surrounding social problems, to make them less overwhelming and more approachable. Social topics are defined, causes and consequences are discussed, service is experienced, and methods to improve problems are generated. Essentially, this pedagogy exhibits the many ways in which people from

all walks of life work together to combat social ills – whether through music, media, literature, or social networking. It includes a plethora of examples from history and pop culture that show variations of humanity, while also allowing students to participate in service assignments. The service component gives students the opportunity to work in the community to observe a social issue up close and it encourages them to contribute to a cause based upon their understanding of the problems. Most importantly, students learn pragmatic and meliorist approaches to problem solving – that giving up does not solve problems but humans can work together to improve the conditions of the world. Therefore, students within this classroom laboratory are encouraged to try alternative, ingenious approaches to solving social problems.

This dissertation shows the theory and praxis of humanity education. To reiterate the words of early pragmatist William James, once we are made aware of human issues, then what is truth's cash value? How is this knowledge applied in society? I attempt to answer James's question by showing how this new pedagogy works to make students aware of themselves and others. Students are provided with concrete actions that enlarge their experience and deepen their empathy.

### **Critical Pedagogy: Schools as Laboratories for Social Change**

According to Richard Lakes in "Volunteerism in Social Foundations Courses," "Critical pedagogy is more representative of social movement activism, mobilizing projects increasingly identified as grassroots, direct action, identity conscious, and oriented to civic and cultural change" (56). By incorporating critical pedagogies that teach students effective strategies for social engagement, schools could in a sense

develop into laboratories for social change that integrates hands on learning and exploration. Laboratory-style schools could teach students methods of understanding complex social problems in efforts to arrive at creative, holistic solutions. One of the most important examples of this is the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools founded by Dewey in the late nineteenth century. Alfred L. Hall-Quest explains Dewey's approach to education in the editorial foreword of *Experience & Education*. He says, "Mr. Dewey interprets education as the scientific method by means of which man studies the world, acquires cumulatively knowledge of meanings and values, these outcomes, however, being data for critical study and intelligent living" (10). This scientific approach to making meaning goes back to the method established by pragmatism founder Charles Sanders Peirce. Dewey was one of the first pragmatists to apply these principles to education. Hall-Quest further describes Dewey's scientific process as:

The tendency of scientific inquiry is toward a body of knowledge which needs to be understood as the means whereby further inquiry may be directed. Hence the scientist, instead of confining his investigation to problems as they are discovered, proceeds to study the nature of problems, their age, conditions, significance. To this end he may need to review related stores of knowledge. Consequently, education must employ progressive organization of subject matter in order that the understanding of this subject-matter may illumine the meaning and significance of the problems. Scientific study leads to and enlarges experience, but this experience is educative only to the degree that it rests upon a continuity of significant knowledge and to the degree that this knowledge modifies or "modulates" the learner's outlook, attitude, and skill. The true learning situation, then, has longitudinal and lateral dimensions. It is both historical and social. It is orderly and dynamic. (10-11)

Many supported Dewey's educational theory. However, he and fellow pragmatist George Herbert Mead gained much inspiration through their association with Hull House. Here,

they witnessed the practice of many pragmatism concepts. Interestingly, Jane Addams and Ellen Starr, the founders of Hull House, were unfamiliar with Dewey's philosophy and did not consider themselves pragmatists. They worked primarily with the immigrant population to offer activities "along four lines designated by Addams as the social, educational, humanitarian, and civic" (Harkavy 9). Furthermore, "Labor Union activities took place at Hull House, which also served as a forum for social, political, and economic reform (10). The interactions Dewey experienced at Hull House helped inform his practices at the University of Chicago. The methods employed through Hull House and Chicago Laboratory Schools consisted of a critical pedagogy that allowed students to derive meaning from their relationship with the world.

In *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, influential Brazilian educator Paulo Freire says a critical pedagogy consists of "an openness toward others" and an "open-ended curiosity toward life" (120-121). While this general definition sums up the overall objectives of a critical pedagogy, K. Fisher in "Demystifying Critical Reflection: Defining Criteria for Assessment" provides specific critical thinking skills that should be taught. Students should acquire the ability to:

- Articulate a contextual awareness of one's own position, through identifying the impact of one's own influences and background;
- Identify one's own values, beliefs, and assumptions;
- Consider other perspectives or alternative ways of viewing the work, i.e. being able to identify what perspectives are missing from one's own account;
- Identify how one's own views can have a particular bias that privileges one view over another;
- Perceive contradictions and inconsistencies in one's own story or account of events;
- Imagine other possibilities, i.e. a capacity to envision alternatives. (317)



This type of training is necessary for America to uphold its democratic principles and maintain the role of a world leader. Currently, many aspects of this nation need repair. With humanity training, more citizens might feel compelled to join an “all hands on deck” approach to problem solving. As citizens within a democracy, we should not expect the government alone to solve all the problems. Everyone’s help is needed in improving society. The pedagogy of humanity that I offer equips students with academic and social skills that engender empathy, service, and democracy. “The Souls of Good Folk” is an example of a critical pedagogy that strengthens critical thinking skills. It allows students and teachers to create a classroom community to work through complex social issues and increase knowledge together.

By helping individuals identify themselves as “social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative creative persons,” Freire says education becomes a “form of intervention in the world” (*Pedagogy of Freedom* 90). When students see themselves as assets to society, as intelligent, creative beings that enhance their environments, they may become less likely to get involved in dangerous, damaging activities such as gang violence and drug usage. When incorporating a critical pedagogy, Leigh Anne Howard says, “education becomes a student-centered collaborative process in contrast to a teacher-centered transmission of (often) disconnected facts and figures” (1129). Students essentially learn better when they are aware of how learning applies to their everyday lives. In this way, learning becomes engaging and students consider their assignments more seriously.

## **Education and Service as Ways of Combating Empathy Deficit**

Learning happens more easily once students can apply what they learn to their own lives and experiences. Educating students to investigate the conditions of everyday life both helps them learn and it teaches the values of good citizenship and humane justice. In this manner, the American educational system could become a major ally in helping the nation become a more democratic, fair society. According to Dewey in

### *Education & Experience:*

We are told that our schools, old and new, are failing in the main task. They do not develop, it is said, the capacity for critical discrimination and the ability to reason. The ability to think is smothered, we are told, by accumulation of miscellaneous ill-digested information, and by the attempt to acquire forms of skill which will be immediately useful in the business and commercial world. (85)

Instead of training citizens to work for the commercial world primarily, schools should teach students how to strengthen and sustain communities. In *Toward a Civil Society*, C. David Lisman says, “Higher education has an ethical and social responsibility to utilize its resources to help strengthen the local democratic process in the service of improving community life” (149). Many others echo this sentiment. In *Higher Education and Democratic Culture* the authors are quoted at length as saying:

Higher education must engage with local community, to improve the opportunity of those living in its immediate neighbourhood [*sic*] as well as further afield to share the benefits of higher education. It must engage with local society to improve that society and to make it sustainable – by helping develop its economy, by helping make its physical and social environment sustainable, by encouraging local citizens to participate in the life and politics of the community and take responsibility for the future of their own community, by transmitting the necessary competences and by regaining the credibility of research-based science.

*In short, higher education must make every effort to give the local community hope. Without hope, no society is sustainable. (10)*

I believe a sustainable community is one that encourages service and empathy to strengthen its civic infrastructure. Therefore, schools could teach citizens how to make sense of what is happening and become active partners in sharing the responsibilities of community preservation. A global program called “Roots of Empathy” is one such example of how schools can offer humanity training. They help K-8 graders develop “knowledge of human development, empathy, and emotional literacy” (“Roots of Empathy”). Their website lists the methodology as:

The materials make connections to the home, the workplace, the community, and the school as appropriate. The training materials engage participants in a variety of interactive activities including role plays, demonstrations, and singing. The curriculum materials provide multiple opportunities for students to problem-solve, work collaboratively, and listen respectfully. The students are also provided with opportunities to communicate their learning using oral, visual, and written forms. (“Roots of Empathy”)

Founded in 1996 by Canadian educator and best selling author Mary Gordon, Roots of Empathy recently branched to the United States in the fall of 2007, with its first school in Seattle, Washington.

By implementing progressive social agendas like “Roots of Empathy” and other such programs, schools, colleges, and universities could play a major role in addressing the “empathy deficit” that President Obama said America is suffering from. Empathy is needed to enhance an increasingly diverse society that is ridden with social problems. It is the capacity to vicariously experience another person’s circumstances for the purpose

of becoming more sympathetic to their predicament. Cultivating empathy requires the decentering of one's assumptions and priorities to focus on understanding the quality of life for someone else. For example, America is accused of being an anti-Muslim nation. Especially after the 2002 series of terrorist attacks, Muslims were negatively portrayed to the point of becoming physical targets for people to vent their frustrations. News sources published many stories about the rampant fear experienced by Muslims and how many resorted to fleeing the country. Such climatic confusion could have been lessened if more people were educated on different aspects of the Muslim culture. Overall, people should learn to respect all religions as being "different" forms of spiritual practices, instead of pitting one faith against the other.

Due to movies and music that aid in the desensitization process of an entire society, people are more likely to participate in war and violence.<sup>8</sup> Although many of us learn the basics of empathy as a child (being comforted when distressed) we can become desensitized as we mature. According to Psychologist Douglas LaBier, Ph.D., Director and Founder of the Center for Adult Development in Washington, D.C., "We unlearn whatever empathy skills we've picked up while coming of age in a culture that focuses on acquisition and status more than cooperation and values "moving over" thoughtful reflection" (Robb "Empathy Deficit Disorder"). He believes that what he calls empathy deficit disorder (EDD) is rampant among Americans and is "at the heart of modernity's most common problems, macro (war) and micro (divorce)." In a *Washington Post* article, LaBier says:

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<sup>8</sup> See bell hooks's *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies* (1996) and Henry Giroux's *Breaking In to the Movies: Film and the Culture of Politics* (2002).

People who suffer from EDD are unable to step outside themselves and tune in to what other people experience. That makes it a source of personal conflicts, of communication failure in intimate relationships, and of the adversarial attitudes -- even hatred -- among groups of people who differ in their beliefs, traditions or ways of life. (HE 05)

He distinguishes between sympathy and empathy by saying:

Unlike sympathy -- which reflects understanding of another person's situation, but viewed through your own lens -- empathy is what you feel when you enter the internal world of another person. Without abandoning your own perspective, you experience the other's emotions, conflicts or aspirations. That kind of connection builds healthy relationships -- an essential part of mental health. EDD develops when people focus too much on acquiring power, status and money for themselves at the expense of developing those healthy relationships. (HE 05)

Furthermore, he provides suggestions for overcoming EDD:

By focusing on developing empathy, you can deepen your understanding and acceptance of how and why people do what they do and you can build respect for others. This doesn't mean that you are whitewashing the differences you have with other people or letting them walk over you. Rather, empathy gives you a stronger, wiser base for resolving conflicts and trumps self-centered, knee-jerk reactions to surface differences. (HE 05)

Again, schools can help cultivate empathy by teaching students to envision themselves as someone else and to understand the variety of issues that person might encounter.

Students should realize that however different people appear, we are bound together as a society. Therefore, when a person's life is improved, it has a positive domino effect within the community. Likewise, when adverse situations mature, they ripple throughout all aspects of society and weaken the infrastructure. Acquiring the skills to become empathetic towards others is especially important in efforts to transform selfish,

independent attitudes that are pervasive in the world today. For progress to occur, it is crucial that each of us improve how we interact with others, regardless of perceived differences.

One method of teaching empathy is through service activities that benefit the community. These activities could include working in areas like hospital or health care, environmental or animal care, and youth services. Empathy training combined with service could transform personal and social interactions and increase civic engagement. This hands-on approach could have lasting effects on all parties involved. Through service, students and organizations could learn how their actions impact others and vice versa. Upon signing the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act on April 21, 2009, to expand community engagement, President Barack Obama emphasized a national call to service by saying:

We need your service, right now, at this moment in history. I'm not going to tell you what your role should be; that's for you to discover. But I'm asking you to stand up and play your part. I'm asking you to help change history's course. Put your shoulder up against the wheel. And if you do, I promise you – your life will be richer, our country will be stronger, and someday, years from now, you may remember it as the moment when your own story and the American story converged, when they came together, and we met the challenges of our new century. (“A Call to Service”)

Service could allow students to develop a sense of agency, which is the capacity to enact personal authority to change a situation. When schools teach methods of empathy and service, they help create a democratic citizenry that is capable and willing to improve the world. Through social critique and service opportunities, students are equipped to actualize meaningful, creative ways to make a difference in the lives of others.

Everyone has the potential to contribute goodwill. Being civic-minded is a principle that should be introduced to individuals early on and sustained throughout life. Family members and churches are generally held responsible for establishing this mentality. However, schools could play an equally important role in cultivating today's youth to care about their communities and the world. While goodwill and social benevolence may not holistically solve social problems, the attitude of giving could allow for progressive changes to take place in society.

Engaging students in service activities at an early age is a noble, foundational endeavor, and it is never too late to begin the process. Although resurfacing strongly in the last decade or so, service and volunteerism in schools are not new concepts. In *Cultivating Humanity*, Martha Nussbaum conveys, "the history of the United States suggests a nation devoted to civic education for citizenship" (3). Some of the first American colleges and universities were founded to promote civic education and the democratic impulse. The mission statements of Harvard, William and Mary, and Yale all coalesce around messages about expanding and creating knowledge, critical thought, and serving the public.<sup>9</sup> Nussbaum says, "The real story of higher education in America is the story of the daily struggles of these men and women [teachers] to reason well about urgent questions and to engage the hearts and minds of their students in that search" (3). Engaging students in a classroom, who come from different backgrounds and experiences, is not an easy feat for teachers. When gauging students' receptivity, it is

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<sup>9</sup> For further information, see the charters of Harvard, William and Mary, and Yale.

important to review teaching concepts as well as methodology to determine its relevancy and usefulness.

Many schools around the country engage students with the public. Professionals are often called upon to share their expertise and to give students a glimpse of different career paths, whether in the classroom or on location. Experience of this caliber usually has a lasting effect on students' lives. Juxtaposed with a more traditional rote learning method, venturing out into the community can be viewed as a liberal approach to education. This involvement is designed to teach students about life in a variety of ways. One prevalent method used is experiential learning, which allows students to derive meaning through hands on experiences or simply put, to learn while doing. Volunteering and service learning are common practices of experiential learning that many schools promote or implement as a graduation requirement.

Service in any capacity can be used to instill moral values and expand concepts of community. While many laud these humanitarian efforts, others criticize practices that do not appear to have qualitative results. The effectiveness of these initiatives, I believe, could be measured in how much students value community and apply service principles to their real lives beyond graduation. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that students have a clear understanding of *why* their work is important and *how* it is connected to improving the lives of others and themselves. Knowing the "how's and why's" of their service could make for a more meaningful experience, instead of simply volunteering to meet academic objectives. Furthermore, critical assessment or reflection is key to making sense of it all.



When students are able to share experiences with peers and hear numerous perspectives, it broadens understanding and gives an overall feeling of connectedness, a sense of community. If more schools value learning through community engagement, I believe students would realize their individual ability to positively impact the lives of others. When validating the lives and contributions of all citizens becomes commonplace, then the “empathy deficit” that Obama fervently speaks of could be turned into an empathy *surplus* and the quality of everyone’s life could be enriched as a result.

### **The Prophetic Pragmatist Teacher**

There is much speculation about the role of social activism and politics within the classroom. Critics claim the two should not be factored into education designed to promote freethinking rather than indoctrination. However, it is almost impossible to be politically neutral when teaching because core beliefs and values are evinced in the design of a course syllabus. Even when teachers deliberately show political neutrality, that stance itself is a political agenda. Putting forth a generic, non-partisan curriculum is still considered choosing a political purpose – which is to be apolitical. Even so, the course of study, selection of texts, and learning objectives are centered on political premises. Also, the assignments and discussions render political consequences, for each student interprets messages differently. Given this argument, teachers should embrace our important leadership roles and choose an agenda that cultivates humanity and civic engagement among students. Society would benefit from teachers who embrace a vital role in shaping the minds of future leaders and political decision makers through establishing a civic and democratic agenda.

Some may view this work as radical, revolutionary politics and liken it to the work of socialists and communists, but it is quite the contrary. Critical teaching should be considered *evolutionary* or progressive politics, for the work of moving the nation forward is the main agenda. Critical teaching, as defined by Richard Lakes in “Volunteerism in Social Foundations Courses,” means “building spaces where students can creatively maladjust in the classroom and, by extending themselves into the community, gain exposure to democratic forms of social reconstruction” (54). Professors should work in concert with their schools, urging the importance of bringing this theoretical social agenda to fruition, with reward of tenure and promotion. According to Mark Wood in *Cornel West and the Politics of Prophetic Pragmatism*:

Although universities and colleges are committed in principle to academic freedom, this freedom is inescapably delimited by individuals who decide the intellectual worth of pedagogy and scholarship on the basis of their intellectual, disciplinary, and political commitments, commitments that frequently support existing social, political, and economic arrangements. (117)

Ultimately, many schools give lip service to working with the community. They should value their professors’ involvement in civic education, especially since it is the mandate of the first American colleges and universities. C. David Lisman echoes Wood’s sentiments. She believes that more teachers would commit to civic work “if the tenure and reward system is changed in such a way as to provide greater recognition of the value of community service for faculty, alongside the traditional values of teaching and research” (158). Furthermore, she assesses that “junior faculty, who attain tenureship through traditional research, are not going to devote much of their time to working with

their students in the community” (158). Again, universities should reevaluate how their rhetorical support for community engagement measures with their system of awarding activist teachers tenure and promotion.

