I Brought Him Here to Be My Friend

Hope, DuBois & Friendship in Historically Black Education

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"I brought him here to be my friend and my companion."[1]

-John Hope

INTRODUCTION

PHILOSOPHICALLY PIVOTING IN A PANDEMIC

It is an understatement to suggest that the 2020 COVID-19 shutdown was an existential crisis of epic proportion. The mysterious illness first identified in Wuhan, China traveled across the globe in the short span of three months—an eerie reminder of our interconnectedness as a global community. As the cases began to rise, travel was restricted, businesses were shut down, sporting seasons were canceled, schools were closed, and college students were sent home in the middle of the spring semester. The pressures of grief, overwork, and isolation led to mental health crises as families juggled the weight of work, home, and the loss of social life. The shutdown was a struggle for everyone, but students and teachers faced a particular set of challenges. Although most schools switched to remote learning models, the loss of leisure, play, and daily interactions tested the limits of our ability to learn without human touch.

As the reality shock began to settle after the first few weeks, *pivoting in a pandemic* became a buzz phrase to encourage businesses to embrace accelerated innovation to maintain productivity and success. The shutdown required more than quickly adapting to new norms and platforms. We realized the importance of human touch, relationships, and belonging in ways that we took for granted before the pandemic. A year without cafes, libraries, bookstores, houses of worship, parks, and schools inspired a new appreciation for friendship. *What might a year without the school rituals and routines of gathering teach us about the role of*

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION | Winston Thompson, editor

friendship in education? How might we 'philosophically pivot' as researchers to tell a different story about the ethics of community in institutional life rather than reiterating and instigating historic feuds?

PHILOSOPHICALLY PIVOTING IN THE PANDEMIC

This reflection on the concept of friendship sprung up as an offshoot of my dissertation research during the COVID-19 shutdown. I originally planned to travel to Morehouse College over the course of an academic year to observe ceremonies as case study on the role of rituals in historically Black education. All the annual events I intended to observe, including commencement, homecoming, and New Student Orientation were cancelled for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year and for the following year as well. I could not stall on my research by waiting for ceremonies to resume; I had to *pivot* like everyone else and find a new way to continue my research while sheltered at home. With travel restricted and libraries closed, the digital archives of the Atlanta University Center Library became the primary source of my research. Combing through the Maroon Tiger—Morehouse College's student run newspaper dating back to 1898—offered a new perspective on institutional life through the eyes of students: an alternative vantage point from most historical narratives on the institution.

While tracking the history of rituals at the Morehouse, I discovered that one of the college's oldest rituals is an annual memorial service in honor of its first African American president, John Hope, who died in 1936. Although he has faded from public memory, Hope is credited for defining the spirit of high ideals and artful living at Morehouse by instilling lessons on excellence, leisure, and the importance of balanced life. In his biography, *The Story of John Hope*, Torrence Story provides an intimate narrative on the place of presence and personality in educational leadership. At the time of his passing in 1936, Hope was most remembered for his ability to maintain intimate personal relationships with "the humblest men, women, and child[ren], and neglecting no touch that would give them a fuller life."[2] Yet, as Story writes, "his most intimate and enduring friendship" was the one he shared with W.E.B. DuBois.[3] Hope and

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DuBois shared a deep friendship for nearly forty years as they worked together to build a Black liberal education in Atlanta. Their friendship, formed around a shared commitment, was challenged by diverging politics and fortified through a deep love for each other.

It is my contention that Hope's legacy was lost in the crossfires of the debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, which has long overshadowed the history of Black education. Their disagreement on the aims of education has left little room to explore the artful aspects of Black institutional life, such as belonging, meaning, joy, and hope. The weight of a year of school closures and researching from home during the shutdown forced me to more existential questions. I began to wonder about the aspects of schooling missed the most. What might the longing for interaction, touch, and belonging teach us about the essence of school life? The theme of friendship became more apparent as I continued to read the stories of these two early architects of Black liberal education; men whose visions and sacrifices birthed the largest consortia of Black colleges and universities in the country. *Why is this story missing from the narrative on historically Black education?* To be sure, the debate between DuBois and Booker T. Washington is well known, but what might we learn by telling a story of friendship?

