

Anti-Racist Pedagogy -- Art or Propaganda?¹

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INTRODUCTION

Writing in 1928, Alain Locke, the influential philosopher of the Harlem Renaissance, observed that the fundamental question for any anti-racist social agenda was "Art or Propaganda. Which?"² Artists and writers of the movement regarded the Harlem Renaissance not simply as a spontaneous flourishing of African-American creativity but as a critical historical moment to be seized in order to alter the course of American racism. Its social mission, as Locke and many others saw it, was to overturn the prevailing perception of Blacks as inferior to whites. Its effects would be two-fold: fostering pride amongst the Black population and addressing whites from a position of strength. Yet if the anti-racist social agenda of the Harlem Renaissance were to succeed in changing people's minds about race, Locke believed, it could not proceed rhetorically. Art could offer a new social vision; propaganda would only exacerbate the polarization of Black and white positions.

The problem with propaganda, he argued, is that it cannot reframe the terms of the debate. To try to discredit racism is already to accord racist arguments a presumptive legitimacy. Thus, the major objection to propaganda,

apart from its besetting sin of monotony and disproportion, is that it perpetuates the position of group inferiority even in crying out against it. For it...speaks under the shadow of a dominant majority whom it harangues, cajoles, threatens, or supplicates. It is too extroverted for balance or poise or inner dignity and self-respect.³

Propaganda, in Locke's view, is inevitably either defensive or strident, if not both. By contrast, art "is rooted in self-expression and whether naive or sophisticated is self-contained."⁴ Creating its own terms for understanding and appreciation, art allows us to sidestep the received, conventional terms of meaning, and to take up possibilities presented to us within the "self-contained" realm of the individual work. While art could not "completely accomplish" the transformation needed to realign Black and white relations in American society, Locke believed that it could "lead the way."⁵

Contemporary debates regarding anti-racist education take up a number of the themes that Locke considers in his arguments on behalf of art versus propaganda. To many critics, anti-racist pedagogy has all the earmarks of propaganda. Certainly the popular media portray anti-racist and other progressive pedagogies as extremist, humorless, strident, and biased. The catch phrase "politically correct" has become shorthand for an ideologically mandated equality that violates common sense, a superficial rhetoric thrust upon a sensible populace by out-of-touch academics with a personal ax to grind. To its advocates, on the other hand, anti-oppressive pedagogy represents an important chance to help marginalized students flourish and to engage privileged students in knowledge-seeking that sets aside assumptions allowing them to condescend to, or dismiss, alternative perspectives.

In what follows, I propose to examine Locke's art/propaganda framework with regard to its implications for latter-day efforts to help end white/Black racism through public education. While anti-racist pedagogy is specifically tied to schooling, it shares in some of the grand ambitions of the Harlem Renaissance with regard to the possibility of fostering genuinely egalitarian appreciation and conversation between Black and white Americans. Commentators of the period differed as to

whether African-American artists should make a point of depicting Blacks in a positive light, but clearly the movement was attuned to educational considerations -- projecting "best foot forward" images of contemporary Black Americans, in the case of James Van Der Zee, for example, and showcasing African and African-American culture and heritage, in the case of Aaron Douglas, Jacob Lawrence, and Augusta Savage, among many others. For Locke, though, the educational value of the movement consisted, above all, in its capacity to represent blackness without reference to the terms set by a racist society. Disregarding conventional perceptions and assumptions, art could offer an objective look at Black experience, physiognomy, and heritage.⁶ Rather than offering piecemeal correctives to error, it would set forth a wholly fresh vision of the race.