Many critics of an activist classroom pose questions of whether an ethical criterion is needed for campus and community collaboration, for one has to choose which interest group to give service. One such critic, Derek Bok, former president of Harvard University, believes that community engagement means that professors will focus less on student development, which is why they teach in the first place<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, he is skeptical about the skills required for such a task. He says, “even the hardest optimist has to wonder whether many professors possess the practical knowledge and political skill to make lasting progress in attacking the problems of urban poverty deteriorating schools, and hard-core unemployment” (82). Since scholarly research and civic action are equally challenging tasks, Bok believes that activist teachers should simply help to improve organizations that serve to improve the community instead of getting involved with the community directly. Bok currently serves as the Faculty Chair at the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations at Harvard. While Bok’s thinking is a viable option, it should not be an exclusive resolution to meeting the needs of the community. Both perspectives, social agency work and independent research, are needed to understand the root of social problems necessary to improve the entire society. Independent research consists of

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<sup>10</sup> Perhaps Derek Bok’s position on the imbalanced act of activist teachers sheds light on the controversy between then-Harvard President Lawrence Summers and then-Harvard professor Cornel West. See chapter two for more details.

looking at how agencies assist the community as well as researching other available means of information, such as the standpoint of the disenfranchised.

Prophetic pragmatist purports that all available perspectives help inform what needs to be done to strengthen communities. This philosophical framework in the composition classroom could allay fears that Bok and others have because this type of classroom is student-centered, not primarily community-centered. It focuses on students' experiences that inform ways of knowing and making meaning in the world. Students participate in service assignments in efforts to develop themselves and the community simultaneously. This pedagogical framework benefits both students and the community in cultivating a more democratic citizenry.

Cornel West states the tenets of prophetic pragmatism as:

a universal consciousness that promotes an all-embracing democratic and libertarian moral vision, a historical consciousness that acknowledges human finitude and conditionedness, and a critical consciousness which encourages relentless critique and self-criticism for the aims of social change and personal humility. (*American Evasion* 232).

Therefore, this method of doing philosophy requires an understanding of the past and present in efforts to make future projections of a social topic. It dictates a meliorist worldview that society can improve through human interaction.

There are many goals for a prophetic pragmatist teacher, as there is a delicate balance in merging traditional and progressive learning methods that support experience as a major learning tool. As a primary goal, prophetic pragmatist teachers should try to create meaningful learning experiences that would live on abundantly and creatively in

students. The prophetic teacher is central to guiding students through the process of discovering the interconnectedness of social issues, how they are manifested, and whom it affects. By the sheer fact of practicing the philosophy in the classroom, the teacher automatically becomes the first prophetic pragmatic that students actually see, aside from texts that discuss individuals like West, Du Bois, and others. According to Dewey in *Education & Experience*, “The teacher should become intimately acquainted with the conditions of the local community, physical, historical, economic, occupational, etc., in order to utilize them as educational resources” (40). The prophetic pragmatist teacher has to apply pragmatic principles and connect education with experience. Thus, the teacher becomes the student’s *living* example of how this philosophy is enacted in the world.

As a prophetic pragmatist example for students, the teacher must work diligently to have an effective classroom structure where meaningful learning occurs. While maintaining a civic agenda is a major objective, the prophetic pragmatist teacher within the composition classroom, specifically, must help students cultivate critical reading and writing skills, for these skills are crucial in making meaning of social interactions. Dewey believes that the operation of keen intelligence is required in connecting the dots of situations to make meaning. For him, critical understanding is a composite of reflection and foresight that yields purpose. Students would reflect on past and present situations in efforts to analyze a social issue for future projections. In other words, students would develop critical understanding of a social problem and come up with a plan or a purpose to improve it. Dewey describes purpose as an “end-view” because “it involves foresight of the consequences which will result from acting upon impulse” (67-68). Again,

intelligence is required to develop a foresight of consequences. He is quoted at length explaining the intricate process involved in establishing purpose:

The formation of purposes is, then, a rather complex intellectual operation. It involves (1) observation of surrounding conditions; (2) knowledge of what has happened in similar situations in the past, a knowledge obtained partly by recollection and partly from the information, advice, and warning of those who have had a wider experience; and (3) judgment which puts together what is observed and what is recalled to see what they signify. A purpose differs from an original impulse and desire through its translation into a plan and method of action based upon foresight of the consequences of acting under given observed conditions in a certain way. (68-69)

Dewey's explanation of arriving at purpose anticipates the pragmatic maxims that Cornel West builds upon to derive prophetic pragmatism. Again, a prophetic pragmatist framework could help students make meaning of their individual lives and also their relationship with the community at large. A prophetic pragmatist teacher is central to guiding students through the process of discovery. In that way, all students have an opportunity to contribute something. Most importantly, the prophetic pragmatist teacher is responsible for knowledge of subject matter that will enable meaningful learning experiences.

### **Creating Community**

It is vital to the sustainability of democracy that citizens understand themselves and their connection to the world community. In her book, *Seeing a Color Blind Future: The Paradox of Race*, Patricia J. Williams says:

Creating community involves the difficult work of negotiating differences, of considering boundaries before we go crashing through, and of pondering our

differences before we can ever agree on the terms of our sameness. The creation of a sense of community is a life-long negotiation of endless subtlety. (6)

There are many conceptions of community, how it is defined, and what it is supposed to look like. Many scholars try to distinguish between academic, discourse, or speech communities. There are also discrepancies about whether online communities are actually communities, instead of forums. In *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966*, Joseph Harris responds to the vagueness and variety of what community means. He says, “For all the scrutiny it has drawn, the idea of community thus still remains little more than a notion - hypothetical and suggestive, powerful yet ill-defined” (100-101). My position here is not to substantiate a particular claim, but in essence, to promote community as being a generic group of interacting individuals that occupy the same virtual or physical space.

In *A Passion for Democracy: American Essays*, Benjamin R. Barber states, “The point where democracy and education intersect is the point we call community” and he agrees with John Dewey that, “in the first place, the school must itself be a community life” (*Experience* 230). Dale Coye further explains the idea of a school community in his essay, “Ernest Boyer and the New American College.” He says, “Institutions of higher education should work more deliberately toward developing a campus atmosphere in which students and scholars are committed to common values, which would presumably be democratic in character and supportive of the values of public scholarship” (26). Coye believes that schools need to work calculatingly to create campus community or else risk fragmentation due to distance learning courses and reliance upon many adjunct or part-

time faculty. Schools need to determine why students would choose to come to campus when they could simply obtain degrees from taking online classes. He thinks the answer should be something like:

‘Because the life of the college provides something you can’t get off campus.’ Although you can learn a great deal about human values from the family, church, or even from a computer screen, college should be about *actively exploring* values and living them. (26)

Furthermore, in order for a school to represent a community, each person should be seen as a valuable, contributing member. Knowledge and experience should be shared reciprocally between students and teachers, instead of teachers being the only depositors of information. Not only can peers learn from each other, but teachers can also learn from students. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire warns against what he calls “the banking system of education,” where teachers deposit knowledge into students for them to later withdraw on an exam to prove how smart they are. This antiquated teaching method is disengaging and overall, debilitating, for it does not develop critical thinking skills or promote effective teaching. These are similar criticisms of the No Child Left Behind educational plan ushered in by President George W. Bush’s administration. Freire recommends a participatory, student-centered approach to learning that encourages retention and application.

To better form communities within schools, Barber suggests that we rectify our skewed notions of public and private. While pragmatism might not solve this dichotomy, it maintains that both experiences should adequately prepare students for public life, academically and socially. Barber says, “Public schools are not merely schools for the



public, but schools of publicness: institutions where we learn what it means to be a public and start down the road toward a common national and civic identity” (225). Here, he speaks of public school in the sense of that which is shared with others, and not to determine which is better or worse, public or private schools. Whether a child in D.C. attends the illustrious private Sidwell Friends School or an underfunded district-supported one, both school systems should engage in open exchange of ideas and should, therefore, be considered public and democratic. Deborah Meier echoes Barber’s sentiments in *The Power of Their Ideas* by saying:

Public schools can train us for such political conversation across divisions of race, class, religion, and ideology. It is often in the clash of irreconcilable ideas that we can learn how to test or revise ideas, or invent new ones. Both teachers and students need to search for metaphors that work across ideological, historical, and personal differences. (7)

Meier criticizes private schools for subliminally reinforcing discriminatory, exclusive ideas linked with money and power. “Just as money is in the marketplace,” says Meier, “ideas – the ways we organize knowledge – are the medium of exchange in democratic life” (8). Overall, privileged attitudes promote self-interest at the expense of democracy instead of advancing democracy. “A school system in which students must come together with others who are different may or may not further any one individual family’s life goals, but it holds the potential to further our common goals as a democratic society,” she aptly states (9). Public schools can teach us how to be better citizens and instruct us in dealing with personal and social difficulty.

All schools should prepare students for democratic engagement with the public, Barber argues. They should exhibit civic responsibility “if our nation is to repossess its civic soul” (230). Although many strides have been made in recent years to promote service initiatives in education, more can be done to make it a national mandate. Barber strongly suggests, “civic literacy must take its place alongside science, math, English, and cultural literacy” (230). This is why many institutions of higher education have service outreach programs and also curricula that promote specific service learning objectives. These schools continue to provide a liberal education and advance the humanities.

### **Cultivating Humanity in the Composition Classroom**

With its emphasis on human issues and potential, the humanities field could lead colleges and universities in fulfilling a civic mission. To better serve society or as the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution states, “To form a more perfect union,” I believe that we should look to the humanities and also participate in real experiences that will inform how we make decisions. The 1980 United States Rockefeller Commission on the Humanities described the humanities in its report, *The Humanities in American Life*:

Through the humanities we reflect on the fundamental question: What does it mean to be human? The humanities offer clues but never a complete answer. They reveal how people have tried to make moral, spiritual, and intellectual sense of a world in which irrationality, despair, loneliness, and death are as conspicuous as birth, friendship, hope, and reason.

According to this definition, it is expected that a humanities class give methods to reflect on what it means to be human. Different theories, readings, and assignments help students develop answers. Regardless of whether the class is literature, history, religion

or theatre, the humanities curricula should offer students a sense of human identity and empathy. Reading the experiences of others could help develop compassionate attitudes and promote action toward solving problems. Although the cultivation of humanity could be engendered within many classrooms, I focus here on composition studies for specific reasons, such as its emphasis on critically inspecting language through reading, writing, and dialogue. Clearly understanding language and its effects on people is important, civic work. Therefore, learning in a composition classroom can be considered a social act.

Recognizing similar human issues that cross race, class, and gender could bring about feelings of interconnection and oneness. Nussbaum suggests that “citizens who cultivate their humanity need, further, an ability to see themselves not simply as citizens of some local region or group but also, and above all, as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern” (10). Cross-cultural communication and understanding could yield a more compassionate, efficient society. Meier suggests that we recognize “the power of each other’s ideas” to sustain communities (11). Otherwise, we will continue to experience a gap in many social areas that need strengthening. Connecting with the human identity could give people permission to care about the plight of others, thus enriching their own plight as well. Nussbaum acknowledges that making this human connection “involves understanding the ways in which common needs and aims are differently realized in different circumstances” (10). Her comments describe what the field of humanities is comprised of, analyzing, critiquing, and theorizing human behavior within subjects such as literature, art, and science.

As part of the field of humanities, composition studies should consider its plight with that of the changing world. It should include additional practices that meet some of the challenges that our students and country face, such as combating empathy deficit or becoming more democratic. Being that America is already a democracy, one may wonder what becoming *more* democratic entails. In *Democracy Matters* Cornel West clarifies his usage of the word “democracy” by saying:

Democracy is always a movement of an energized public to make elites responsible – it is at its core and most basic foundation the taking back of one’s power in the face of the misuse of elite power. In this sense, democracy is more a verb than a noun – it is more a dynamic striving and collective movement than a static order or stationary status quo. Democracy is not just a system of governance, as we tend to think of it, but a cultural way of being. (68)

When viewed as an action verb, the word democracy takes on a new life form with infinite possibilities, instead of it being considered a social ideal that has already been achieved. West’s definition of democracy embodies the ideas of civic education that the founding American colleges and universities employ. They firmly believe that educating individuals about the importance of freedom and democracy strengthens society. Composition studies should continue this civic tradition through educating citizens about social responsibility and the importance of community.

Unlike some courses within humanities, composition studies focuses on the transmittal of oral, visual, and print language and how it is used most effectively – by whom, to whom, and for what purposes. Whether composition students review a book or speech or produce original work, understanding how words are put together in efforts to effect meaning is a general objective. In *Composition and Cornel West*, Keith Gilyard

states:

Composition can contribute primarily to what we may call a deep democracy by fostering critical inspections of language. Much of the daily interaction for all of us is instantiated through language; thus, language is a key analytic category for anyone proposing social change. (3)

Through learning how to critically think, research, and write, composition students can effectively advocate for social change.

As Gilyard suggests, Cornel West has radically influenced composition studies. Many scholars within the field have cited West and have incorporated his theories in the classroom. Gilyard states, “It is profoundly within the purview of composition studies to address the concerns raised by West about educating a critical citizenry who will promote democratic values and who will draw upon a heritage of what West terms a “deep democratic tradition” to fashion humane responses to unwarranted social misery (Democracy Matters 13)” (Gilyard 3). Composition teachers who incorporate social activism within their curricula are considered part of the “radical compositionists” in Christian Weisser’s book *Moving Beyond Academic Discourse: Composition Studies and the Public Sphere*, where he states:

...radical compositionists advocate significant changes in both theory and practice in writing instruction. They assert that the teacher’s role should be to transform the unequal power relations in the classroom through student empowerment. That is, radical compositionists argue for new approaches to writing instruction that develop political consciousness and critical thinking in students through dialogic methods. Similarly, they also suggest that writing scholars and teachers should begin to examine discourse outside of the university to more fully understand how the composition classroom works as a microcosm of the prevailing discursive structure of a culture. (26)

Weisser supports a student-centered classroom where experience, dialogue, and reflection are essential to offering new insights on culture. Incorporating fresh and exciting approaches to writing instruction may encourage students to be fully invested in their work and see it not as rudimentary writing practice, but instead, as purposeful work that contributes to social dialogue, understanding, and possibly, action. Joseph Harris states:

We write not as isolated individuals but as members of communities whose beliefs, concerns, and practices both instigate and constrain, at least in part, the sorts of things we can say. Our aims and intentions in writing are thus not merely personal, idiosyncratic, but reflective of the communities to which we belong. (98)

In efforts to broaden conceptions of community, it is crucial to expose students to different cultures via diverse literature and experiences. Knowledge of minorities and sub-cultures could link students to others who may look different and allow the realization that similar human needs and strivings may be acquired differently according to particular circumstances.

Understanding the majority of a narrative, instead of judging only a piece of it, could improve social relationships. Echoing the sentiments of President Obama, Nussbaum suggests that cultivating humanity requires cultivating empathy. What Obama defines as “empathy,” she refers to as “narrative imagination,” which is:

(the) ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person’s story... when we identify with a character in a novel, or with a distant person whose life story we imagine, we inevitably will not merely identify; we will also judge that story in the light of our own goals and aspirations. (11)

Cultivating humanity, therefore, requires the inclusion of everyone in the social story. Minorities, of all persuasions, are essential to the cultural narrative of America and should be discussed within the classroom. A significant and radical approach could be incorporating more diverse literature in the classroom and making it standard, or part of a canon, instead of relegating it to an ethnic studies category.

*Only* teaching from canons can be viewed as elitist within this increasingly diverse society. Barber believes that canons expire and become ineffectual after a while, although discarding them altogether is not his proposal. To make them relevant to the current generation, he believes, “they must be reassessed, relegitimized, and thus reembraced. A canon is no use if it is not ours, and it becomes ours when only we reinvent it” (182).

Altering a canon to make it relevant to the current generation can be considered a radical notion, since the very nature of a canon is to represent the works most influential in shaping culture. Much controversy surrounds the notion of an established canon. Many believe that the majority of works within a canon do not adequately represent a diverse society and constant debate surrounds who decide which books are noteworthy for reading and teaching. Trying to change the canonical system to make it more comprehensive can be a daunting task, for “it is always radical, in any society, to insist on the equal worth of all human beings,” says Nussbaum (112). I agree with her idea that an inclusive approach to literature is an important political agenda that sustains and evolves our conception of a democracy. It is important that the composition classroom include a rich diversity of literature reflective of our society.

Through writing and dialoging about human concerns with others, composition students are able to reflect on their own belief systems and traditions in efforts to critically examine themselves. Nussbaum expands on Socrates' idea of what it means to have an "examined life." To her, "this means a life that accepts no belief as authoritative simply because it has been handed down by tradition or become familiar through habit, a life that questions all beliefs and accepts only those that survive reason's demand for consistency and for justification" (9). In efforts to wake up democracy, American citizens must first wake up and examine themselves. Self-examination of lifestyles and values could give insight to how problems and solutions are negotiated.