In no way do I seek to minimize the importance of their disagreement; however, I want to suggest that it is time that we honor their contributions to the philosophy of education by allowing them to stand on their own, devoid of comparisons. In other words, this work attempts to unlock the canon to include a story of friendship. This contribution to the field helps us to look beyond the deficit-laden research that continues to focus on shortcomings, challenges, and disfunctions, to appreciate the myriad of ways Black colleges continue to breathe life and hope into students through an ensouling experience marked by meaning, hope, and love. It is my hope that this work invites philosophers and practitioners of education to approach this season of homecomings after the year of the pandemic with a deeper appreciation for the ensouling and artful elements of school life. By exploring the Hope and DuBois friendship we can break new ground for a new conversation on the one that speaks to beautiful,

affirming, and ensouling aspects of historically Black education.

HOPE & DUBOIS – A STORY OF FRIENDSHIP

FORGING THE FRIENDSHIP: THE NIAGARA MOVEMENT MEETING (1906)

John Hope was a *race* man, an honor given to one who was committed to the work of uplifting the Black community through education, civic, or religious engagement. Students and colleagues considered him the standard bearer: the embodiment of pride, courage, and high ideals. Generations of students, like Buck and Molly Franklin, admired him so much that they named their son, John Hope Franklin, in his honor.[4] He was the definition of power and ideal for many students and colleagues alike who were inspired by his dogged work ethic and unwavering commitment to excellence and social justice. Hope rose to prominence when he became the first Black president of Atlanta Baptist College (later renamed Morehouse) in 1906. Hope grew up in Augusta, Georgia surrounded by many of its founding teachers. Prior to his leadership, Black colleges were primarily governed by northern missionary societies and southern white philanthropists. The ascension of a Black president ushered in a new chapter in the history of Black education. Hope brought a new energy and pride to the campus by introducing Black faculty to serve notice to the world that Black people could lead their own institutions.

In August 1906, John Hope made the bold decision to attend the Niagara Movement Meeting, organized by W.E.B. DuBois at Storer College in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, on the One Hundredth Birthday Anniversary of abolitionist John Brown. By attending, Hope made a bold statement by standing alongside other race men committed to continuing the legacy of the late abolitionists through their work in education, civics, and law.[5] The Niagarites made a vow to sacrifice money, prestige, and life itself for the cause of racial uplift: "We reconsecrate ourselves, our honor, our property to the final emancipation of the race which John Brown died to make free."[6] In addition to working to secure voting rights and demanding the abolition of discrimination in public accommodation, the group was committed to *real education* for Black children.

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The manifesto reads:

> Education is the development of power and ideal. We want our children trained as intelligent human beings should be, and we will fight for all time against any proposal to educate Black boys and girls simply as servants and underlings, or simply for the use of other people. They have a right to know, to think, to aspire.[7]

Although the manifesto was published as "An Address to the Country," it also served as a pact that forged lifelong friendships grounded in a vision towards the freedom and flourishing of Black communities, particularly children and youth.

Following the 1906 Niagara Meeting, Hope and DuBois returned to Atlanta where they carried out the spirit of their covenant at Morehouse College and Atlanta University. Just weeks after their return, The Atlanta Riot of 1910 exposed the intensity of racial hatred and violence as a mob of ten thousand mostly young whites ran through the streets terrorizing every Black person it could find. Black passengers were pulled off trolleys, hunted in shops, and chased for almost five days, leaving twenty people dead and hundreds injured. During their Atlanta years, "they took long walks together and discussed their ideas."[8] Hope and DuBois looked to each other for strength and inspiration as young leaders and scholars amid the tense racial conflict of Atlanta in the early 1900s.