Key to Locke's notion of art as education is its avoidance of argumentation. For him, the problem posed by propaganda is not that it serves a particular agenda -- obviously, he meant for art to serve a distinct social, political, and intellectual agenda. The problem with propaganda, as he saw it, is that it is reactive, and thus reliant upon the very assumptions it is intended to displace. Unlike the more familiar opposition between propaganda and common sense or between propaganda and open inquiry, Locke's art/propaganda dichotomy suggests that the most important obstacle to social understanding may be a form of literal-mindedness: accepting our starting points as a given and seeking change through incremental adjustments. In effect, then, Locke rejects the kind of approach to promoting interracial understanding taken by liberal education. In the traditional liberal arts model, the path to a freer understanding is through careful analysis, reasoned argumentation, and dialogue. But from Locke's perspective, that approach reintroduces at every turn the very assumptions that preclude a transformed understanding. Particularly in the case of Black/white relations, what is called for is a reorientation in our thinking rather than the correction of each and every error in existing understandings. As a pragmatist, Locke saw change not in terms of incremental improvement but in terms of shifts: adopting new positions and entering into new relations.

The question I wish to consider is the extent to which Locke's art/propaganda framework is useful for categorizing the workings of an anti-racist pedagogy. I argue that Locke's distinction between art and propaganda offers a way to frame anti-racist pedagogy in terms other than those of liberal education, while still embracing democratic relations and intellectual understanding as central goals of education. As a tool, it serves a crucial purpose in highlighting the need for anti-racist education to step outside the premises of racism. Because Locke's dichotomy lends itself to an essentialized conception both of race and of truth, however, it falls short of the emergent approach to pedagogy called for by an anti-racist (as opposed to anti-prejudice) agenda for education. Following Locke, I argue for an aesthetic metaphor for anti-racist education, but in order to address some of the limitations of Locke's art/propaganda dualism for a conception of anti-racist pedagogy, I emphasize performance over presentation.⁷

PEDAGOGICAL PROPAGANDA

If we accept Locke's definition of propaganda as partisan -- as "one-sided and often pre-judging"⁸ -- then it seems pretty clear that propaganda is incompatible with democratic education. Whether propaganda is concerned with urging pre-approved truths on the reader (or viewer), taking shortcuts to belief, or correcting errors and imbalances, it starts from an established perspective and seeks to convert others to that perspective. The success of propaganda consists not in persuading others of the correctness of any particular claim, but rather in persuading them of the essential rightness of the stance as a whole; implicitly or explicitly, the reader or viewer is invited to embrace the one position and to reject the other. Indeed, it may be that propaganda cannot succeed on any terms other than wholesale acceptance and rejection. Certainly, its most common use is in simplistic dichotomies, whether in reference to competing brands of tissue paper, candidates for office, or social issues such as abortion and gun control. However, there are important distinctions to be made between propaganda in its crude form, as indoctrination, and propaganda in Locke's sense of *reactive*

argumentation and correction. It is with propaganda in the latter sense that I shall chiefly be concerned.

Propaganda as Indoctrination. The cruder forms of propaganda fail as education because they fail to teach us how to respond discriminately, do not even raise the question as to whether judgment ought to be reserved, but urge foreclosure on the basis of ready-to-hand, knock-down arguments. Yet what differentiates crude propaganda from education is not the assumption of predetermined answers -- set answers being far from rare in education, whether in the form of addition sums, literary symbols, or laboratory outcomes -- so much as discouragement from careful thinking. Whereas education imposes process or procedure upon our responses, requiring us to submit them to the discipline of formal organization, propaganda frames understanding *for* us and then invites us to regard it as unframed, as obvious: invites us to take it at face value.² Superficially, it resembles argumentation. Skeptics are invited to compare opposing positions and to "see for themselves" whether this cola isn't hands-down the winner or whether the candidate of the moment doesn't have in bucketsful all the virtues that the incumbent so sorely lacks. Unlike argumentation, though, crude propaganda does not invite further, more probing inquiry, does not demand any real work on the part of the audience. The work has been done in advance; all the lucky sideliner has to do now is to scan the results and draw the inevitable conclusions.