In the process of waking up, or coming to consciousness, citizens need to develop the ability to think for themselves and choose what works well. Instead of always deferring to others for leadership and solutions, citizens could learn to choose better leaders and also take personal action. A waking up of citizenry was exhibited in the United States' 2008 presidential election, when record numbers of people who had never before participated in the voting process cast their ballots to elect the nation's first Black American president. Because the majority of citizens were exhausted with past government traditions, they cast their votes in hopes of infrastructural change. This presidential election is a major example of democracy in action, of people all over the country engaging in grassroots efforts, such as organizing and mobilizing through the Internet, to achieve desired results. Many people are excited about the Obama presidency because it symbolizes a shift in consciousness for the nation, a shift that promises to



revolutionize the way government is run, in addition to improving race relations worldwide.

In efforts to “Be the change you wish to see in the world,” as Indian political and spiritual leader Mahatma Gandhi advocates, we must carefully and critically see ourselves and not pass the proverbial “buck.” Once we “wake up,” then perhaps each of us could embrace the notion that, “the buck stops here.” When we become more responsible and interconnected citizens, then democracy could potentially live through each of us. In the course of critically analyzing society and becoming empathetic to the challenges that citizens face, it is my hope that through “The Souls of Good Folk” composition students exhibit personal agency to creatively solve social problems.

The next chapter gives specific pedagogical methodology to engender empathy and action within students. The approaches that I incorporate are ones that I have personally used and know to be effective. However, many other methods can yield similar results. I suggest that prophetic pragmatist teachers select strategies they feel most comfortable with and after much testing and experience, include additional methods in the pedagogy.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PROPHETIC PRAGMATIST CLASSROOM

#### **Overview of Classroom Methodology**

For many of us, words such as hope, democracy, love, and change are but abstract notions that seem impossible to manifest in a cynical, fatalistic world. Even within a democratic society, these words can be thought of as perpetual aspirations that are only occasionally glimpsed or mere rhetoric that is spewed in efforts to project a certain ethos. What often appears most difficult for people is moving from conceptualizing these well-meaning intentions to carrying out a plan of action to achieve them. Without specific guidance on how to cultivate and maintain such attributes, it might become easy for people to give up when their efforts seem futile. To live out positive affirmations or emulate the words of inspirational leaders, such principles must be demonstrated and reinforced for practical, achievable purposes. One could ask what hope, democracy, love, and change look like when manifested. In a world compounded with crises and self-interest, these positive elements may be difficult to fathom. However, there are a plethora of examples that show positive aspects of society and there are many folk that help make living sustainable and beneficial for everyone.

Teachers could play a central role in showing students how to recognize folk that promote hope, democracy, love, and change in the world. Their positive examples are all

around us, in literature, nature, and also in every day life. Seeing these examples could help students value concepts that build coalition, trust, and humanity. As a result, they could learn to become conscious of life, critically aware of their actions and the actions of others. Furthermore, they could develop empathy and also become motivated to improve society. For example, when students learn how others their own age organized and made a difference in their community, perhaps they could feel empowered to do the same. A critical pedagogy of humanity – or what some would call a pedagogy of democracy or a pedagogy of love – could inspire such change. In *The Power of Their Ideas*, Deborah Meier argues that teaching empathy and compassion are not “soft, mushy goals” for they are “as much cognitive as affective” (63). Furthermore, she asserts, “If such habits are central to democratic life, our schools must become places that cultivate, consciously and rigorously, these moral and intellectual fundamentals” (63). By adopting curricula that promote empathy and service, schools can help cultivate citizens that are empowered to make a difference in the world.

As a means to teach students how to value community and democracy, I offer a pedagogy of humanity called “The Souls of Good Folk” that uses prophetic pragmatism as its philosophical framework. These “good folk,” as I term them, are the ones that help us overcome despair by showing us what needs to be done to improve society and they could possibly offer ways of how to do it. They include marginalized people, cultural workers, grassroots activists, teachers, artists, musicians, and others that help America see itself in efforts to make appropriate social changes. Throughout my prophetic

pragmatist classroom, students view the work of “good folk” as literature and tangible examples of how to enhance society.

Using Cornel West’s derivative philosophy as a theoretical framework could help cultivate humanity and promote civic engagement in students. The prophetic pragmatist composition classroom is an experiential learning laboratory that combines traditional teaching methods with progressive, hands-on approaches to make experience paramount to the learning process. Therefore, education is centered on students’ experiences or applied knowledge. As within the pragmatism tradition, when a theory does not yield a desirable result, it is replaced with a new method and the testing process begins again in hopes of better discoveries. Since experimentation and evaluation are necessary elements within pragmatism, this classroom becomes a laboratory where inquiry and dialogue are encouraged to increase cognition. Meier supports the idea of a classroom laboratory by stating:

Our schools must be the labs for learning about learning. Only if schools are run as places of reflective experimentation can we teach both children and their teachers simultaneously. (It’s why John Dewey’s famous University of Chicago elementary and secondary school was named the Lab School). Schools must create a passion for learning not only among children but also among their teachers. (140)

Meier builds upon the pragmatic maxim of early pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce when she suggests, “All students need to understand the way scientists arrive at truth” and “They need opportunities to experience the scientific method in operation” (168). If students had occasions to thoroughly investigate information, they would better

understand the process of making meaning and arriving at “truths.” Peirce’s 1905 maxim states:

In order to ascertain the meaning of an intellectual conception one should consider what practical consequences might conceivably result by necessity from the truth of that conception; and the sum of these consequences will constitute the entire meaning of the conception. (Peirce 5.9)

Meier believes that student involvement in the learning process could generate much excitement and confidence. She says:

Students need reasons to respect the conclusions reached by those who work at science full time, reasons other than the belief that its another form of “received truth.” The trick is to teach them this confidence in the scientific establishment in ways that support the use of scientific thought in their own lives, as well as the capacity to hazard an opinion on matters of science that may pertain to political and moral priorities, and a healthy and knowing skepticism toward the misuse of scientific authority. (168)

I too believe in the notion of a classroom laboratory because it yields unlimited learning potential for students, for there is a difference between experiencing education and actually having an educational experience. Experiencing education consists of absorbing random, disconnected facts, whereas the latter gets the learner involved in the process of understanding what they are learning. Having an educational experience allows one to discover meaning, acquire knowledge, and also apply knowledge, which would enhance other cognitive skills applicable to all areas of life. Teaching through a prophetic pragmatist framework is critical academic work, for it helps produce responsible democratic citizens and it sustains local communities. Furthermore, it strengthens the nation and enhances its position as a world leader.

The prophetic pragmatism classroom is designed to engender empathy, service, and democratic action in students. Therefore, different theoretical methods are applied or tested for students to assess the outcomes. Everyone in the class is expected to contribute to the process of understanding and meaning making through activities that promote critical thinking. This approach is holistic in the sense that it is comprehensive, yet specific. The skills obtained in this class develop an individual personally, academically, professionally, and civically. Essentially, the class is designed to promote students as “good folk,” enacting hope, love, and democracy to change the world. Students within this class could help show society what needs improving and possibly offer suggestions of how tasks could be accomplished. The entire prophetic pragmatist classroom is a form of experiential education that incorporates other critical methods to develop understanding, cognition, and action. I believe that multiple philosophies and approaches could work independently and collaboratively to engender a democratic, progressive citizenry. It is with this rationale that I use many teaching methods within my prophetic pragmatist composition classroom.

With appropriate adjustments, a prophetic pragmatist philosophical framework could be used in any classroom that seeks to arrive at social change. As a form of experiential education, it could employ countless methods. Specific approaches are determined by a course design and projects. For example, a math class using a prophetic pragmatism lens would not have the same design as a composition classroom, even with the same end objective of social change. The math class might apply equations and theorems to enhance community structures, whereas composition students would use

different forms of communication to effect change. These two vastly different classes would have the same prophetic pragmatist philosophical framework and end objective. West states that one of the main objectives of prophetic pragmatism is to expand an Emersonian culture of creative democracy. He explores this definition as:

To speak then of an Emersonian culture of creative democracy is to speak of a society and culture where politically adjudicated forms of knowledge are produced in which human participation is encouraged and for which human personalities are enhanced. Social experimentation is the basic norm, yet it is operative only when those who must suffer the consequences have effective control over the institutions that yield the consequences, i.e., access to decision-making processes. (*West Reader* 151)

To expand an Emersonian culture of creative democracy means to use independent thinking and experience to help decide or generate truths. Although he loved books and considered them to be great resources and inspiration, Emerson cautions in “American Scholar” to not let any book be the final authority on the truth. He encourages every person to read books, but to make life experiences our dictionary. Emerson suggests that each generation write its own books. Therefore, his work translates in the prophetic pragmatism classroom as students being aware and engaged with information to create new meaning and implementation. This requires learning from the past, critically thinking through complex social issues, and formulating new social and political theories to repair civil inequities. Creative ways and ingenious approaches are needed to address empathy deficit and to build a sustainable world community. In *Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative*, Sir Ken Robinson, British author and internationally recognized leader in the development of creative innovation says:

Creativity is not a single aspect of intelligence that only emerges in particular activities, in the arts for example. It is a systemic function of intelligence that can emerge wherever our intelligence is engaged. Creativity is a dynamic process that draws on many different areas of a person's experience and intelligence. (12)

Prophetic pragmatism promotes creativity as a vehicle to solving social problems. Again, any course could employ this lens differently, as long as the outcome enhances society.

Creativity solving social problems means addressing small aspects of a problem where possible. This gesture alleviates the effects of the overall social issue and it also reduces anxiety associated with tackling the complexities of what could potentially be a global problem. When students realize that small advances toward addressing social issues are beneficial, they view their efforts as more practical and achievable, especially within the span of a short semester. For example, some of my former students completed a service-learning project in a social services agency. They assessed that parents, primarily mothers, that had small children with them had an added burden of entertaining or caring for the child while preparing to meet with a caseworker. In efforts to assist parents, the students planned a makeover of the waiting room to include an inviting play area for children. They had a bookcase, books, and toys donated and they added superimposed cartoon characters on the wall. The before and after images they provided during their final presentation showed successful results.

In this chapter, I explore specific ways in which a prophetic pragmatism framework could be applied. As an *example*, I use the composition classroom as the site for this pedagogy because first year writing courses are typically and overtly centered not on subject matter primarily but on critical literacy. This includes becoming an active



participant in thinking and responding to the world based upon inquiry. Critical literacy is actively and questioningly engaging with texts to read underlying messages. These texts could include oral, print, and visual rhetoric. Understanding different texts rhetorically would help students deconstruct how language is used to inform, influence, and engage readers. In learning techniques of rhetoric, students are better prepared to convince their respective audiences to become civically engaged.

Composition students gain much reading, speaking, and writing experience in the classroom and they can apply those skills in the community to gain additional experience.

According to Meier:

Human beings are by nature social, interactive learners. We observe how others do it and see if it works for us. We learn to drive and cook this way. And how to handle ideas. We check out our ideas, argue with authors, bounce issues back and forth, ask friends to read our early drafts, talk together after we've seen a movie, pass on books we've loved, attend meetings and argue things out, share stories and gossip that extend our understanding of ourselves and others. Talk lies at the heart of both our lives and our intellectual development. This kind of exchange is rarely allowed in school or modeled there – not between kids or between adults. (153)

The more experience a student obtains allows for greater learning potential and knowledge formation to creatively solve social problems. Since speaking and writing are ways of engaging with the world in a dialogue, composition students use these skills to develop empathy and cultivate values of citizenship. This type of social interaction, in the classroom and in the larger community, supports the development of cognition, which is a major theme of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky's theoretical framework. In *Mind in Society* he states:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (57)

Therefore, students actively engage with others to learn more about themselves and society. Learning to speak publicly is an important element of this class, for it builds confidence and enables leadership potential to flourish. Public speaking is used to teach students how to speak well, make a good impression, and consider the audience's positions. This entails understanding the audience in efforts to address a topic at hand. Students constantly speak in groups, in class discussions, during presentations, and with community partners. Ultimately, students learn the value of their voice in effecting change. For example, at a small private college in Greensboro, a small group of students worked with an advisory committee to help reform their campus dining experience ("Meriwether"). After surveying the student body and calculating data, they successfully persuaded the college president to switch to a food service vendor that offers fresh, organic, and vegetarian options. These students effectively used speaking and writing skills to make a real difference in the lives of those who desire healthier menu choices on campus. Although these students were not privy to a prophetic pragmatism classroom per se, their work could be analyzed as such. Within the context of a composition classroom, these students used speaking and writing skills to make important changes on their campus. Overall, when viewed within a prophetic pragmatist lens, they actualized Emerson's culture of creative democracy. Instead of simply complaining about their

cafeteria, these students worked to creatively solve the problem. They gave voice to the marginalized (students who were affected by the campus food offerings) and they spoke to power (campus officials) to effect change (switching food service vendors). Through their successful campus bid, these students learned the value of a democratic citizenship.

Within the context of education as a philosophy of experience, “The Souls of Good Folk” pedagogy helps to cultivate different skills. It uses the following methods within the classroom laboratory to promote a compassionate, progressive citizenry: 1) experiential learning; 2) community and service-learning; 3) ethnography; 4) group work and collaborative learning; 5) journal writing and the double-entry format; 6) dialogic discourse; and, 7) technology. Each of these experiential learning approaches is used within a prophetic pragmatist framework that combines cultural criticism and service for democratic action. Even though specific theories are discussed, other activities might accomplish the same goals. Furthermore, a teacher might start out by only using a few of these approaches at a time, for using these collectively might be difficult to put into practice initially. Again, experience is a key factor here. With more experience, a teacher might feel comfortable incorporating all the methods simultaneously with different student groups. Each method promotes critical thinking independently and also in combination with the other methods. To critically assess situations, much research and reflection are involved. Below, Dewey expands on the intricacies of reflection, which he calls “the heart of reflection.”

The old phrase “stop and think” is sound psychology. For thinking is stoppage of the immediate manifestation of impulse until that impulse has been brought into connection with other possible tendencies to action so that a more comprehensive

and coherent plan of activity is formed. Some of the other tendencies to action lead to use of eye, ear, and hand to observe objective conditions; others result in recall of what has happened in the past. Thinking is thus a postponement of immediate action, while it effects internal control of impulse through a union of observation and memory this union being the heart of reflection. (64)

In a prophetic pragmatist classroom, students have to often stop and think to discover and make meaning. Students are required to learn from the past as a *means* of understanding the present. Similar to Du Bois's prophetic pragmatism example within *Souls*, this student-centered class would review the history (epistemological, scientific, etc.) and present context (existing social dichotomy, data, etc.) of a respective social issue in efforts to make *future* projections (create a plan or purpose to show society what *could* be and *actively* work toward that end). Students in this classroom use prophetic pragmatism to practice the work of social scientists, using a variety of means to better understand the world.

To change society, I believe, along with Ralph Waldo Emerson and many other pragmatists, that a person must first start with self and constantly reflect on the self to measure personal growth. In "American Scholar" Emerson suggests that one study nature in order to know oneself. In "Self-Reliance," he says:

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better for worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till.

Emerson wants us to recognize our own greatness, creativity, and ingenuity of ideas. He asks that we "trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string" ("Self-Reliance"). In

the prophetic pragmatist classroom, for example, personal and site observations collected during an ethnography project could help students evolve. Understanding oneself could happen through observation and interaction with society. Vygotsky advocates a sociocultural approach as being vital to understanding oneself. He believes “action is mediated and cannot be separated from the milieu in which it is carried out” (Wertsch18). Therefore, a person’s actions give much indication of their thoughts and beliefs. When the “self” changes, one can see the perceived “other” differently as well, for new thinking yields new beliefs and new actions.

Even though “The Souls of Good Folk” utilizes many approaches, this pedagogy always begins and ends with an evaluation of self. In this class students must assess how they are personally applying knowledge in the world. Understanding how the thoughts, beliefs, and actions of oneself are changing could also inform how people in society make changes. Each activity in this class leads one to some form of self-realization or consciousness of one’s actions. For example, students would grapple with a social topic independently (research, reading and reflection in journal writing activities) and then participate in collaborative learning experiences (within group and class discussions and also during a service project). Reflecting on these different experiences (classroom and community) could change students’ thoughts, beliefs, and actions toward a social issue. Therefore, students assess how their personal actions have changed after having newfound thoughts and beliefs about a social issue. Again, all experiences in this class are designed to begin with the self and end with the self.

If possible, the course description for this class should be made available to the entire campus upon the pre-registration period to attract students that are interested in the respective social topic for the semester. Otherwise, teachers might end up with disengaged students, which is always a possibility anyway. However, a class filled with students that are interested in the prescribed social topic could make for an exciting learning experience for everyone.

During a class discussion within the first few weeks of the semester, students could present questions about issues centered on homelessness, past and present. These important questions would lead to research, literature and data that provide answers. Students work with the teacher to identify relevant historical and present reading materials.

Below are sample questions that students could ask about past issues of homelessness:

- 1) Has homelessness *always* existed?
- 2) What aspects of homelessness are considered “normal” and what are considered “excessive”?
- 3) What are general conceptions of homeless people? Why?
- 4) What social factors cause abundant homelessness in society– work force reduction, closing of mental health facilities?
- 5) How is society affected by homelessness?