"ARE WE FRIENDS?": HOPE & BOOKER T. WASHINGTON (1910)

Although they shared many commonalities, the strength of their bond was tested when President Hope sought Booker T. Washington's support in securing a financial gift for the college from Andrew Carnegie. Though they recognized Washington as a great man, they had serious concerns about motives and support behind his industrial education model. Washington was also an assimilationist who was willing to endure mockery and denigration in the name of money.[9] Hope and DuBois were of a different mindset: they sought to redeem Black intellectual and cultural life from the money-getting aims of Washington's Tuskegee. They believed Black people deserved to flourish and thrive as human

beings, not relegated to commodification of southern capitalism. The accommodationist philosophy made moneymaking the focus of religion, politics, and education. Earning a living became more important than aspiring to new ideals, human rights, personal dignity, and freedom. They believed that there was more to education than the gospel of making money by any means necessary. Nor was President Hope fond of the mogul and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, who publicly espoused racist sentiments and upheld racial segregation in the web of libraries he funded across the country. However, Hope knew better than anyone else how much the school could use Carnegie's support. After several failed appeals to the General Education Board, Hope met with Washington to ask for his help in securing a ten-thousand-dollar contribution from Carnegie. The gift financed the construction of Sale Hall, a new academic building with a chapel large enough to accommodate the student body for daily services and campus gatherings. Washington had close ties to many of the Northern philanthropists who were in favor of his industrial model.[10]

In the weeks following, Hope finally told DuBois and a few other Niagarites about the arrangement, and they 'roasted' him. He could handle their mockery and ridicule, but he was mostly worried that he would lose DuBois as a friend. Hope wrote a deeply personal letter to DuBois explaining his actions and expressing his hope that his fundraising on behalf of the school would not affect their friendship:

> My impression is that friendship—not acquaintanceship or perfunctory intercourse but real friendship—is based not so much on agreement in opinion and policies and methods but upon downright confidence, upon simple faith, no matter what the view or appearances. You and I for nearly ten years have been friends, at least I have fancied so. I write to ask, no matter whether you doubt the wisdom of or resent my action, *are we friends?* [emphasis added].[11]

Hope considered himself a loyal disciple of DuBois, but he thought it would have been selfish to allow his personal loyalties to stand in the way of what was best for the College. It is clear from the tone of the letter that this is not a simple memo between colleagues, but two men who share common

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interests, visions, and values. Ironically, Hope wished that the letter would remain a private exchange; he never intended for us to read it one hundred and eleven years later:

> This letter is absolutely personal, and I should feel hurt ever to have it mentioned or quoted except between you and me. It comes too much out of my heart…It is a letter from a man to a man between whom a friendship has developed based on mutual interests in a race that we love and are working for. I want that friendship to last. It if does, we shall do even more than we ever have done. Why should it not last? Signed, your very dear friend, John Hope.[12]

Days later, DuBois wrote back assuring Hope that there was no animosity, but he warned him about getting wrapped up in "Washington's net," and the danger of losing one's freedom for the sake of funding: "You must not think that I have not known and appreciated your friendship for me or that I ever have doubted or doubt now your loyalty to the principles which we both sincerely believe."[13] However, he understood and sympathized with Hope. He realized that he was in a precarious position between pragmatic leadership and principle; his foremost responsibility was sustaining the institution. For Black college presidents, it was often a matter of accepting the generosity or starving. "I may have to place myself in [your] position," says DuBois," yet, but, by God, I'll fight hard before I do it."[14]

THE ATLANTA YEARS

For the next twenty-six years, Hope and DuBois shared a lifelong friendship that continued to grow even after DuBois left Atlanta to join the NAACP as editor of *The Crisis* in New York.[15] DuBois and Hope's friendship moved beyond institutional work and political disagreements. It is not hard to imagine that their long walks in and around Atlanta yielded time to deliberate on personal matters that were close to the heart. Years later, Hope invited DuBois back to Atlanta as a visiting professor in sociology. Although their schedules did not allow them to spend much time together, Hope was overjoyed to have his friend: "I brought him here to be my friend and companion."[16]