If anti-racist pedagogy involved suppressing students' thinking about racial complexities and contradictions in order to enforce wholesale acceptance of the teacher's perspective, then anti-racism would be a form of indoctrination, as its loudest, most self-righteous critics charge. Of course, anti-racist pedagogy does not normally, let alone inherently, fit such a description. Nevertheless, to some of its critics, anti-oppressive pedagogy is propaganda, pure and simple. Pedagogy that identifies traditional knowledge as andro-, hetero-, or Eurocentric, for example, is said to substitute an anti-male, anti-straight, or anti-white (or, more simply, anti-American) "approved" version of history or literature (or whatever), for the hard-won, objective standards that define Western knowledge. From this perspective, the claims made on behalf of anti-racist or anti-sexist canons and pedagogy are unwarranted and can be dismissed as mere wishful "me-tooism." Indeed, the hollowness of the claims is said to be evidenced by their facile substitution of what their proponents would like everyone to believe for what "ordinary people" and "experts" actually do believe. The only warrant offered for such claims, critics contend, is their political correctness -- that is, their agreement with a particular ideological agenda. And the only reason that they have anyone's attention, given their transparent self-servingness, is that a powerful coterie of academic radicals has abused the privilege of the classroom to indoctrinate vulnerable college students with what, to anyone else, are patent untruths.

This, of course, is the Limbaugh/D'Souza/Buckley/*Time/Newsweek/New York Times Book Review* stance towards anti-oppressive pedagogy,¹⁰ and I mention it, in part, because it is so influential and, in part, because it needs to be differentiated from more careful, substantive criticisms of progressive pedagogy. The degree to which this caricature of progressive pedagogy and discourse has succeeded in passing itself off as sensible is, I think, an indication of the degree to which issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality are already polarized -- and thus, perhaps, an indication of the unlikelihood of propaganda having much to say to its adherents. The portrayal of progressive pedagogy and cultural theory as grotesquely exaggerating differences and recklessly promoting divisiveness has managed to set the terms for virtually any mass media discussion of the issues. To take perhaps the most familiar example of such a portrayal, a fair number of people seem prepared to believe that "feminist political correctness," for example, *both* defines all feminism *and* is attributable to an extremist fringe group of man-hating, arms-bearing, pinko-Communist, bra-burning, impossibly ugly women bent on policing the rest of society. These people, we are solemnly warned, do not represent the majority of American women. (No doubt feminists have overestimated their number.) Such images of political correctness policing ought to be absurd, yet it is not uncommon for them to be treated as the gravest of the intellectual threats facing a democracy. The Commie-collage imagery attributed to

radical anti-racists is generally less outrageous than that used to characterize feminists, but probably this is a function of concern about *sounding* racist, and not of a milder degree of hostility.

The willingness to charge feminists, anti-racists and other progressives with the kind of nostalgic, Cold-War, pormanteau invective that used to be reserved for Communists suggests that the hostility of those making the charges is not susceptible to intelligent discussion. Indeed, the accusations of political correctness leveled against progressive pedagogies are of concern mainly because they indicate the climate of debate (using the term loosely) to which present-day anti-racist education is addressed. White privileges are taken for granted or even defended in the name of righteousness; arguments on behalf of minority interests, on the other hand, are treated either as a profound threat to democracy or as mere faddishness. Ironically, the trivialization and misrepresentation characteristic of such media treatments are themselves propagandist, dismissive in advance of any arguments that would challenge long-standing privileges.

Propaganda as Argumentation. The question as to whether anti-racist pedagogy constitutes propaganda in the sense of indoctrination is not my central concern, however. Not only are the charges themselves melodramatic rather than substantive, but the question assumes the kind of enlightenment opposition between propaganda and truth that I am looking to avoid. My primary concern is with propaganda in an almost academic sense -- as reaction or correction. Such propaganda need not be indiscriminating -- in fact, it may be exquisitely, minutely discriminating, concerned with the most subtle nuances of understanding. Many well-intentioned corrections to textbooks are propagandist in this sense, insofar as they seek to adjust imbalances, correct misperceptions, increase minority representation, or dispel myths. The trouble with such educational strategies, as Locke points out, is that they invoke the very assumptions they are intended to discredit. Because they take the form of amendments to an otherwise fixed framework, the effect is likely to appear disproportionate, even monstrous. If we assume whiteness as the norm, any appeal to specifically Black issues, historical figures, or points of view will leap out as a radical departure from the supposedly neutral standards that govern the basic textbook narrative.