Below are sample questions that students could ask for present contextual understanding of homelessness:

- 1) Given the current state of the economy, is the current rate of homelessness considered normal or excessive?
- 2) What are some of the factors that lead to this present situation?

- 3) What are national and local agencies doing to reduce the problem?
- 4) Are their methods beneficial?
- 5) What are other countries doing to lower homelessness rates?
- 6) How do their methods compare with ours?

After reading, writing, talking, reflecting, and experiencing issues of homelessness, students critically assess *all* the information they have gathered in efforts to plan community group projects that would help alleviate the problem.

The specific components of “The Souls of Good Folk” pedagogy are fashioned as a scientific approach, for students work as social scientists within this classroom laboratory to cultivate humanity and creatively solve social problems through a prophetic pragmatism philosophical framework. Therefore, the three major areas of the semester center on theory, method, and assessment:

### **Theory**

- 1) Each semester a different social issue is selected as the class theme. Due to the complexities surrounding a given topic, the entire class focuses on *one* problem such as homelessness, for example. This is similar to Du Bois’s sole focus on racism within *The Souls of Black Folk*.
- 2) Students are introduced to learning objectives of the composition classroom (for example) and the philosophical framework of prophetic pragmatism. Within the composition classroom, students are expected to improve their reading, writing, research, communication, and assessment skills. Students learn how to summarize, analyze, reflect, and present information. Within the prophetic pragmatism framework, students are expected to investigate phenomenon of a

social issue by considering multiple, diverse perspectives, acquire new knowledge through reasoning abilities and experience, and offer ways of creatively solving problems. This work should reflect self-understanding, meliorism, empathy, and democracy as a means of cultivating humanity.

- 3) Students are taught different methods of achieving these learning objectives and they complete small assignments for reinforcement. For example, to hone critical reading skills, students might annotate an article and discuss their comments with peers. Furthermore, they might study the rhetorical triangle to understand rhetorical appeals and methods of persuasion, then read an article and identify how the author uses language to convey the message. Reading texts closely could help students develop critical writing skills.

### **Method**

- 1) The methodology consists of individual, group, and community work. The reading materials for this class (centered on homelessness, for example) are *any* relevant historical and present (epistemological, scientific, etc.) literature. This information is analyzed, summarized, researched, and assessed individually and collaboratively (in journal writing and dialogic discourse) in efforts to render future implications of the social issue. The literature also includes the work of “good folk,” which serve as road maps for how people could tangibly improve a social issue.
- 2) As a measure of studying ample material closely within the short span of a semester, students are placed in groups that take turns presenting information and



leading discussions. The reading materials are past and present information on the social issue. For example, instead of each student reading a total of twenty-five articles, each group could read only five articles, present the information, and lead the class in a discussion. As a class, students analyze and discuss reading materials together. The teacher is a contributing member of each group, meeting regularly and guiding students. This group activity hones leadership, speaking, and collaborative learning skills in preparation for community engagement and a final presentation.

- 3) Students work in groups to complete community project assignments on the social issue. They select “categories” of projects they are interested in, such as technology, ethnography, or service learning. Then, they plan with group members effective, intelligent strategies to engage with the larger community. For instance, one group could focus on generating awareness and dialogue about homelessness through a social networking site such as Twitter or Facebook, while another group completes an ethnography assignment on homelessness. Again, the teacher works with each group to create community projects that could challenge thinking and promote civic action. The analysis of reading materials coupled with community experience, could render insight to effectively addressing social problems.

### **Assessment**

- 1) In the process of learning about homelessness, students’ personal assumptions and biases are challenged. Therefore, by experiencing different perspectives of the

social topic, it is expected that change occur within students and also within society.

- 2) Each student is responsible for submitting a final portfolio exhibiting assignments, journal entries, and assessments that clearly show the connection of ideas and their learning progress throughout the semester. Students critically assess how specific classroom and community activities met and reinforced prophetic pragmatist learning objectives. They evaluate personal growth and cultivation of humanity, empathy, and democracy within and beyond the classroom. Most importantly, students render insight on aspects of the class that did and did not work well and offer suggestions for better implementation.
- 3) Each group is responsible for giving a well-organized final presentation that introduces their project concepts and exhibits the stages of their community engagement for social change. Students show their collaborative efforts in thoughtfully integrating research throughout the presentation.
- 4) Finally, within a class dialogue, students and the teacher reflect on issues covered throughout the semester and make collective projections and assessments about the social issue and about the class dynamics also.

“The Souls of Good Folk” uses experiential learning as an umbrella term to indicate the many different types of hands-on learning opportunities aforementioned. Adding hands-on learning opportunities in an already challenging pedagogy make the dynamics more complex. Students have to understand and negotiate their own literacies, their experiences prior to college, and what they think they have to keep or leave behind.

Much learning and reflection go into embracing new ideas, concepts, and change.

Therefore, prophetic pragmatist teachers should carefully plan a syllabus and allow room for reassessment<sup>11</sup>. Teachers must remain vigilant about the quality of assignments over the quantity. According to Deborah Meier:

If we want the next generation to be truly better educated on such matters, then they need a setting in which they are expected to “cover” a lot less so that such new habits of thought can take root – a setting in which they can practice, get feedback, and try again as new ideas gradually begin to make sense. Even one “aha” by itself is not enough, much less answering the question right at the end of the chapter. (148)

Students must work closely with the teacher to ease problems they may face. For instance, they may find themselves in situations where they feel at risk or lack necessary skills to complete an assignment. Successful integration of learning in the prophetic pragmatist classroom centers on collaboration of all entities involved – teacher, students, community agency, etc. Most importantly, students need time to process in-class experiences with community engagement beyond the classroom.

Again, I highly suggest using a central class social topic and having students complete different experiential learning projects (such as ethnography, service-learning, or social networking) in groups.<sup>12</sup> In this manner, the experiences are diversified to inform whole class learning about the social issue. This could possibly lead to a final

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<sup>11</sup> I use “reassessment” instead of “error” due to the nature of this laboratory style classroom. Everything is considered a learning process; even missteps in the methodology inform better planning opportunities.

<sup>12</sup> The prophetic pragmatist teacher is a member of *each* group, listening, guiding, and making suggestions. Final decisions are made as group consensus. This way, the teacher is informed about the progress of the class and is available to help remedy situations as they occur.

class project during the closing assessment of the semester. For example, each group's project findings could be compiled in a class portfolio or zine, a small circulation of original text and images. Or, students could organize a presentation open to the public that could influence local government policy. The creative, democratic possibilities are limitless.

The additional sections of this chapter discuss each experiential learning method and how it can be used independently and collaboratively. Furthermore, it shows the rationale for its inclusion within "The Souls of Good Folk" pedagogy.

### **Theoretical Concepts within "The Souls of Good Folk"**

#### Experiential Education

Recently, a distinction has been made between experiential learning and experiential education. Experiential learning is considered "informal education" because it can occur with a single individual and their interests. Even though theory can be applied, it is not a requirement and the person simply learns by doing. Conversely, experiential education is viewed more formally and holistically due to its academic principles. Most proponents of these learning methods merge the two terms and use them synonymously. Likewise, I interchange the two terms since both methods are applied within the curriculum.

Learning by doing is an age-old method that has been practiced well before theoretical concepts developed. However, John Dewey is a key figure recognized for introducing experiential learning into the American classroom. In his book *Experience and Education*, he promoted the idea that democracy and education are intricately

connected. For him, good education should be progressive and student-directed. This theory has grown increasingly popular since the early twentieth century because “it has been nurtured and developed by leaders in learning: David Kolb’s *Experiential Learning Cycle*, Howard Gardner’s *Multiple Intelligences*, and Daniel Goleman’s *Emotion Intelligence*” (“What is Experiential Education?”). In *Experiential Learning and Change: Theory Design and Practice*, Walters and Marks state, “Experiential learning has evolved from being an exploratory, experimental technique in the 1950s and 1960s in growth centers such as the National Training Laboratories and the Esalen Institute, to being common practice currently wherever learning is pursued (1). It has been accepted as a serious pedagogical method in many schools around the country.

According to the Association for Experiential Education (AEE), “Experiential learning is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values” (“What is Experiential Education?” AEE). AEE carefully define the words “educators” and “learners” to show the vastness and flexibility of this philosophy, for many roles encompass each title. They state that “educator” can include a “therapist, facilitator, teacher, trainer, practitioner, counselor, etc” or anyone who teaches through a means of direct experience. And, “learner” can include “student, client, trainee, participant, etc.” (“What is Experiential Education?” AEE). Experiential learning can apply to almost every aspect of life, wherever learning happens. Within academia, the criteria for experiential learning may vary according to respective learning objectives. For example:

Experiential learning at the University of Pittsburgh includes different types of activities, with one common goal—to immerse you in “hands-on” activities outside of the classroom, emphasizing the central role of experience in the learning process. These activities include internships, research, teaching and academic service-learning for undergraduate students. (“What is Experiential Learning”)

“The Souls of Good Folk” utilizes this interdisciplinary learning approach because participants would learn through hands-on assignments and assess the outcomes with reflection and analysis. Experiential learning can be considered pragmatist because it advocates an attitude of inquiry as a primary way of making meaning. Participants are expected to embrace new experiences and reflection to learn more about themselves and the world. A certain level of risk-taking is involved among experiential learners - students and teachers – since it is difficult to predict the outcome of any situation or assignment. However, it is believed that a hands-on learning experience has a more lasting effect than traditional or didactic learning styles. Experiential learning is engaging because it is student-centered and designed to stimulate one intellectually and emotionally. Furthermore, this philosophy is useful because its approaches can be used with “participants of widely differing needs,” says Walters and Marks. They continue by saying:

For people with very little life experience, the techniques can concentrate on expanding their experience base; for university students, the techniques can concentrate on linking intellectually relevant experiences and personal development with theory and empirical research. For experienced and older individuals from many groups, the techniques can concentrate on bringing order, comprehension, and new skills to their life experiences. The scope of activities can range from simply sharing information or learning very specific skills to developing new approaches for coping with much larger and pervasive issues such as changing careers or adjusting to the loss of a spouse. (3-4)

Each student should find some aspect of experiential learning exciting and stimulating, for this philosophy directly contradicts the “banking system” learning style that Paulo Freire discusses in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Instead of teachers merely depositing information into students, experiential education allows for a collaboration of learning within the classroom, where each person is a teacher and student. In efforts for a prophetic pragmatism classroom to be successful, both student and teacher must change their habits of mind. In *The Power of Their Ideas*, Deborah Meier offers five qualities that embody a teacher who has moved beyond traditional thinking of schooling and has changed teaching habits. The qualities of this teacher would be:

(1) a self-conscious reflectiveness about how they themselves learn and (maybe even more) about how and when they *don't* learn; (2) a sympathy toward others, an appreciation of differences, an ability to imagine one's own “otherness”; (3) a willingness, better yet a taste, for working collaboratively; (4) a passion for having others share some of one's own interests; and then (5) a lot of perseverance, energy, and devotion to getting things right!” (142)

Students should believe they can contribute to learning and the teacher should become a learner in the classroom also. By working together to expand knowledge, the power construct in the classroom is shared among students and teacher. As the recognized final decision maker in the class, the teacher, should work to balance the “authoritative” telling when appropriate with listening and eliciting ideas from students. Meier tells us, “It is through collective coownership of new designs of schooling in an atmosphere that allows for reflective examination and reshaping based on experience that something new might emerge (147). She believes in general, we are “not accustomed to recognizing the power

of each other's ideas; it's easier to take flight" (11). This mutually responsible classroom dynamic could also engender a shift in overall consciousness of students and teacher, whereby they recognize the benefits of collaborative efforts to increase knowledge formation. Furthermore, students have an opportunity to recognize their ideas as meaningful and powerful ways to improve society.

The methodology used in assessing the experience aspect of experiential learning may fluctuate for each school or organization. In efforts to establish common ground and "foster the effective use of experience as an integral part of education," the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) established *Foundations of Experiential Education*. Written in 1997, this document includes a section on "Eight Principles of Good Practice for all Experiential Learning Activities." They believe the following eight principles, at length, underlie the pedagogy of experiential education:

1. **Intention:** All parties must be clear from the outset why experience is the chosen approach to the learning that is to take place and to the knowledge that will be demonstrated, applied or result from it. Intention represents the purposefulness that enables experience to become knowledge and, as such, is deeper than the goals, objectives, and activities that define the experience.
2. **Preparedness and Planning:** Participants must ensure that they enter the experience with sufficient foundation to support a successful experience. They must also focus from the earliest stages of the experience/program on the identified intentions, adhering to them as goals, objectives and activities are defined. The resulting plan should include those intentions and be referred to on a regular basis by all parties. At the same time, it should be flexible enough to allow for adaptations as the experience unfolds.
3. **Authenticity:** The experience must have a real world context and/or be useful and meaningful in reference to an applied setting or situation. This means that it should be designed in concert with those who will be affected by or use it, or in response to a real situation.
4. **Reflection:** Reflection is the element that transforms simple experience to a learning experience. For knowledge to be discovered and internalized the learner must test assumptions and hypotheses about the outcomes of decisions



and actions taken, then weigh the outcomes against past learning and future implications. This reflective process is integral to all phases of experiential learning, from identifying intention and choosing the experience, to considering preconceptions and observing how they change as the experience unfolds. Reflection is also an essential tool for adjusting the experience and measuring outcomes.

5. **Orientation and Training:** For the full value of the experience to be accessible to both the learner and the learning facilitator(s), and to any involved organizational partners, it is essential that they be prepared with important background information about each other and about the context and environment in which the experience will operate. Once that baseline of knowledge is addressed, ongoing structured development opportunities should also be included to expand the learner's appreciation of the context and skill requirements of her/his work.
6. **Monitoring and Continuous Improvement:** Any learning activity will be dynamic and changing, and the parties involved all bear responsibility for ensuring that the experience, as it is in process, continues to provide the richest learning possible, while affirming the learner. It is important that there be a feedback loop related to learning intentions and quality objectives and that the structure of the experience be sufficiently flexible to permit change in response to what that feedback suggests. While reflection provides input for new hypotheses and knowledge based in documented experience, other strategies for observing progress against intentions and objectives should also be in place. Monitoring and continuous improvement represent the formative evaluation tools.
7. **Assessment and Evaluation:** Outcomes and processes should be systematically documented with regard to initial intentions and quality outcomes. Assessment is a means to develop and refine the specific learning goals and quality objectives identified during the planning stages of the experience, while evaluation provides comprehensive data about the experiential process as a whole and whether it has met the intentions which suggested it.
8. **Acknowledgment:** Recognition of learning and impact occur throughout the experience by way of the reflective and monitoring processes and through reporting, documentation and sharing of accomplishments. All parties to the experience should be included in the recognition of progress and accomplishment. Culminating documentation and celebration of learning and impact help provide closure and sustainability to the experience. ("Standards of Practice")

Overall, students should be involved in all aspects of an experiential learning project – intellectually, emotionally, physically, and socially – for acquired skills could apply to

future learning experiences. By being curious and creative throughout each assignment, students can construct meaning, even through mistakes.

Walters and Marks outline five broad types of experiential learning experiences. They include 1) education, 2) training, 3) professional development, 4) personal growth, and 5) therapy. Education is defined as “information assimilation or cognitive development” (4). Training “implies a skill focus or behavioral practice and generally features high levels of physical involvement.” In professional development, the complex, broad information being taught relates to the “total nature of the participant than to a specific skill.” Person growth “refers to the expansion of awareness about the self and change of cognitive, affective, and behavioral patterns associated with coping.” And, therapy “refers to efforts to aid individuals in overcoming specific psychological problems.” It requires a “deeper, more focused effort by a skilled therapist to alter cognitive, affective, and behavioral patterns in a systematic way for each unique case” (4). While reflecting on the outcomes of an experiential learning assignment, students could apply Walters and Marks’ criteria to assess the many ways in which they learned.

There are many characteristics of experiential learning. How each is implemented depends on the needs and learning objectives of respective schools. Within “The Souls of Good Folk,” experiential learning is applied within a prophetic pragmatist framework to engender a more compassionate and just society. Therefore students would generate specific civic-oriented projects through service-learning, internships, and other methods. The projected learning outcomes for this critical pedagogy include professional

development, critical thinking, leadership, conflict resolution, and problem-solving strategies.

### Community and Service-Learning

When many people hear the term *service*, thoughts of military involvement usually come to mind. While military service is crucial to the sustainability of this powerful nation, many other areas of the country require adequate attention as well. Through organizations like Peace Corps and AmeriCorps, much service has been rendered to underserved areas. However, now that the U.S. finds itself in disrepair on many fronts – such as economic, education, and environment – service to this country is of utmost importance. According to Lisman:

We are clearly at a historical point where service learning has not merely contributed to the moral development of young people, but it is helping reengage institutions of higher education with the larger society in ways that are relevant to the times and circumstances we are facing. (157)

Therefore, the current U.S. presidential administration is calling for a new era of service to improve the nation and produce strong leaders. Instead of focusing on rebuilding underserved areas abroad, many people these days are finding projects right within their own communities. Increasingly, more schools are partnering with community agencies to offer students service-learning opportunities.