At least three educational perspectives suggest that anti-racist pedagogy is propagandist in Locke's sense of the term. From one perspective, an anti-racist approach seems to exaggerate or otherwise distort the problems that racism poses for knowledge in a democracy. Since liberal education seeks to dismantle all forms of bias by directing attention outward -- towards the general and the universal, and away from the merely idiosyncratic -- knowledge or value claims explicitly referenced to a minority group or, indeed, any identifiable group (with the curious exception of children) are considered problematic because they are particularistic. Essentially, the objection here is that the solution to racism is the same as that which applies to all forms of bias -- namely, the application of more democracy. Anti-racist pedagogies and curricula, however admirable in intent, demand a disproportionate emphasis on race, whereas all forms of bias are equally abhorrent. As a result, such pedagogies work against the abstract, neutral principles that govern democracy and thereby undercut the possibility of a truly colorblind society. The appropriate solution, from the perspective of liberal education, is not to abandon the ideal of a universal education but to apply it more rigorously.

A second, related objection is that anti-anything approaches to education start off on the wrong foot. The point is not only that such approaches adopt a negative tone (although that may be a problem too), but that, as Locke argued, they have no independent vision of the good -- that they are defined by what is wrong with education as it stands and not by what education ought to look like. From the perspective of Afrocentrism, anti-racist pedagogy is reactive. What is needed is race-centered education of a kind that takes up issues of race in the context of a shared cultural heritage or a shared economic future rather than a shared political problem. Whereas defining education in terms of social problems means adopting a deficit-remediation model, and may mean assuming some universal standard that applies equally to Blacks and whites, defining education in terms of an independent set of standards allows Blacks to claim an authentic education (whether "authenticity"

is constructed in essentialist or emergent terms). Thus, it avoids the parasitic character of propaganda.

The third objection that might be raised against anti-racist pedagogy is that it frames educational goals in definite political terms and thus answers, at the outset, the questions that education ought to enable us to address: "What is to count as fair? as appropriate? as democratic?" From a Deweyan perspective, the meaning of democracy is a matter of inquiry, experimentation, and reflection, and the role of education is to prepare us to reconsider assumptions and rules of thumb that have served us well in the past but that may prove inadequate in the future. Given that "anti-racism" assumes a conception of racism tied to existing circumstances, anti-racist pedagogy offers neither a visionary nor an emergent project. In Locke's terms, it is more akin to propaganda than to art. To qualify as "art," anti-racist pedagogy would need to begin by re-envisioning, if not actually changing, the relations that shape our values and assumptions regarding race.

Up to a point, I think, all three of these objections can be answered. The appeal to colorblindness as a democratic and pluralistic value, for example, can be shown to be a refusal of knowledge rather than a generous indifference towards racial categories. Indeed, colorblindness is normally associated with whites specifically because a willingness to disregard race -- to treat others *as if* race did not matter -- is the prerogative of those in a position to decide whether it does or not. (Performing in the 1960s, Dick Gregory would gradually warm up his white audiences with self-mocking humor; then, once he had them comfortable with their own comfort, he would challenge them: "Wouldn't it be a hell of a thing if all this was burnt cork and you people were being tolerant for nothing?")¹¹ Despite its recognized status as abstract principle, colorblindness is a virtue parasitic upon prejudice.¹² From Locke's perspective, referring race questions to abstract principles like colorblindness begs the question of how apparently universal principles may already assume whiteness as their framework.

The second objection is less readily answered, for presumably education ought to refer to a vision of the good and not serve as a mere corrective to the problematic. Yet appealing to an "independent standard" of the good on the grounds that education ought to *confine* itself to the realization of goodness and refuse to consort with the corrupt is, quite literally, utopian. As Lisa Delpit has pointed out (in a somewhat different connection), well-meaning teachers who undertake an experience-based (read: "authentic") approach to literacy education for African-American students deny them access to the language and codes of power no less than overtly racist teachers might, who refused to teach them on other grounds.¹³ The appeal to "purity" and authenticity, in other words, may address one dimension of racism but ignore others. Since its causes and effects include (but are by no means restricted to) economic relations, moral frameworks, ideological rationalizations, and white ignorance, racism cannot be eliminated through any single, purifying solution.

Finally, the argument that "anti-racism" is a political category to be decided upon -- an emergent standard and not a fixed point of reference -- does raise an important challenge to Locke's notion of art as capable in itself of supplying (anti-racist) truth. Yet to use the argument to discredit the very concept of a pedagogy referenced to political concerns would be to undercut the appeal to an emergent approach to democratic education. Power relations are woven into the fabric of our lives, goals, and values; it isn't possible *not* to start with politics. Rather than conceiving of an anti-racist pedagogy as a blueprint for righteous teaching, we might think of it as one of the projects *of* teaching. As Dewey wrote in 1937,

Democracy...means a way of living together in which mutual and free consultation rule instead of force,...a social order in which all the things that make for friendship, beauty, and knowledge are cherished....These things at least give a point of departure for the filling in of the democratic idea and aim as a frame of reference. If a sufficient number of educators devote themselves to...find[ing] the answers to the concrete questions which the idea and aim put to us, I believe that the question of the relation of the schools to direction of social change will cease to be a question, and will become a moving answer in action.¹⁴

One of the concrete questions that democracy puts to us today is that of how to overcome our racism -- a question pedagogy cannot afford to ignore.

Thus far, I have argued that anti-racist pedagogy is not inherently propagandist. Of course, this is not at all to say that it will not be, in particular cases. Insofar as education is conceived in terms of texts and curricula that, in and of themselves, correct racist attitudes and assumptions (setting aside any question of interests or power), it is conceived as a form of propaganda. But of course texts and curricula are not magical repositories of anti-racism that can, of themselves, transform racist sentiments, ideology, or structural relations. The role that education can play in addressing racism lies less in restricting ourselves to particular texts, methods, or lessons, I believe, than in developing a pedagogy that actively takes up race relations as a key element of inquiry. Like art, pedagogy can work to create spaces in which the ordinary, everyday meanings we give to experience are problematized, revisited as if new and anything but self-evident. In such spaces, those party to the project -- artist, audience, teacher, students -- learn how to see and how to respond to previously unimagined possibilities.

ART AS EDUCATION/EDUCATION AS ART

Whereas propaganda, in Locke's formulation, refers to an emendatory or editing impulse, art refers to the development of new perspectives. The importance of art lies in its refusal to read social convention literally. As a metaphor for anti-racist education, it means, in part, problematizing the supposedly neutral standards that privilege whiteness, and, in part, reconceiving both whiteness and Blackness. In invoking art as the *opposite* of propaganda, though, Locke grants too much to art. By holding on to Enlightenment assumptions about truth, Locke proposes a misleading role for art as somehow apolitical in contrast to propaganda as inherently ideological.

The romantic strain in Locke's conception of art is revealed in his belief that "the art of the people," specifically peoples of African ancestry, is "a tap root of vigorous, flourishing living."¹⁵ Such art, he believed, is the source of a beauty that reveals truth, for unlike academic art, it has not been subjected to "generations of the inbreeding of style and idiom,"¹⁶ nor lost the capacity to see objectively.

The Negro physiognomy must be freshly and objectively conceived on its own patterns if it is ever to be seriously and importantly interpreted. Art must discover and reveal the beauty which prejudice and caricature have overlaid. And all vital art discovers beauty and opens our eyes to that which previously we could not see.¹⁷

Art, Locke believed, offered a way to break with old stereotypes and invent new forms, while remaining true to "some sort of characteristic idiom,"¹⁸ is a distinctive heritage and expressive style. Pragmatist that he was, he saw art as a way to come to experience both with a fresh eye and with the funded experience (to borrow a Deweyan term) of a rich ancestral legacy.¹⁹