In its *Series on Service-Learning in the Disciplines*, The American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) defines service learning as:

a method under which students learn and develop through thoughtfully-organized service that: is conducted in and meets the needs of a community and is coordinated with an institution of higher education, and with the community; helps foster civic responsibility; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students enrolled; and includes structured time for students to reflect on the service experience.

Similarly, in the foreword of *Service-Learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices*, Thomas Ehrlich identifies service learning as:

the various pedagogies that link community service and academic service and academic study so that each strengthens the other. The basic theory of service-learning is Dewey's: the interaction of knowledge and skills with experience is key to learning. Students learn best not by reading the Great Books in a closed room but by opening the doors and windows of experience. Learning starts with a problem and continues with the application of increasingly complex ideas and increasingly sophisticated skills to increasingly complicated problems.

Service-learning practices are important to help sustain communities in a mutually reciprocal manner. Both entities – campus and community – learn from each other to increase knowledge.

In “Service Learning,” Brodelon and Phillips state the value of this community learning is that it “assumes that the learning environment extends from the classroom to the community, and that there are valuable resources fortifying student learning that cannot be obtained through participation in college alone” (143). However, they believe that many students do not necessarily make the connection between learning in traditional settings provided by colleges and universities and “haphazard” community volunteering. Therefore, it is necessary to reinforce what is learned in the classroom with what is learned in the community. According to Edward Zlotkowski, “when what students learn

in their courses can be deliberately reflected, refracted, and refined in nonacademic experiences, many discover for the first time what being liberally educated is all about” (95). Making the classroom-community link in the prophetic pragmatist classroom includes much critical reflection, journal writing, and dialogic discourse. In discussing the purpose of reflection, K. Morton says:

The point of reflection is, in some ways, focused inward: What does this mean to me? How do I make sense of it? What am I going to do with what I think or feel?... I believe the most important outcome of reflection is that participants can answer the question, ‘What has your experience taught you about yourself?’ (128)

Reflection helps students understand how their academic coursework relates to their social, political, and interpersonal experiences in the community. Furthermore, reflection allows students to determine if their experiences (campus and community) are improving a sense of civic responsibility. In efforts to help students write critically and thoughtfully about their experiences, Kerry J. Strand provides sample questions as a guide. They include the following:

- Who benefits from what this organization does? Is anyone harmed
- by its efforts? How and why?
- Why are people involved in this work?
- What are the causes and consequences of the problem that this agency/organization addresses? How could/should this problem be addressed differently?
- What structural changes would have to take place to help alleviate
- this problem? How might such changes be instigated and
- implemented? What are the barriers to making changes?
- Can one envision a society in which this agency is unnecessary?
- What would such a society look like? Is it achievable?
- Who has power in the city, in this organization, and in relationships within the organization? How is that power

exercised?

- What are the sources and consequences of the inequality of power?
- How do other forms of social inequality – race, class, gender, age,
- sexual orientation – bear on the work of this organization and on
- one’s own work within it?
- What is the impact of “service” on the “clients” and on others
- within the community? (35-36)<sup>13</sup>

Instead of serving the business and market economy, schools should implement service-learning to sustain local communities. Through service-learning opportunities, students learn what it means to participate in a civic infrastructure. According to Jeffrey Crews:

As pedagogy, service-learning is used by instructors as a powerful means of teaching: teaching that has the potential to breathe life into any subject for students. It also has other uses beyond the particular discipline or subject matter in question; it can introduce students to worlds beyond the campus that students may migrate through but not necessarily belong to or contribute as members. In so doing, it can raise awareness, inculcate values, and invite critical thinking about issues of social justice, citizenship, civic and social responsibility, and ethical and moral choices in increasingly complex local and global communities. Or it can be used to teach leadership and social skills, train students for subsequent employment, or open the door to various career paths. (viii)

For teachers, incorporating service learning in the classroom can appear a bit challenging and time consuming. As a measure to assist with potential anxiety, Jeffrey Howard provides Principles of Good Practice in Community Service-Learning Pedagogy. They include the following:

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<sup>13</sup> Reprinted with permission from Kerry J. Strand, author of “Sociology and Service-Learning: A Critical Look,” in *Cultivating the Sociological Imagination: Concepts and Models in Service-Learning in Sociology*, James Ostrow, Garry Hesser, and Sandra Enos, volume editors, 1999 by AAHE. The volume is one of 18 in AAHE’s Series on Service-Learning in the Disciplines, Edward Zlotkowski, series editor, published by the American Association for Higher Education, Washington, D.C.

- Academic credit is for learning, not for service.
- Do not compromise academic rigor.
- Establish Learning Objectives.
- Establish criteria for the selection of service placements.
- Provide educationally sound learning strategies to harvest
- community learning and realize course learning objectives.
- Prepare students for learning from the community.
- Minimize the distinction between the students' community
- learning role and the classroom learning role.
- Rethink the faculty instructional role.
- Be prepared for variation in, and some loss of control with, student
- learning outcomes.
- Maximize the community responsibility orientation of the course. (3-12) <sup>14</sup>

Within the prophetic pragmatist classroom, service learning is used to give students present day contextual information regarding a social topic. This experience and work allows them to see “real” problems in the community and learn how agencies meet the needs of its clients. The information learned at service-learning sites, coupled with additional knowledge of the social problem, allows students to render insight on how to improve the problem. Colleges and universities have the resources to partner with local agencies to benefit the local infrastructure. This partnership shows students collaborative learning and democracy in action. It also teaches them how they can become a more involved citizen. Furthermore, students develop relationships with agencies that could potentially employ them. Service learning is not simply community outreach; it is

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<sup>14</sup> Reprinted with permission from Jeffrey Howard, Ed. Updated from the original: Howard, J., Ed. “Community Service Learning in the Curriculum.” *Praxis I: A Faculty Casebook on Community Service Learning* (pp. 3-12). Ann Arbor, MI: Office of Community Service Learning Press, University of Michigan, 1993.

forming community partnerships that help revitalize and improve the life of local communities. Service learning is a form of pragmatism that shows how learning is a social act. When people engage with the public, they are actively learning. Reflection upon social experiences has the capability to change habits, beliefs, and actions. Service learning allows students to become critical learners that are civically engaged for social change.

In “Service Learning as a Transgressive Pedagogy: A Must for Today's Generation” Angela Leonard shares her experiences teaching a service-learning class. Service-learning helped her students “painfully and embarrassingly” discover things about themselves and counter stereotypes they harbored about any discriminate group (68). Below is her summation of the class:

Their responses constitute a rich portfolio of expression of personal growth, self-critique, honesty, naiveté, shame, and pride. Through their voices one can also discern that concepts such as social justice, universal respect, humanitarianism, social consciousness and ethical responsibility, gain meaning. By requiring my students to perform service within communities of people that seemed so ethnically, culturally, racially and economically different from them, I have caused them – with much resistance – to see themselves differently, to expand the narrowness of their own lives; and to recognize the fundamental threads of universality that binds each and every one of us. (70)

The prophetic pragmatist classroom includes service learning in hopes of challenging students to see their own biases, stereotypes, attitudes, prejudices, and beliefs. The venues selected for their service activities are predicated on the social topic for the semester. For example, if the class is focused on issues of homelessness, students would conduct service learning work with organizations that address policy and client issues.



Hopefully the community experiences will help students recognize the human ways in which everyone is connected. Service learning helps students cultivate humanity in themselves, first. In the process, they could help enhance the lives of others in the community.

### Ethnography

“At its core, ethnography is a method of learning about human cultures that originated in anthropology” (Kelly and Gibbons 280). In efforts to become a more humane, empathetic society, it is important that we learn about different cultures and respectfully interact with them. Anthropologists generally define culture as “an invisible web of behaviors, patterns, rules, and rituals of a group of people who have contact with one another and share common languages,” says Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein in their book titled *Fieldworking* (3). Cultural exchanges usually dictate how a group defines itself and also how they are perceived by the world at large. As Du Bois suggested in *The Souls of Black Folk*, each culture has something to teach the world, if only we could value the differences and not work toward a melting pot society. Ethnographers try to understand different cultures and they could render new insight on how we think about different groups. They are the people that gather and process cultural data through working “in the field” or fieldworking. Once practiced exclusively within the field of anthropology, ethnography is now utilized in many other disciplines including composition studies and sociology. The methodology is accommodating across the curriculum because “ordinary lives involve all the skills of fieldworking – looking, listening, collecting, questioning, and interpreting – even though we are not always

conscious of these skills,” conveys Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1). Through applying ethnographic skills, students could become consciously aware of themselves and the world.

“The Souls of Good Folk” incorporates ethnography because it combines many skills students are already using within this critical pedagogy of humanity, such as journal writing, dialogic discourse, and collaborative learning to achieve its goals. Furthermore, ethnography is a form of experiential learning and pragmatism that requires one to remain objective in efforts to constantly renegotiate meaning. As pragmatists, ethnographers reject the notion of a final truth with a capital “T.” They keep looking for new insight, many small “t’s,” within a given culture. They use many different approaches to collecting data and reading the world, which could include interviewing, questionnaires, or simply observing, and also many different methods of writing and assessing data. According to Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein:

Fieldworkers investigate the cultural landscape, the larger picture of how a culture functions its rituals, its rules, its traditions, and its behaviors. And they poke around the edges at the stories people tell, the items people collect and value, and the materials people use to go about their daily living. By learning from people in a culture what it is like to be part of their world, fieldworkers discover a culture’s ways of being, knowing, and understanding. (3)

Essentially, student ethnographers have an opportunity to see practical ways in which cultures interact with its members and also with others outside their group. Fieldworking is important work, for it has the potential to help others see different aspects of a culture that could enhance social relationships.

Since ethnography requires students to closely monitor and authentically engage with a community, personal biases and stereotypes might be challenged during the process of gathering research. Ethnographers may have to grapple with their own prejudices and misunderstandings of a situation. According to Michael Burawoy:

From the very beginning the field challenges our preconceptions, forcing us to reconstruct our images, our theories, and even what constitutes our questions. Initially, our understanding of what is going on – what is interesting – may oscillate wildly, but over time the oscillations diminish (if all goes well) as we converge toward a stable interpretation. (294)

Personal experiences and attitudes dictate how each person reads and interprets the world differently. Literary theorist Louise Rosenblatt promoted the concept that readers are in a constant transaction with the text, responding and interpreting based on our personal cultural lens.<sup>15</sup> A starting point to making sense of our personal interpretation or lens could be to observe oneself. When students discover why they react a certain way to specific situations and why they think a certain way, it could help strengthen their work “in the field” as ethnographers. Personal discovery can help answer questions about why others behave as they do. Ethnography consists of reading texts closely<sup>16</sup> to infer meaning, even if the text is oneself. Students can read the world closely by talking back to texts through an internal dialogue, annotations, and journals. Ethnography helps students critically read their own lives to give it meaning and it also helps them to critically assess the lives of others. According to Kelly and Gibbons:

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<sup>15</sup> See *Literature as Exploration* (1938)

<sup>16</sup> See I.A. Richards’ theories of close reading and literary criticism in *Practical Criticism*

Ethnography is interpretive in nature and focuses on the symbols within a culture. Rather than simply describing what a researcher sees in a research setting, an ethnographer seeks to understand what those observations *mean*. He or she is not satisfied to know simply *that* something happens differently in one group than in another group, rather, the researcher wants to know *why*. (281)

Understanding the *why* of a situation could essentially help improve social relationships. Instead of judging a situation from a limited perspective, ethnography gives students a chance to understand cultural acts contextually. For this reason, it is an important methodology in the critical pedagogy of humanity classroom. When people realize the *why* of cultural acts, they could learn to see others as simply being different, rather than more or less important.

While an ethnographer is observing a subject (text), they may also end up observing themselves growing and changing simultaneously. Writing in a journal, double entry format in particular, could help ethnographers read closely and critically think through field observations, *rethinking* and *reconstructing* prior notions. Analyzing questions raised within the journal could further inform meaning. Ethnographers have to deeply engage with others to make meaning and contribute to ongoing social theories. Consequentially, cultures could learn to value each other's offerings and not subscribe to status quo ideology as being the standard.

Writing and talking about fieldwork experiences are effective ways for ethnographers to work through any personal fragmentation, existentialism, or double consciousness they could potentially face. Du Bois discussed double consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk* as an awareness of a dual social reality and the nuances and implications thereof. For him, double consciousness meant thinking through his place

within both the black and white worlds he inhabited to understand the larger context. Through closely observing this bifurcation and raising questions from both possible perspectives, Du Bois was able to critically assess social problems and offer solutions as it pertained to race relations. His book helped to clarify biases and misconceptions to show the humanity of blacks. Therefore, while fieldworking it is important to highlight acts that appear confusing to later critically think through them. As Michael Burroway conveys:

The purpose of fieldwork is not to strip ourselves of biases, for that is an illusory goal, nor to celebrate those biases as the authorial voice of the ethnographer, but rather to discover and perhaps change our biases through interaction with others. Thus, the “I-You” relation between observers and participants replaces a “we” relation of false togetherness and an “I-they” relation in which the I often becomes invisible. Remaining on the sidelines as a marginal person or positioning oneself above the “native” not only leaves the ethnographer’s own biases unrevealed and untouched but easily leads to false attributions, missing what remains implicit, what those we study take for granted. (4)

Du Bois was able to successfully use his double consciousness experience to better understand the black and white dichotomy and communicate his ideas of humanity to the world. Reflecting on his life experiences of working “in the field” of both white and black realities helped him think through issues of racism in America. Critical observation of each situation could be valuable instruction of how to comprehend and move forward. For example, while fieldworking, an ethnographer could become aware that an observee is also observing them. An ethnographer may want to grapple with how they think the observee perceives them and come to terms with or make meaning from that peculiar dichotomy.

Trying to locate and understand cultural implications is essentially what ethnography consists of. Used within a critical classroom, it could inform students on how to creatively solve social problems. Ethnography allows us to critically analyze our personal social constructions in efforts to *reconstruct* a new interpretation. In a sense, ethnography can be compared to service learning, for they are forms of experiential and collaborative learning. Both methodologies require students to work “in the field” to discover and learn. They allow students an opportunity to engage with a community they might not have otherwise. However, there is no service requirement in ethnography. An ethnographer does not have to be hands-on to learn from a respective culture and can simply discover new things through observing. Therefore, it is necessary for ethnographers to journal and dialogue about their observations to make meaning. A writing classroom is especially receptive to this holistic fieldwork approach, for composing observations can aid one in assessing the past, present, and future particulars of a situation.

As aforementioned, there are many ways to gather and assess data when fieldworking, depending on the objectives. In “Ethnography as Method, Methodology, and “Deep Theorizing”: Closing the Gap Between Text and Context in Academic Writing Research,” Theresa Lillis lists core features of ethnography based on a widely recognized ethnographer Martyn Hammersley. They are the following:

- Ethnography is concerned with the collection and analysis of empirical data drawn from “real world” contexts rather than being produced under experimental conditions created by the researcher;
- The research involves sustained engagement in a particular site;

- A key aim is for the researcher attempting to make sense of these events from the perspectives of participants;
- Data are gathered from a range of sources, but observation and/or relatively informal conversations are often key tools;
- The focus is a single setting or group of relatively small scale; or a small number of these. In life-history research, the focus may even be a single individual;
- The analysis of the data involves interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions and mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most. (359)

Like prophetic pragmatism, ethnography aims to reveal the varying implications of a culture – the larger context as well as the intimate details – to assess meaning. This type of critical analysis is generally associated with deconstruction theory. Ethnography specifically employs different methods to *rethink* theories that could inform our notions of society. According to Burawoy, we should “search for theories that highlight some aspect of the situation under such as being anomalous and then proceed to rebuild (rather than reject) that theory by reference to the wider forces at work, be they the state, the economy, or even the world system” (6). Instead of *deconstructing*, tearing down, and starting anew, “The Souls of Good Folk” takes a meliorist approach in each of the methodologies employed to *reevaluate* and *reconstruct*.

### Group Work and Collaborative Learning

Learning to work with others is probably one of the most important skills a person can learn. In order to become successful in life, it is crucial to interact well with different people’s temperaments and abilities. Furthermore, many employers seek individuals that are team players and keen strategists. “The Souls of Good Folk” utilizes much group

work and collaborative learning, as the skills acquired during this process are beneficial for personal, academic, and social development. It is a distinctly pragmatic concept, since social interaction generally causes one to assess the self. A person's thinking, habits, and actions usually change as a result of collaborative work. Within a group, different members have varying degrees of strengths and weaknesses. However, each person is needed to complete a project. Comparing oneself with others in this manner could strengthen underdeveloped areas of the self. As previously mentioned, different methodologies overlap in this critical pedagogy of humanity. With the exception of independent journal writing, each of the methods could be effectively implemented in group work/collaborative learning. Within a prophetic pragmatist framework, group work and collaboration are essential to establishing community, meaning making, and creatively solving social problems. I use the terms "group work" "collaborative learning" and "cooperative learning" synonymously.

In her article "In Support of Cooperative Learning," Susan P. Ravenscroft defines cooperative learning as "pedagogies that involve the use of groups whose members share interdependent goals and are assessed on individual outcomes" (187). "The purposes of cooperative learning include improved individual learning; more positive attitudes towards school, study and other students; and an opportunity for students to work in small groups – a skill sought by many employers," she says (187). Many educators see the benefits of students learning in groups in comparison to whole class learning. According to Alexis J. Walker in "Cooperative Learning in the College Classroom," "Students in cooperative-learning classrooms interact more and are more interdependent



than students in traditional classrooms in which the teacher lectures but peer interaction is discouraged (328). Students seem more invested in their work because peers are counting on them.