But Locke's account differs from that of Dewey in emphasizing the autonomy of feeling; for Locke, feeling has a distinctive claim to value and truth. Critiquing Dewey's "logico-experimental" approach to inquiry, Locke observed that truth is not only "the correct anticipation of experience," but may be as well

the sustaining of an attitude, the satisfaction of a way of feeling, the corroboration of a value. To the poet, beauty is truth; to the religious devotee, God is truth; to the enthused moralist, what ought-to-be overtops factual reality.²⁰

Art allows for the perception of truths beyond the perceived facts, and in Locke's view therefore offers a representation of experience at once more objective, more inclusive, and more stirring than conventional, everyday language could allow for. Art, in short, can be "a profound and galvanizing influence,"²¹ at once symbol of and vehicle for the new.

The power of art to teach, for Locke, seems to be in part a matter of teaching how to see, how to respond, and how to appreciate. Whereas in literal forms of communication meanings are either expository or self-evident, framed in terms of publicly shared conventions and standards, art demands a response appropriate to its own rhythms, traditions, juxtapositions, and medium. The artist, framing experience in fresh ways, teaches the reader or viewer to see possibilities, relations, and beauty previously not apparent. By refusing literalness, the artist requires the audience to work at responding to his or her vision. And by setting aside conventional frameworks of meaning, the artist exposes them *as* conventions: as the means by which a given society has historically and institutionally made sense of experience. Yet for Locke, the artist seems to be less a visionary than a naturalist -- someone who observes nature directly, objectively, on its own terms. While he is particularly drawn to the possibilities of abstract art, and clearly does not think of objectivity in terms of anything like a transcription of reality, he does regard art as representing experience in more direct, expressive ways than are possible through everyday language. And, of course, this is particularly true for African Americans, for whom the prejudicial imagery and orderings of what we call common sense serve as a constant source of misrepresentation.

The difficulty with Locke's conception of art is that it appears to have an essentialist (though also pluralist) conception of beauty and truth, as if what art does is to strip away the sedimented accumulation of prejudice, convention, and convenient stereotypes, thereby revealing the underlying experience. That he assumes this view of art seems clear to me both from what he says about the triumph of beauty and truth, and from his characterization of art as the opposite of propaganda. On this view, propaganda is partial, reactive, and political in the sense of partisan. Art, by contrast, is whole, active, authentic, and implicitly above politics.

As I see it, though, the advantage that art offers over propaganda is not that one is political and the other objective. The art/propaganda dichotomy assumes that art simply expresses experience or a vision, without political overtones; by contrast, propaganda is instrumental and reduces vision to editing. But art, like its counterpart in pedagogy, involves selecting from and reworking experience -- framing it for an audience. Since the experience of Blackness and whiteness in our society is inherently political, art concerned with race cannot escape politics. Yet because art teaches us new ways to respond, it liberates us from reliance upon the fixed premises of racism. It takes us up where we are but at the same time shifts us, introducing us into new and surprising relations. No longer grounded in the familiar, we begin to construct fresh understandings, and in the process reconstruct ourselves as well.

I agree with Locke, then, that anti-racist education must create some working space outside of the existing discourses of racism, but disagree with him regarding the kind of space it can be. I see it not as a politics-free zone in which political prejudices are to be held at bay so that racial innocence can be restored or preserved, but rather as a space reserved for experimentation, for play, and for performance. Much as we regard the theater as a site for the creation of new and absorbing narratives, rather than as the representation of what is already known, I believe that the classroom can be a site for taking up possibilities in order to live with them. I say "live *with* them" in order to focus on the distinction between aesthetic experience and unexamined experience. We *live* certain possibilities without necessarily realizing them as only possibilities and not necessities. Art, performance, and pedagogy are ways of framing possibilities so that they may be taken up in embodied experience and yet not be treated as finalities.

What would this mean for a specific classroom undertaking -- say, an inquiry into the debate between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois? It might mean framing the debate as a specific genre within the performance tradition so that particular moves would be identifiable as "playing the game" or "advancing the narrative." What counts as meaningful and persuasive would then be understood in light of the *kind* of public performance that the debate constitutes, including its audiences over time. One way to accomplish that framing would be to enter the debate from an altogether different perspective -- that offered by Barbara Fields and James Anderson, for example,

or by Toni Morrison or Carter G. Woodson. Taking up the debate in a performance vein also would mean treating each of the sides of the argument as opening up possibilities, rather than as describing "realistic" or "rational" positions. Thus, one would not simply read the positions literally and argue, for example, "Washington was being realistic; there was a very real danger of lynching at the time," or, alternatively, "I agree with Du Bois. The Constitution provides us with our rights; no one is required to earn them." Instead, the classroom project would involve understanding, appreciating, and critiquing each of the positions as a complex move in the attempt to shape race relations against a particular historical backdrop. Developing such an understanding might take any number of directions, but it could not be referred simply to abstract principles or to individuals' experience. Instead, it would involve *creating* an experience in which the elements of the debate were a point of departure rather than themselves setting the limits of the educational experience.

CONCLUSION

If anti-racist education is to change rather than refine the ways that racism shapes thought and action, it cannot simply react to racist premises. Yet neither can it treat the classroom as an innocent space in which to avoid racism, as if anti-racist education consisted in "not giving children ideas," rather like some versions of sex education.²² Instead, it will need to create performative spaces in which the commonplaces of racism can be unsettled -- in which racism can be addressed as a framing of meaning rather than as natural -- while, at the same, time alternative possibilities are played out within the performative constraints of the classroom. In this sense, anti-racist pedagogy is both personal and political. Adrienne Rich speaks to the need to become the kind of person who can read a poem;²³ anti-racist pedagogy asks us to become the kind of persons who can respond to as-yet-unimagined racial possibilities. And, if we regard politics, at its best, as a vital engagement over how to structure the possibility for democratic relations, anti-racist pedagogy offers a tool for rethinking what it means to be a democracy.²⁴

1. The arguments made in the paper apply to many forms of racism. However, because racism cannot be understood as a generic category any more than sexism or many other forms of discrimination and oppression can, the discussion here focuses on one dimension of race issues -- namely, those concerning whites and African Americans. If the issues were similarly elaborated for other racial minorities, I believe that many parallels would become evident; however, the issues would not be identical. For example, bilingualism is an issue for Hispanics, but not for African Americans, and Native Americans who succeed in mainstream schools face a conflict between traditional and professional knowledge, whereas more assimilated minority groups usually do not.

2. Alain Locke, "Art or Propaganda?" in *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Nathan Irvin Huggins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 312. Originally published in *Harlem* 1 (November 1928): 12–13. Locke discusses parallel themes in connection with adult education in his essay, "Negro Needs as Adult Education Opportunities," in *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond*, ed. Leonard Harris (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 254–61. (See especially 256–59.) The latter essay was first delivered as a speech in 1938.

3. Locke, "Art or Propaganda?" 312.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 313.

6. Ironically, Locke's educational agenda imposed its own set of social conventions on Black artistic endeavors. As Cornel West has observed, many of the Harlem Renaissance artists and intellectuals -- Locke in particular -- sought recognition for the "New Negro." What this meant, in practice, was that art was not supposed to step outside all social convention but was to conform to new, Black, middle-class conventions instead of white, racist conventions. Locke's appeal to art as offering a new perspective on race relations specifically selects out supposedly rawer, more emotional Black art forms (such as jazz and preaching) in favor of refined art forms celebrating the "New Negro." See Cornel West, "Horace Pippin's Challenge to Art Criticism," in *I Tell My Heart: The Art of Horace Pippin*, ed. Judith E. Stein (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts/New York: Universe, 1993), 50–51. Although this irony need not undercut Locke's basic argument, it does indicate that the appeal to an educational agenda problematizes the claims made for artistic freethinking.