However, as with any methodology outside of tradition, there is much disapproval of group work and collaborative learning. The criticism comes from students and teachers alike. Walker notes:

Teachers sometimes are reluctant to employ student groups. Because some instructors have used them as a way to avoid extensive preparation themselves, others have come to stereotype group strategies as a way for faculty to reduce their own workloads. Achieving effective student groups however, is a labor-intensive proposition, one in which the instructor occupies multiple roles as facilitator, collaborator, informant, lecturer, monitor, evaluator, and so on. (328)

It takes thorough planning to effectively incorporate group work and collaborative learning. Teachers have to consider every detail of the arrangement, even student attitude. Many students, especially ones that are already highly motivated, are not generally excited about working in groups. Ravenscroft says, “Some research shows students feel negatively about sharing of grades, resent possible free riding, or feel uncomfortable with the diffusion of responsibility” (188). Most times, students would prefer to work alone to ensure positive results, instead of counting on someone else to do their respective parts.

When introducing group work and collaborative learning, teachers could play a central role in alleviating student trepidation by explaining what is expected of each person within a group. Ravenscroft suggests that faculty “use periodic peer evaluation, progress reports, written defenses of how and why work was divided, and most importantly, individual assessment of learning” to monitor the groups before a project is

due (189). Students could openly discuss their concerns about the process as well.

Perhaps the dialogue will motivate students to work well together when they realize the multiple benefits and their group members' attitudes. In the group, the so-called advanced or motivated students could enhance their leadership and delegation skills and learn how to best help others succeed. And, other less active group members could gain confidence, improve communication, and learn new techniques. Therefore, each student could learn how to become more interpersonal, interdependent, and responsible individuals. Group work and collaborative learning could be a win-win situation for students and teachers if there is careful planning, close monitoring, and positive attitudes.

In "A Sense of Community," Lancy and Rhees say, "...putting students in groups may not result in cooperative learning if the groups are not carefully structured, with the professor providing the framework on which to build cooperation" (102). Even though each teacher facilitates group work differently, it would work well to monitor group and individual progress. This could be done through student evaluations and group-teacher conferences. Students could periodically assess strengths and weaknesses as individuals and as a collective. They could discuss different strategies with the teacher to effectively complete their task. Furthermore, class time could be allocated for group work assignments. This would allow the teacher to view the members interacting with each other, guiding and answering questions when necessary.

Since extensive effort is exerted to facilitate group work and collaborative learning, Ahmed Hassanien suggests that students undergo explicit, ongoing training to

be successful. In “Student Experience of Group Work and Group Assessment in Higher Education,” he says:

Students should receive training on group learning, such as how to set goals, share roles, divide tasks, use of peer and self-assessment, adopt strategies for conflict resolutions and communicate face-to-face and via technological means. (24)

Teachers could collaborate with other professionals to host these skills-training sessions. By getting others involved, this would be a good opportunity for students to see the teacher exhibit teamwork skills they aim to teach students. As a best teaching practice, teachers should always maintain their roles of mentor and leader by example.

Many believe that cooperative learning is an age-old method that increases student learning. In “Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems,” Etienne Wenger says:

Since the beginning of history, human beings have formed communities that share cultural practices reflecting their collective learning: from a tribe round a cave fire, to a medieval guild ... to a community of engineers ... Participating in these ‘communities of practice’ is essential to our learning. (163)

However, there are many unanswered questions due to the limited research. Susan Ravenscroft lists some of the prevailing issues as:

To the extent faculty do not script or prescribe student behavior, the question of what actually occurs during student interaction still remains. Some researchers suggest that the cooperative process should be highly structured; others assert that the degree of structure should be decreased for more conceptual material. There are individual studies which report no improvement in achievement with cooperative learning, suggesting that the necessary conditions for cooperative learning are not fully understood. Faculty can not yet turn to the literature for

definitive advice on most effectively applying cooperative learning, or help in deciding which particular technique to use in a given course. (189)

As an example, I believe the following research provides a bridge for the competing opinions. In “Collaboration as a Catalyst for Critical Thinking in Undergraduate Research,” Sue Waite and Bernie Davis conclude the following about group work:

Students’ fears of possible conflict and dominance in collaborative work were not fulfilled in the supportive climate of our sessions and this climate appeared to have fostered greater exploration of issues. Furthermore, we argue that the collaboration created many instances of scaffolding of critical thinking by both students and tutors. However, we also found that current expectations of tutor-student relationships and conventional teaching practices may require time and institutional change to develop collaboration and critical thinking more fully. (417)

Hephzibah Roskelly agrees that as a philosophy, the research and method of group work are limited. She wrote *Breaking (into) the Circle: Group Work for Change in the English Classroom* to identify new, more useful ways for teachers to incorporate group work into the course design. She lists a major reason for failed group work is due to the conflicts that arise “with theories about knowledge and achievement that teachers, students, and institutions hold on to, most often unconsciously” (5). For instance, she offers these likely conflicts: “How can a student be simultaneously collaborative and competitive with others?” “How can a teacher be at once the authority and the novice?” And, “How can achievement be evaluated in a context in which individual achievement counts for little?” To work through such difficulties with group work, she supports among others theorists, Paulo Freire’s belief in the “necessary link between theory and practice, and the necessary accommodation of theories to practices,” which “provides a method for seeing

how group work's goals can be translated into actual practice in the classroom" (5). She is quoted at length:

Groups by necessity accommodate the various experiences group members bring to the group. Groups must, as a result, listen, pay attention to differences; they must change course or redesign plans depending on group members' perspectives and the sharing of these perspectives. And the classroom itself must provide reports of their work together to the larger group. As each group hears from the others, they learn even more about the topics at hand and about how knowledge is being made in the other small circles around them. Theories of instruction, of how knowledge occurs and is made, of how students behave and teachers talk, become infused with new ideas that emerge from the new experience that results from much talk and new activity. (5-6)

Therefore, students and teachers can learn to abandon old ways of thinking about education and begin to see each other as cohorts in the formation of knowledge and meaning making. Roskelly believes an important role of the teacher is to help students make connections with what they already know and the new information they are learning with their peers in groups. As a major reference, she explores Lev Vygotsky's work on how we learn and interact with others. She says:

To see the role of the group as necessary to learning is not to see the role of the teacher diminished or subverted. Vygotsky's ideas suggest that the teacher's function, as well as peers', is crucial in students' development. A skilled teacher not only introduces a learner to new experience, but also fosters the connections and transformations that the new experience provokes by talk, challenge, and reinforcement – all activities that move the learner beyond what he or she might be able to consider alone. The *zone of proximal development* is Vygotsky's term for the place where the actual (what the learner can do) moves toward the possible (what the teacher or other partner helps the learner conceive). Teachers who see themselves and their students in this dynamic way begin to think of ways of asking questions, responding to writing, designing assignments, and nurturing student talk. (33)

“To help teachers think about why group work is crucial to classroom instruction,”

Roskelly list six claims from Andrea Lunsford, a scholar on collaboration and collaborative writing. They are as follows:

- 1) Collaboration aids in problem finding as well as problem solving.
- 2) Collaboration aids in learning abstractions.
- 3) Collaboration aids in transfer and assimilation; it fosters interdisciplinary thinking.
- 4) Collaboration leads not only to sharper, more critical thinking, but to deeper understanding of others.
- 5) Collaboration leads to higher achievement in general.
- 6) Collaboration fosters excellence. (24-25)

To put her different beliefs about group work to practice, Roskelly offers four ways of making groups work. Her “Blueprint for Action: Maxims for Breaking into Circles” includes the following:

- 1) Make group work organic – have a rationale for when and how students work in small groups throughout the semester.
- 2) Teach people how to work in a group – “help students learn to speak and listen, to accommodate, to work together through problems and ideas, and to develop a sense of self that can come only through seeing the self as one among others – the way life is lived.” Assign specific roles in groups, such as the president, the recorder, and the reflector.
- 3) Make membership in a group permanent – because a typical semester lasts between thirteen and fifteen weeks, students can get to know each other better if they are assigned permanent group members. “The trust that can flourish when groups know they will stay together for the term allows writers to become willing to share their drafts, readers to offer suggestions and real opinions, speakers to learn to listen, and listeners to learn to speak.”
- 4) Make the group’s work real – select tasks for groups that require negotiation: talking together, listening for ideas, and planning together. (130-142)

To reiterate, the ways in which teachers facilitate group work and collaborative learning make all the difference. To achieve success, one must incorporate untraditional methods in the classroom. According to Roskelly:

The real hope of group work lies in the possibility it can offer for nurturing more equitable systems within the classroom and the institution – more equal spaces for all the members who are invited to break in the academic circle – that is, all students who enter public schools. (7)

The multiple critical thinking and negotiation skills acquired by students and teachers in the process of engaging in group work are worth the efforts.

#### Journal Writing and the Double-Entry Format

Many people journal for different reasons, such as to keep an account of things that happen in life. However, Joan Didion abandons the notion of what she considers listing pointless facts in a diary. In her essay “On Keeping a Notebook,” she conveys that she would much rather record “lies,” which are the fictional juicy details she writes about a situation according to the way they felt to her at the time. “*How it felt to me*: that is getting closer to the truth about a notebook,” is the rationale she gives for her approach. Even though Didion’s method may appear a bit eccentric for academic journal writing, I believe she suggests an important lesson for teachers who desire to implement this in the classroom. Of course, students are not encouraged to tell “lies” in their entries. The point Didion is making, I believe, is that journal writing should enable one to share ideas from a personal perspective for understanding. Students should be able to convey things

according to the way they feel. This is a primary way to cultivate critical thinking and meaningful learning, which are general expectations of academic journaling.

In “Does Reflective Journal Writing Improve Course Performance?” Cheryl A. Cisero defines journal writing as:

meaningfully interacting with the reading material by applying information to personal experiences, analyzing and critiquing information, synthesizing information, or creating a product based on the information. (231)

This definition sums up the goals many teachers have when considering journal writing. However, many students have a warped concept of it, believing the writing to be mere diary entries that are shared with the teacher. Or, there is a gender bias about journal writing, with many male students thinking it is something that women do primarily. For example, many of my male first-year composition students suggested that *if* they log events in a journal-like format, it is most likely comparable to a calendar. This way, they can remember upcoming assignments and events in a practical manner, without feeling pressure to write creatively and expand the details. Whether male or female, everyone approaches journal writing differently, for “keepers of private notebooks are a different breed altogether,” says Didion. She explains, “The impulse to write things down is a peculiarly compulsive one, inexplicable to those who do not share it, useful only accidentally, only secondarily, in the way that any compulsion tries to justify itself.” This urge, she feels, “begins or does not begin in the cradle.” Many students may share Didion’s sentiments on journal writing; you either have the wiring or not. Even though Didion skillfully describes how journal writing enhances her life, students may ultimately



think the point to keeping a notebook is personal and hard to discern. Therefore, they may not fully appreciate the ways in which journal writing is used in academia.

The task for teachers that aspire to successfully integrate journal writing into the curriculum is to introduce a variety of writing prompts and techniques, for there is no singular approach proven most effective. “Journal writing can only be effective in improving course performance if students make the effort to engage in reflective thinking, thereby making learning more meaningful,” says Cisero (233). She believes that since many students have not given much opportunity to think critically and make meaning for themselves, teachers have “a responsibility to cultivate reflection, critical thinking, and meaningful learning in our students” (233). It is most important for teachers to convey the practical and theoretical concepts of journal writing, for many cognitive benefits overlap into one’s personal and professional life. In “Building the Habit of Writing,” Maureen Wanket says:

When my students practice journal writing, they are practicing for their future academic, political, and emotional lives. They build skills so that some day they might write a great novel, a piece of sorely needed legislation, or the perfect love letter. (74)

When teachers promote journal writing, they help cultivate essential reasoning and literary skills that allow students to become successful citizens.

O’Connell and Dymont conducted a survey to find out why faculty use journals.

They reported many reasons that suggest journal writing enables students to:

(1) have more freedom in expressing themselves and their leaning; (2) reflect upon their own personal growth and development; (3) connect their field

experiences to their in-class experiences; (4) develop their natural observational skills (e.g., weather, animal behaviour [*sic*], plant identification); (5) draw on a wide range of types of intelligences (see H. Gardner, 1993); (6) develop their writing skills; (7) disrupt the focus on humans in the education system; and (8) develop and intimate an intimate and embodied connection with the more than human realm. (680)

Journal writing is popular among many teachers because of its flexibility. It can be included into any class across the curriculum. Especially within a composition or literature class, it helps students expand their reading and thinking skills. “Writing in a literature class is usually limited to taking notes on lectures and composing critical appreciations, critical essays, or book reports,” says Ann E. Berthoff. However, she adds:

Writing can help develop a critical method of reading by, first of all, providing for students an example of a text coming into being – their own. And, second, by encouraging habits of reflective questioning in the process of reading, chiefly by means of interpretive paraphrase, writing can help students replace the nonquestion, “What is the author trying to say?” with the critical question, “How does it change the meaning when I change the text and put it this way?” (45)

Even though keeping a journal increases writing, reading, and thinking skills, Berthoff introduces a particular method that she believes takes precedence over others. “The most useful way to raise consciousness of texts as intermediary forms and to develop a method of critical reading is, simply put, to have students write continuously in a double-entry notebook,” she says (45). The methodology to this style of journaling is most distinctive.

Berthoff explains the double-entry concept:

On the right side reading notes, direct quotations, observational notes, fragments, lists, images – verbal and visual – are recorded; on the other (facing) side, notes about those notes, summaries, formulations, aphorisms, editorial suggestions, revisions, comment on comment are written. The reason for the double-entry

format is that it provides a way for the student to conduct that “continuing audit of meaning” that is at the heart of learning to read and write critically. The facing pages are in dialogue with one another. (45)

The ‘continuing audit of meaning’ is a reference to literary critic and rhetorician I.A.

Richard’s<sup>17</sup> conception of reading closely to interpret new implications of a text. Also,

through reading closely or critically, one can gain insight to writing critically. According to Berthoff:

When we read critically, we are reading for meaning - and that is not the same thing as reading for “message.” Meanings are not things, and finding them is not like going on an Easter egg hunt. Meanings are relationships: they are unstable, shifting, dynamic: they do not stay still nor can we prove the authenticity or the validity of one or another meaning that we find. (42)

Much traditional pedagogy teaches students to read a text for “the message,” as if there is a central “one” or two that every sentence supports. Students are tested on how well they find this message. However, students need the additional training to read closely for deeper meaning. Furthermore, they should learn how to assess personal meaning from texts, outside of the scripted query and answers that many teacher manuals provide.

The double-entry journal is designed specifically to give one practice in thinking critically – to allow one to think about their thinking. By capturing the way their mind processes a text, the double-entry format can help a person understand how a conclusion is drawn. Revealing someone’s “personal lens,” or how they see the world, can shed light on how different interpretations of the same text are made. Sharing these different meanings can enhance the learning process of students and teachers alike. Therefore,

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<sup>17</sup> See Richard’s *Practical Criticism*.

journal writing works well as a precursor to dialogic discourse and group work in the classroom.

“The Souls of Good Folk” utilizes journals, in particular the double-entry format, as a method for students to think deeply about a text, gain insight, and assess meaning. It is a distinctly pragmatist concept since the writer engages in an internal dialogue and reflection process to arrive at changed or evolved beliefs. The double entry format of journal writing and meaning making can be compared to Du Bois’s notion of double consciousness. In *Souls* he says it is a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (xxvii). One is constantly engaged in reflection to generate understanding. Journal writing works collaboratively with other methods in this critical pedagogy to effectively employ a prophetic pragmatism framework of cultural criticism for democratic action. The reflection and synthesis process required in the double-entry journal will allow students to understand the many nuances of social problems and pose creative solutions.

In “Dialogic Reflection and Journaling,” the authors agree that the most versatile and effect method of journal writing is the double-entry form. According to them:

It can be used for reflecting on assigned readings, note-taking in lectures, visual presentations, or various other class activities. Its purpose is twofold: first, students carry on an interactive dialogue with the material, recording their summaries or restating the content in their own language and constructing personal meaning. Second, they use their notebooks as shared texts with peers to construct the knowledge socially to advance understanding. (188)

The double-entry notebook is a writing process that starts with internal dialogue, could prove useful within a classroom discussion or dialogic discourse, and could also end with

internal dialogue, as the “continuing audit of meaning” occurs. In this article, the authors also provide a list of benefits to using the double-entry journal. They include the following:

- Responsibility for learning belongs to the learner, not the teacher
- Students are active/reflective not passive
- Personal shaping of new knowledge not received knowledge from the teacher (transmission model)
- Student centered; that is, students determine what they know or don't know, as opposed to teacher-centered instruction, where teachers assume what students know or don't know
- Increased student talk in both small and large groups, in contrast to teacher-ed discussions and question/answer exchanges
- Intentional building of (social) learning community, rather than learning as isolated activity (knowledge as personal ownership)
- Thinking and learning viewed as process, not final product (essay, research paper)
- Thinking and learning in the Double Entry Journal are intentional acts; they are “active rehearsals” rather than reproductions of what the instructor expects
- Students discuss new information as it arises in groups rather than being led by the teacher through a chapter in a textbook. (188)

Overall, the double entry journal is a flexible, yet demanding way to teach students how to have a conversation with themselves on paper to make meaning. Through the double-entry format, reflection begins with the individual and it could enhance group and class participation.