7. West's argument suggests that Locke conceives of art as a kind of disciplining of primitive energies. Among the art forms that West says Locke omits from consideration are those most closely associated with performance: dance, jazz, blues, preaching, and sports. See West, "Horace Pippin's Challenge," 50–51.
8. Locke, "Art or Propaganda?" 313.
9. Betty Bardige has raised the important question of whether education that emphasizes distancing does not at times serve to suppress humanitarian, "face-value" responses, and I think she may be right -- indeed, I would press the issue even further than she does. But the point here is not whether face-value responses ought to be encouraged in education; rather, it is that education cannot urge that pre-framed interpretations be taken as self-evident. On face-value responsiveness, see Betty Bardige, "Things So Finely Human: Moral Sensibilities at Risk in Adolescence," in *Mapping the Moral Domain*, ed. Carol Gilligan, Janie Victoria Ward, and Jill McLean Taylor, with Betty Bardige (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 87–110.
10. Despite occasionally including liberal and leftist voices, the mainstream media usually takes a casually, even gratuitously dismissive stance towards politicized minorities. *The New York Times Book Review*, for example, periodically erupts into what we might call the "no thanks to" approach, as in "No thanks to feminism, poet X is now recognized as one of the great writers of this century." Limbaugh, by contrast, favors the full-scale kangaroo-court indictment over the piddling taint of the discreet intellectual snub.
11. See Mel Watkins, *On the Real Side: Laughing, Lying, and Signifying -- The Underground Tradition of African-American Humor that Transformed American Culture, from Slavery to Richard Pryor* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 495–96.
12. Ironically, the prejudice to which this refers is often a function of the same universalist orientation that decries "racial difference talk" as divisive, for it is within universalist orientations that members of minority groups such as Blacks and women are likely to be dismissed as inherently particularistic in their outlook and therefore unable to grasp matters in their global character. "Colorblindness," "gender blindness" and other forms of voluntary ignorance are attempts to correct for such condescensions with an appeal to the metaphorical blindness of justice. Colorblindness treats race as if it did not matter: the appeal is to an ideal in which color ought not to matter -- a world in which color is not a difference that makes a difference. In a society in which degrading assumptions are routinely attached to racial identifications and in which designations such as "greatest Black artist of the twentieth century" or "foremost African-American novelist" mean something necessarily *less* than "greatest artist of the twentieth century" or "foremost American novelist," it is an understandably attractive ideal. However, its value is contingent upon the assumption that recognizing racial differences is inherently a question of stereotyping and hierarchical orderings.
13. Lisa D. Delpit, "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children," *Harvard Educational Review* 58, no. 3 (August 1988): 280–98. This example also speaks to the specificity of race issues. For African Americans, access to the culture of power is usually assumed to be desirable. By contrast, for those Native Americans torn between a traditional life on the reservation and a "successful career" as measured by white standards, access to the culture of power is itself a problem.
14. John Dewey, "Education and Social Change," in *The Later Works, 1925–1953*, series ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 11, (1935–1937), ed. Kathleen E. Poulos et al. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 417. Originally published in *Social Frontier* 3 (May 1937): 235–38.
15. Locke, "Art or Propaganda?" 313.
16. Alain Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," in *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Arno Press and the *New York Times*, 1968 [1925]), 258.
17. *Ibid.*, 264.
18. *Ibid.*, 267.
19. There are notable resonances between Locke's pragmatism and that of both James and Dewey, although Locke explicitly distances himself from both. See especially John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, in *The Later Works, 1925–1953*, series ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 10, (1934), ed. Harriet Furst Simon (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987). Locke's anthology, *The New Negro*, was published nine years earlier.
20. Alain Locke, "Values and Imperatives," in *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond*, ed. Leonard Harris (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 37. The essay first appeared in 1935.
21. Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," 256.
22. Indeed, it is noteworthy that so much of anti-racist pedagogy assumes that the audience is children. Locke remarks that during Reconstruction, "Negro education began...with adult education," and it seems to me that this is where white

education about racism must also begin. See "Negro Needs as Adult Education Opportunities," 256.

23. See Adrienne Rich, *What Is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993).

24. I am indebted to Frank Margonis and Ivan Van Laningham for their careful readings of and thoughtful responses to this paper.

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