### Dialogic Discourse

Establishing a classroom community is a risky endeavor and serious work, especially in a critical classroom, for everyone involved is in a constant state of flux. The ebb and flow of interactions could either weaken or strengthen the infrastructure. The

critical classroom is designed to take students and teachers out of their comfort zones and challenge them to address personal and social issues. One method of achieving this is through dialogic discourse. The teacher is a central factor in establishing community and trust in this challenging setting. Students should trust that the teacher will help them work through moments of intensity, with an unbiased, critical approach. Additionally, the teacher should trust that students are authentic and sincere in their dialogic exchanges. It is easy to repeat popular world opinions, but students should express their own ideas and also understand how they reached their decisions.

Incorporating dialogic discourse can be a challenging feat, for it adds pressure to this already intense pedagogy. Dialogue enables the tearing down and rebuilding process of personal and social transformation. While negotiating through dialogic discourse in the critical classroom, students and teacher have an opportunity to share thoughts on difficult topics for understanding. Although understanding is the objective, it is often a difficult process to arrive there. As Vygotsky suggested, all learning is situated within social, historical, and cultural contexts. Therefore, each person enters the conversation with a prescribed set of assumptions and opinions.

*On Dialogue* is considered “the most comprehensive documentation to date of the process David Bohm referred to as “dialogue” (Bohm xv). In it, he says, “Dialogue is aimed at the understanding of consciousness *per se*, as well as exploring the problematic nature of day-to-day relationship and communication” (xviii). He believed the key components of dialogue to be “shared meaning; the nature of collective thought; the pervasiveness of fragmentation; the function of awareness; the microcultural context;

undirected inquiry; impersonal fellowship; and the paradox of the observer and the observed” (xviii). Dialogic discourse is needed in schools in efforts to teach students effective communication strategies for personal, social, and professional development.

Maintaining a dialogic discourse requires much persistence, negotiation, and patience. For any chance of success, students and teachers could dialogue about the benefits and limitations of this method from the onset. This conversation could establish mutual trust, critical awareness, and inspire innovative strategies. Dialoguing with someone can be challenging if specific skills are not employed. Truly listening and thinking critically throughout a conversation could generate understanding and enlightenment. However, many people have not been taught to engage in genuine conversation, whereby ideas are mutually shared and considered for understanding. Generally speaking, many people abandon effective communication efforts for a need to simply prove their position as right. They have a discussion to, in a sense, set the record straight. Bohm makes a clear distinction between dialogue and discussion. He says:

Discussion is almost like a ping-pong game, where people are batting the ideas back and forth and the object of the game is to win or to get points for yourself. Possibly you will take up somebody else’s ideas to back up your own – you may agree with some and disagree with others – but the basic point is to win the game. That’s very frequently the case in a discussion. (7)

For the above stated reason, perhaps discussions are not an effective method of communication within a critical classroom, where the objective is to expand knowledge and evolve together. Instead, Bohm believes dialogue is a better alternative. It allows for the development of community and meaningful exchange. He continues:

In a dialogue, however, nobody is trying to win. Everybody wins if anybody wins. There is a different sort of spirit to it. In a dialogue, there is no attempt to gain points, or to make your particular view prevail. Rather, when any mistake is discovered on the part of anybody, everybody gains. It's a situation called win-win, whereas the other game is win-lose – if I win, you lose. But a dialogue is something more of a common participation, in which we are not playing a game against each other, but with each other. In a dialogue, everybody wins. (7)

When students learn methods of communicating in a non-competitive, less-authoritative manner, then everybody in the conversation wins, for understanding and progression are the common goals. Bohm believes “a basic notion for a dialogue would be for people to sit in a circle,” for it “allows for direct communication” (17). This set-up could allow for a more personal interaction and a feeling of community. As important, “it may be useful to have a facilitator to get the group going, who keeps a watch on it for a while and sort of explains what’s happening from time to time,” he says. Once the group is accustomed to the flow of conversation, the facilitator could proctor less and observe more of the exchanges.

Dialogic discourse is incorporated within “The Souls of Good Folk” to help strengthen basic communication and thinking skills in efforts to improve society. Schools could play a major role in improving critical awareness and understanding if dialogic discourse were implemented in the curricula. Instead, most schools continue with a traditional learning approach that limits reasoning and synthesis skills. Sue Lyle explores the traditional teaching and learning approach in her article “Dialogic Teaching: Discussing Theoretical Contexts and Reviewing Evidence from Classroom Practice.” She cites the following research:



Since the mid-1970s, classroom observational research from both sides of the Atlantic has produced a consistent picture: schools and classrooms are full of talk, but little collaborative talk between learners. It is generally accepted that what is now seen as a monologic style of discourse structure between teacher and pupils known as the IRF (Initiation/Response/Feedback) is a fundamental feature of all official talk in classrooms, constituting around 60% of the teaching/learning process. (225)

The IRF philosophy can be compared to Paulo Freire's conception of the "banking system" of education. Within each of these methods, students' cognitive development and communication skills are stunted.

Two different intentionalities of discourse – monologic or dialogic – are identified in O'Connor and Michaels' article "When is Dialogue 'Dialogic'?" Monologic discourse is defined as "lecture-like" and dialogic discourse as "prototypically realized as discussion" (277). Within the traditional, didactic, or monologic classroom discourse, the majority of the dialogue is directed from the teacher to the student. Within these contexts, the teacher is acknowledged as the primary depositor of knowledge and the students have few opportunities to discover and make meaning. Most disruptive, I believe, is that these methods impede inquiry and curiosity; they condition students to believe what they are being taught is the absolute truth. In a traditional learning environment, ideas are regurgitated as a measure of one's intellectual prowess. Therefore, with the classroom being a potential model for how society operates, many students equate success with playing it safe, by following the rules and repeating what they are told. In the article "Script, Counterscript, and Underlife in the Classroom: James Brown versus Brown v. Board of Education," Gutierrez and others state, "In these contexts, oppressive power

relations often appear natural and neutral rather than socially constructed, political, and historical in origin” (450). If students understood such power structures, they could more easily participate in dialogic exchanges for collaborative learning, meaning making, and social progress.

Instead of expecting the teacher to fill them with knowledge, I believe students who participate in dialogic discourse become personally invested in learning and seek scholarship on their own. When students are taught a number of opinions and assumptions, instead of just a select few, they become more intellectually curious and progressive minded citizens. They learn to evaluate the usefulness of new concepts and are not relegated to hegemonic views. Lyle says, “Dialogic talk is concerned to promote communication through authentic exchanges” (225). Dialogic discourse could help engender empathy and creatively solve social problems, for “there is genuine concern for the views of the talk partners and effort is made to help participants share and build meaning collaboratively,” she says (225). By incorporating this teaching method into the critical classroom, teachers become agents of social change; they prepare students to think through challenging situations and pose solutions in concert with others.

“Any discussion of dialogic approaches to learning and teaching,” Lyle believes, “owes a debt to the Russian psychologist Lev Vgotsky (1896-1934) who emphasised [*sic*] social and cultural influences on child development, and especially recognised [*sic*] language as the driving force behind cognitive development” (223). Vygotsky promoted the concept that all learning is situated within a cultural, historical, or social context. His findings have stimulated much research on how language impacts comprehension and

how dialogic discourse could be used as an effective learning method. Others such as Jerome Bruner and Mikhail Bakhtin have built upon Vygotsky's concept of language transmission for cognitive training. Lyle says:

Bakhtin's concept of 'dialogical meaning-making' allows the learner to play an active role in developing a personally constructed understanding of the curriculum through a process of dialogic interchange. Dialogism stresses the intersubjective nature of language as a social system. According to dialogism we produce and organise [*sic*] social reality by talking and writing. Dialogism assumes knowledge is something people do together rather than an individual possession. (224-225)

She echoes many theorists who believe dialogic teaching "holds the greatest cognitive potential for pupils, whilst at the same time demanding the most of teachers" (222).

O'Conner and Michaels would agree. In their article they contend, "It is easy to claim an ideological affinity with Dialogical [*sic*] discourse, but it is more difficult to understand how to enact this stance in one's classroom talk and interaction" (277). Since "classrooms are full of discourse and dialogue: the back-and-forth between teachers and students, formal and informal talk, in small and large groups, one-on-one conferences, and written text to an audience," how can teachers definitively know when a dialogue becomes dialogic (275)? These writers believe the field of dialogic pedagogy is underdeveloped in best dialogic practices and suggest we "find better ways to talk about the linkages between task, talk, role, and the nature of knowledge (whether it can be generated from within the student or is conventional and must come from the outside), and develop analytic schemes that better represent these linkages" (285).

To have a more effective dialogic classroom, I believe that students and teachers should be clear about their discourse intentions and continue practicing to improve their

methods. A teacher could purpose to engender dialogic discourse in the classroom, and then inadvertently switch to a monologic way of interacting. This could be an example of a teaching moment for students and teacher. They could analyze how and why the direction of command changed within the conversation. According to Lyle, “ Any understanding of dialogic pedagogy will depend on analysis of classroom talk to discuss its dialogic quality” (224). For example, a situation could arise where the teacher is the only person in the room who can clarification information. Once the information is understood, it should strengthen the conversation and enable dialogic discourse to ensue. The teacher should balance authoritative telling with allowing students to make meaning. Bohm believes, “If we begin to confront what’s going on in a dialogue group, we sort of have the nucleus of what’s going on in all society” (16-17). Reflection and analysis are keys to assessing more effective dialogic practices.

Essentially, O’Connor and Michaels conclude that both monologic and dialogic discourse have their respective place in education. However, incorporating *more* dialogue in the curricula is necessary “if we are serious about supporting students to go beyond the given, to challenge the arguments of others with evidence, to generate novel interpretations or analyses” (284). For these reasons, dialogic discourse is included within “The Souls of Good Folk.” It enhances students’ understanding, communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, comprehension, and listening skills for academic and real-world application.

## The Role of Technology

The twenty-first century is known for its technological advances. It seems like new, more efficient gadgets are introduced on the market daily. Computer technology, in particular, has changed the ways in which we communicate and our notions of community. Unfortunately, it is leaving behind established print methods as a struggling enterprise. For example, the price of the U.S. postal stamp has increased several times to offset the price of fewer mail deliveries. People are encouraged to handle most transactions online as a quicker, cost-effective, environmentally friendly alternative to using the mail system. Another example is of major print newspaper companies filing bankruptcy and going out of business for more convenient, real-time news online. Especially due to the popularity of online social networking communities such as Twitter, Facebook, and Myspace, news travels faster than ever before. For many, print newspapers are seen as “yesterday’s news,” in comparison to online news. We’re becoming more of a virtual community culture, where everyone has the opportunity to voice opinions.

Everyone is not sold on the idea of a virtual community. In “What is Virtual Community?” Benjamin R. Barber asks, “How can there be ‘common ground’ when ground itself vanishes and women and men inhabit abstractions?” He continues:

There may be some new form of community developing among the myriad solitaires perched in front of their screens and connected only by their fingertips to the new web defined by the internet. But the politics of that “community” has yet to be invented, as it is hardly likely automatically to be democratic, certainly not as a result of market imperatives. It has yet to be shown that anonymous screen-to-screen interaction can do for us what face-to-face interaction has done. (268)

While most of Barber's comment may have been reasonable when he wrote it in the late 80s, much has changed about the capacity for virtual communities to be democratic or to substitute in-person interaction. I do not believe the Internet can replace face-to-face interaction. What it provides is an alternative, for people no longer have to travel as often to "see" one another. Their communication can be done virtually through the Internet. Companies can save lots of travel money by utilizing technology that enables virtual meetings. Furthermore, campuses can extend their reach by offering distance education, which is online instruction across the curriculum that makes earning a degree more accessible. Virtual communities are useful because they join individuals from all sectors of life that are spread across the world. Many people find solace in joining virtual support groups. They have become increasingly popular sites and are highly trafficked. For many, it is easier to receive *free* advice from a stranger or an anonymous person, instead of conveying personal information to friends and family who might be too closely associated or judgmental to be unbiased. Accessing Internet technology can be considered a democratic process. Any American can venture to a local library and use the computer to gain information and also participate in a virtual community.

More so, democracy in virtual communities can be witnessed within classrooms. "In Some Classrooms, Dialogue is Tweeting Up," is an article recently published in *The Washington Post* that show how professors across the country are using Twitter to motivate students in writing. Since the social networking site only allows 140 characters per post, students have to think critically about ways to engage and connect with readers.

“At its best, professors said, Twitter creates a virtual collective stream of consciousness, a real-time flow of sometimes funny, sometimes newsy, sometimes thought-provoking observations, photos, conversations, documents, questions, videos and links” (A6).

However, some professors prefer to keep online communication with students disclosed from the entire world, in more traditional forms such as Blackboard. Research has shown that using the private chat rooms and messaging boards of Blackboard enables more effective group work and it also helps alleviate male dominance in the classroom. Studies indicate that men are generally the first to speak in classroom discussions and they persistently get their views heard, leaving many female classmates subjugated and voiceless. Through virtual communities, everyone has an equal chance in participating in conversation.

While many focus on the liabilities of virtual communities, I tend to see more of the benefits. Yes, as a composition teacher of many years, I have noticed a decline in the way students write due to text and instant messaging devices. However, our culture is changing and teachers have to adapt these practices into the classroom to keep students engaged. Of course, I do not believe academic or business language should be diminished for popular short hand codes. However, teachers can use these popular trends as examples in the classroom to show the importance of communicating effectively. Students could dialogue about the differences between personal and professional communication etiquette and social and academic contexts.

Within Barber's article, he also states:

The out-of-body nature of virtual communication is both a virtue and a vice. It can marginalize bodies – as when college roommates sit side by side conversing via their screens, or when wired campuses watch social clubs and local recreational centers atrophy because students are glued to their computers. My own test for a virtual community is this: I will believe in the virtual community when someone shows me virtual community service. (268)

Virtual community service may not exist in the literal sense that Barber suggests, but today many people use the Internet for meet-up and organizing purposes. Therefore, virtual communities translate into the real and tangible by connecting individuals who might not have otherwise come together. Again, virtual communities can be powerful tools for democracy. For example, during the 2008 United States presidential election, the world witnessed an unprecedented online political campaign for the first time in history. More than the other candidates, then-Senator Barack Obama effectively utilized computer technology for voter outreach, Web hosting, fundraising, and social networking.

Chris Hughes, a then-twenty-five year old Hickory, North Carolina, native and Facebook cofounder, was hired by the Obama Campaign along with software company Blue State Digital (BSD) to organize a massive online movement (McGirt). Hughes designed My.BarackObama.com, or MyOB for short, and BSD managed Obama for America. Eventually these two networking tools merged to help “mobilize over 3 million individual donors to contribute over \$500 million online, to motivate over 2 million social networking participants, and to create and promote more than 200,000 offline



events across the country” (“Our Team”). During a talk in London, Thomas Gensemer, managing partner of BSD said:

A number of key principles from ‘Obama for America’ can be used by organizations supporting a candidate, or a particular issue or cause. Organizations must learn how to lower the barriers to participation and reach all constituents by communicating to them in easy, action-oriented and personalized ways. (“Obama’s Online Guru”)

These same social networking principles could be taught in the classroom to show students effective ways of online organizing for civic engagement. Although I believe computers should never replace print books, they should be utilized more in the classroom to reify a technological tool that is integral to most students and professionals. “The Souls of Good Folk” utilizes computer technology in the composition classroom as a valuable source of informing and organizing online to promote a social agenda. Through online networking sources, students could help make a positive difference in the world.

There has been a recent shift in pedagogical practices that call for more use of technology in the classroom. In “Teaching Digital Rhetoric: Community, Critical Engagement, and Application,” the authors report, “The recommendations of educational organizations such as the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE), and the American Library Association (ALA) include language that reflects the need to teach and encourage students to gain technological literacy” (DigiRhet.org 233). Their detailed account is quoted at length below:

The CCCC “Position Statement on Teaching, Learning, and Assessing Writing in Digital Environments” calls attention to the fact that “classes and programs in writing require that students compose digitally”; the resolution continues to describe the ways in which writing changes shape in digital spaces. The resolution addresses the ways in which some of our assumptions and practices of writing don’t change shape in digital environments, but also calls attention to the multiple and extended facets that require our attention when we ask students to compose with computers and across networks (for example, economic and cultural barriers must be addressed, access must be assured). In addition, in the “Informational Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education,” the ALA identifies informational literacy as crucial to today’s “environment of rapid technological change and proliferating information resources.” In these standards, the ALA acknowledges that informational literacy and information technology are inseparable, and that, along with acquiring technological skills needed to *use* technology, technological “fluency” requires that the information-literate person have a “deep understanding of technology. (233)

Being technologically literate requires more than maneuvering through the Internet or social networking sites. It requires thinking critically within a different medium. Students should understand technology as a tool and find ways to best utilize its methods.

Since technology is well integrated into almost every aspect of society, it seems quite necessary to include it in the classroom. In “Social Technology as a New Medium in the Classroom,” Jeffrey Yan says, “New modes of everyday communication – textual, visual, audio and video – are already part of almost every high school and college student’s social life” (27). Therefore, it is important that teachers collaborate with others and also seek professional development to effectively implement virtual networking tools such as electronic portfolios (e-Portfolios), blogs, online learning communities, and wikis into an educational setting. Yan believes these tools help create “opportunities for groups to share, collaborate, showcase and grow together,” which in turn, motivates both students and teachers (30). While teachers navigate through both classroom and virtual

communities, they must maintain a student-centered approach to teaching. “While we adopt more nuanced and complicated stances toward technology as scholars and practitioners, says Barbara B. Duffelmeyer in “Critical Work in First-Year Composition: Computers, Pedagogy, and Research,” “we must as teachers help our students achieve this balanced perspective as well” (357-358). She believes this is important because “writing is epistemic” and quotes James Berlin, a well-known theorist in the field of composition studies, to expand this notion. Berlin is quoted as saying:

In teaching writing, we are not simply offering training in a useful technical skill that is meant as a simple complement to the more important studies of other areas. We are teaching a way of experiencing the world, a way of ordering and making sense of it. (358)

Duffelmeyer says Berlin defines this as our “*work* of creating a critically literate citizenry” (358). Since students are already familiar with much virtual networking technology, teachers have the opportunity to merge different pedagogies to enhance critical thinking skills.

Blogs, wikis, and ePortfolios are examples of virtual community spaces that can be easily integrated into an educational setting. A blog is an online journal with entries organized in reverse-chronological order. It combines text, images, videos, and links to other blogs. Readers can leave comments and also subscribe in RSS (real simple syndication), receiving a notification when new information is posted. Many students enjoy receiving comments from a worldwide audience, instead of just their teachers and peers. Yan lists “popular blogging platforms used in classrooms include Blogger ([www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)) and EduBlogs ([www.edublogs.org](http://www.edublogs.org))” as being free of charge and easy

to set up (29). Another popular tool is a wiki, which is an online research community that has multiple authors contribute information to web pages for a general audience. One of the best-known wikis is the collaborative encyclopedia Wikipedia ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)). Additionally, e-Portfolios are becoming increasingly popular as students prepare for graduate school and the work force. This way, prospective employers and schools can browse through student work in an expeditious, cost effective method.

The possibilities of using technology in the classroom are limitless. In “Digital Technologies and Pedagogies” the authors say:

New digital technologies and multimedia are transforming how we teach and learn. They are transforming our classrooms from spaces of delivery to spaces of active inquiry and authorship. New digital media are empowering students to become researchers, storytellers, historians, oral historians, and cultural theorists in their own right. Whether constructing their own life stories or interpreting the life stories of others, the digital format transforms students’ capacity to synthesize, interpret, theorize, and create new cultural and historical knowledge. In this way, digital formats potentially democratize learning and produce critical subjects and authors. (DigiRhet.org 153)

Teachers can play an important role in bridging the social and academic contexts of using technology. Employing new learning methods help motivate and engage students and teachers alike. Furthermore, using technology in the classroom reinforces the notion that we are all a community of learners, sharing and growing together.

### **Issues of Contact Zone and Assessment**

Conflict in the critical classroom is generally anticipated, whether it is with oneself or with others. Students may experience the conflict of grappling with this non-traditional approach to learning. Additionally, the critical teacher might have to defend

this teaching approach compared with other traditional methods in the academy, especially in the area of assessment. This section discusses the issues surrounding interpersonal classroom dynamics and academic assessment of student learning.

### Contact Zone

Handling various clashes within this classroom laboratory makes for more effective real world application. Expectations to dialogue openly about personal and political opinions could cause such angst. It could cause one to become apprehensive and defensive, as no one sets out to become isolated or misunderstood by listeners. Bohm believes people defend their beliefs when they are challenged. He says, “People frequently can’t resist defending them, and they tend to defend them with an emotional charge” (8). For Bohm, conflict may be necessary to achieve understanding. He says:

This emergent friction between contrasting values is at the heart of dialogue, in that it allows the participants to notice the assumptions that are active in the group, including one’s own personal assumptions. Recognizing the power of these assumptions and attending to their “viruslike” nature may lead to a new understanding of the fragmentary and self-destructive nature of many of our thought processes. (xvii)

Through a critical pedagogy, students may realize that much of the friction that ensues in the classroom also exists beyond academia and within their home communities. Methods taught in the classroom could help them negotiate through real problems they encounter.

Mary Louise Pratt wrote “Arts of the Contact Zone” to discuss “the ideas of community that underlie much of the thinking about language, communication, and culture that gets done in the academy” (2). She believes that most people live in what

Benedict Anderson calls “imagined communities.” These are spaces where we *imagine* that others within our communities think, speak, and write the same way we do. We imagine they share the same set of rules that govern us. We feel safe within our imagined communities; however, that is neither the reality of academia nor of the real world.

Roskelly discusses breaking “the circle of sameness” in the classroom “that prevents voices from being heard and ideas being questioned” (*Breaking* xii). She says:

To the extent that students’ lives don’t match those of one another or that of the teacher, or the myth of the student or the classroom activity, the classroom can’t be safe. Too many experiences and opinions and values get shut down or closed out. We lose these students, even if we’re unaware of it. Only when we acknowledge difference and use it can the classroom become what it needs to be, a place of trust where we can together cross from the safe circles of unquestioned assumptions into the wilderness of new ideas and divergent experience and opinion. (*Breaking* xii)

In academia, for example, we imagine that language is “held together by a homogeneous competence or grammar shared identically and equally among all the members,” says Pratt (2). Once we acknowledge this myth and move beyond it to embrace differences, we can then learn to extend our notions of community, thus our worldview.

Participating in dialogic discourse could rupture our hegemonic, imagined spaces and cause us to realize that our classroom community is quite different from what we believed. It consists of people from different life experiences and backgrounds, although they may appear similar on the surface. Mary Louise Pratt would consider the “emotional charge” that Bohm says occurs during dialogue to be part of what she calls *contact zones*. She defines this term as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism,

slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (2).

This social space could be imagined or real, as each of us has a personal lens that we use to make meaning and direct our decisions. Again, a level of trust should be established in the classroom to allow for idea sharing and community building.

Being in a critical classroom filled with contact zones may appear as an overwhelming task. While it is a challenging construct of many dissenting viewpoints, much learning is taking place. Students and teachers are discovering methods to meet at the crossroads of ethnic, social, and cultural differences. Each learns to respect differences and also find common ground. The following excerpt is quoted at length as an example Pratt gave of a class that functioned like a contact zone:

The very nature of the course put ideas and identities on the line. All the students in the class had the experience, for example, of hearing their culture discussed and objectified in ways that horrified them; all the students saw their roots traced back to legacies of both glory and shame; all the students experienced face-to-face the ignorance and incomprehension, and occasionally the hostility, of others. In the absence of community values and the hope of synthesis, it was easy to forget the positives; the fact, for instance, that kinds or marginalization once taken for granted were gone. Virtually every student was having the experience of seeing the world described with him or her in it. Along with rage, incomprehension, and pain there were exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom -- the joys of the contact zone. The sufferings and revelations were, at different moments to be sure, experienced by every student. No one was excluded, no one was safe. (2)

Within this intense class, Pratt and students had what was called as “safe houses.” These are “social and intellectual spaces where groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared understandings temporary protection from legacies of oppression” (5). They are designed as spaces for

“healing and mutual recognition.” These safe houses “construct shared understandings, knowledge, claims on the world that they can then bring into the contact zone.”

“The Souls of Good Folk” allows for contact zones and safe houses within the critical discourse because the general idea is for students to realize that they live in a world of diverse opinions, rather than solely diverse ethnicities. Generally speaking, contact zones exist almost everywhere. Skills employed in this classroom could be applied as negotiation strategies between individuals of different persuasions outside of class. Furthermore, within the prophetic pragmatist framework, the conflict resolution skills learned could help students creatively solve social problems and learn more about themselves in the process.

### Assessment

In *Experience & Education* John Dewey tells us the best way to measure student learning is through their intellectual and moral growth. I adopt this same approach in the prophetic pragmatist classroom. Growth of this capacity is assessed in both traditional and non-traditional methods, like the merger that constitutes the prophetic pragmatism class dynamics. Since this philosophical framework is enacted through the composition classroom, students are assessed on their writing abilities, primarily. Student writing is graded on a progression scale, which I believe is in accordance with the pragmatism philosophy. Therefore, I employ final presentations and also a portfolio style grading method, whereby students have all semester to revise and hone specific writing, speaking, and thinking skills. Essentially, students’ grades reflect their critical literacy abilities and how they manage the complexities of the pedagogy. Again, these critical skills are



determined by the end of the semester during presentations, portfolios, and student reflection letters. However, students receive feedback and assessment throughout the semester by the teacher, their peers, and other sources such as a writing center. Students should always know which areas of their writing and projects that need strengthening and they work constantly to improve assignments for end of semester results.

In *What Does It Mean to be Well Educated?* Alfie Kohn acknowledges that assessing “high-quality instruction” is a bit trickier than traditional assessment models.<sup>18</sup> He believes the most promising models use “exhibitions.” This is when “students reveal their understanding by means of in-depth projects, portfolios of assignments, and other demonstrations – a model pioneered by Ted Sizer, Deborah Meier, and others affiliated with the Coalition of Essential Schools (9). His thoughts of these schools are quoted at length:

The assessments in such schools are based on meaningful standards of excellence, standards that may collectively offer the best answer to our original question simply because to meet those criteria is as good a way as any to show that one is well educated. The Met School focuses on social reasoning, empirical reasoning, quantitative reasoning, communication, and personal qualities (responsibility, capacity for leadership, and self awareness). Meier has emphasized the importance of developing five “habits of mind”: the value of raising questions about *evidence* (“How do we know what we know?”), *point of view* (“Whose perspective does this represent?”), *connections* (“How is this related to that?”), *supposition* (“How might things have been otherwise?”), and *relevance* (“Why is this important?”) (9)

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<sup>18</sup> Kohn includes other references such as the following: *The Power of Their Ideas* by Deborah Meier (about Central Park East Secondary School in NYC), *Rethinking High School* by Harvey Daniels and his colleagues (about Best Practice High School in Chicago), and *One Kid at a Time* by Eliot Levine (about the Met in Providence, Rhode Island).

This intense class requires much engagement from everyone involved, especially the teacher. The prophetic pragmatist teacher should render assessment in the manner that this philosophy dictates – as a progressive approach. Since the teacher works closely with each individual student and group throughout the semester, comments are rendered on each assignment, including research and journal assignments. According to Chris Anson in his essay “On Reflection,” teachers should “develop ways to respond that encourage students’ ideas while pushing them into higher domains of critical reflection.” This should be done in lieu of “simply endorsing students’ journal entries, or writing positive phatic comments (“great idea!” “right,” “wow!” or “interesting observation”) (177). Assistance with basic writing techniques could be offered through a school’s writing center, where available. Similarly, other skills (public speaking, group work, technology) could be outsourced through campus academic centers. Outsourcing additional assistance would tremendously improve the classroom effectiveness. Again, the prophetic pragmatist teacher should show collaboration in teaching methods in the same manner that students are asked to collaborate with each other and with community partners. Integration of many critical skills is needed in this pedagogy. Overall, students have to develop critical reading, speaking, and writing skills to be considered a critical thinker. Likewise, the teacher has to provide critical comments on students’ papers to model the kind of analytical reasoning and explorations they should take in their writing. Critically reflective comments reinforce the critical trajectory of the class.

In the final portfolio, students should be able to make connections between academic coursework and the immediate social, political, and interpersonal experiences

of community-based activities. They should reflect on how these experiences informed their feasible plan to improve social conditions. Students' reflection letters should specifically show how they applied in-class material with contexts beyond the classroom. Overall, student intellectual analysis is assessed in the realm of personal and social consciousness. This critical synthesis would be evident in their journal entries, research, and community projects. Students' experience is assessed. Teachers have to consider how the students changed intellectually, personally, and civically. Therefore, not only are prophetic pragmatist teachers employing a fundamental shift in teaching methods, but the philosophy is reflected in assessing students' grades as well. Students and teachers alike are achieving greater understanding through reflection and hands-on methods of learning.

### **Conclusion: Real World Application of Humanity**

The purpose of a classroom with a prophetic pragmatist framework is to engage students in cultural criticism for social action. Through utilizing different skills such as inquiry, dialogue, and reflection, students could come away having a better understanding of the self and the world. Students should be able to embrace a sense of double consciousness, always looking at himself or herself as others might see them and vice versa. This notion of seeing doubly helps one to cultivate empathy and compassion, for one considers how someone might assess them and it also allows one to think of what it might be like to walk in someone else's shoes. In other words, students should ingratiate themselves in self-reflection for personal evolution. Applying the pragmatism philosophy enables one to grapple with crisis and doubt in meaningful ways. Pragmatism instructs one to suspend or doubt personal beliefs in the presence of others in efforts to understand

different concepts and ideas. Doubt and experience are crucial pragmatic tenets emphasized in this class that promotes education as a philosophy of experience. Students learn the value of inquiry and they realize that truth consists of many small “t’s” and no big “T.” The overall objective of this pedagogy is for students to become a changed empathic and democratic self after much social experience. This class combines cultural criticism with experience to yield change. Cultural criticism is the uncovering and consciousness raising of social beliefs and habits. Experience is the examination process that leads to many small truths. As a result of cultural criticism and experience, change could manifest within the self and within the community. This pedagogy is designed to promote critical thinking skills, rather than have students memorize random disconnected facts about different subjects. In this manner, students would become well-educated because of their reasoning and synthesis abilities. Meier tells us:

There are, in the end, only two main ways human beings learn: by observing others (directly or vicariously) and by trying things out for themselves. Novices learn from experts and from experience. That’s all there is to it. Everything else is in the details. Until we create schools in which the ratio of novices to experts is lower and the opportunities for novices to try out what they see and hear the experts doing are more plentiful, we’ll be wasting much of our time. (181)

This pedagogy is not aimed at training students primarily for corporate purposes. Instead, it teaches students invaluable life skills and encourages inquiry. According to Kohn:

The best sort of schooling is organized around problems, projects, and questions – as opposed to facts, skills, and disciplines. Knowledge is acquired, of course, but in context and for a purpose. The emphasis is not only on depth rather than breadth, but also on discovering ideas rather than on covering a prescribed curriculum. (8)

Although my specific pedagogy in higher education is a seemingly new method, society has reflected a recent shift in consciousness toward more humanitarian practices.

Celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, Bono, and Angelina Jolie have generated much social awareness and have even made philanthropy look chic. But there are many hometown heroes without national recognition that help sustain their communities in equally meaningful ways. Regardless of recognition, each of us should do our part to improve society. We should assume an all-hands-on deck approach to cleaning up our communities and making our neighborhoods safer. For example, if people within a community enhanced the educational system for everyone, then improvement would occur in other areas, like reduced school dropouts, reduced crime, and reduced incarceration rates.

Society progresses through its many collective social movements. Americans have witnessed many revolutions, including its inception. From the freedom of slaves and women's rights to civil unions, America is constantly and eventually evolving. Also evinced during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, it appears that the collective thought right now is centered on equal rights and opportunities for everyone. After experiencing an evasive government, a failing economy, corporate corruption, and rampant homelessness, the American public expects more accountability and transparency. More people seem politically engaged, through the popularity of social networking sites. Especially since the 2008 Presidential Election, there is much social networking for social change. For example, as a measure to recognize World Malaria Day, April 25, actor Ashton Kutcher recently challenged major news network CNN to a Twitter

popularity contest. The first to reach one million Twitter followers would donate one hundred thousand dollars to Malaria No More, a nonprofit organization that provides mosquito nets to families at risk of malaria in sub-Saharan Africa. Although CNN lost the bet, they also donated to the cause, along with other celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Kutcher's wife Demi Moore, Ryan Seacrest, and Larry King. In a video that Kutcher shot from inside a car, he says, "I found it astonishing that one person can actually have as big of a voice as what an entire media company can on Twitter" (qjk.com). This celebrity contest sparked discussions around the globe about malaria in Africa and how mosquito nets help to reduce the number of infected persons. Meier believes:

Change won't happen the way I've been describing if it depends on policymakers, big-name task forces, well-intentioned governors or systems thinkers. Change will take people who remember what otherwise gets lost: that it's not just about building a powerful America, beating out Japan, or even world-class job skills; it's about creating a more powerful citizenry and a more caring one. (184)

Technology has made the global world seem so connected. As the world is connected to the Internet, news and ideas are shared immediately. With historic elections across the world that allow women and minorities equal access, change is a ubiquitous theme. Therefore, a pedagogy of humanity is a much needed, timely offering to reinforce this social movement of change.

Students who participate in a pedagogy of humanity are not engaging in a new phenomenon, although the learning practices might be different. These students are actually becoming better prepared to meet societal needs of solving social problems and promoting justice. A pedagogy of humanity teaches students to care for more than their

own circle of inclusion. It prepares them to not only become successful, but it gives them essential tools to leave a legacy. When these students turn on the television and see CNN Heroes or iReporters, or hear a song like “If Everyone Cared” by Nickelback or “We Are the World” by Michael Jackson, they are able to connect with souls that resemble their own, the souls of good folk, which are people that care enough about the world to make a positive difference.

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