Friendship was an important element of DuBois's time in Atlanta. DuBois carried several personal and professional identities, including critic, scientific investigator, professor, and writer; however, his reflection on his Atlanta years seem to highlight DuBois as friend:

> My real life work was done at Atlanta…They were years of great spiritual upturning, of the making and unmaking of ideal, of hard work and hard play. Here I found myself. I lost most of my mannerisms. I grew more broadly human, made my closest and most holy friendships, and studied human being…With all this came the strengthening and hardening of my own character…I emerged into full manhood, with the ruins of some ideals about me, but with others planted above the stars; scarred and a bit grim, but hugging to my soul the divine gift of laughter and withal determined, even unto stubbornness, to fight the good fight.[17]

This narrative of friendship forged over shared commitments can lead us into a new consideration on the meaning and value of education as a human endeavor. DuBois and Hope believed in the power of real education. They believed that children should be trained as intelligent human beings, and for this reason they pushed against the money-getting philosophy of education and gave their lives to building a capital for Black liberal education. Their friendship reminds us of the artful elements of school life: the life-giving and life-sustaining relationships forged in communities of inquiry over time. *How can our understanding of Black education change if we focus on friendship instead of feuds?*

By emphasizing friendship, partnerships, and networks of support, the history of education can also be used to teach lessons on the ethics of care and love. Hope, DuBois, and Washington had political disagreements that separated them into two distinct camps; however, they all faced the common threat of overwork. Many Black leaders and activists, like Hope and Washington, suffered and died pre-maturely because of the constant weathering from stress, depression, and lack of sleep and rest. Booker T. Washington's health began to fail from "overwork, stress, arteriosclerosis, and high blood pressure" on top of a high-fat diet.[18] He died at the age of 59. In his final years, John

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Hope constantly complained of "being tired to death."[19] Hope died at the age of 67. Although DuBois lived on until the age of 95, he was concerned about the crisis of *overwork* that led to premature deaths of many of his friends. When young classical composer Samuel Coleridge died at the age 37, DuBois said his premature death demanded that we look at the cause:

> When such a man dies, it must bring pause to a reasoning world. We may call his death-sickness pneumonia, but we all know that it was *sheer overwork*—the using of a delicately-tuned instrument too commonly and continuously and carelessly to let it last its normal life. We may well talk of the waste of wood and water, of food and fire, but the real and unforgivable waste of modern civilization is the waste of ability and genius,—the killing of useful, indispensable men who have no right to die; who deserve, nor for themselves, but for the world, leisure, freedom from distraction, expert medical advice, and intelligent sympathy.[20]

It is not hard to imagine that Hope and DuBois must have talked about this strain and stress of work on their daily walks around the West End community surrounding their campuses. Hope was aware of his declining health and the need to slow down and rest. Similar to the need to philosophically pivot in moments of existential crises, a narrative of friendship opens space for emerging generations to emulate an ethic of care and raise awareness about common threats to the community.

TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORICALLY BLACK EDUCATION

The history of Black education documents the long struggle of Black communities striving to learn against the harsh winds of segregation and legalized miseducation. Education has been used as both a tool and weapon. It has helped some achieve the American Dream while simultaneously barring others from securing a better quality of life. Many Blacks suffered great losses attempting to learn how to read, write, and count. They were willing to sacrifice their lives because they believed education would lead to freedom and liberation.

Enslaved Blacks lost their fingers trying to learn how to read. During Reconstruction, Black Codes made literacy a punishable crime in several states. Black children, like Ruby Bridges, were assaulted as they made their way into newly de-segregated schools. And today, Black children in urban charter schools are drastically disciplined and suspended to an extent that discourages curiosity and interest in school altogether. Yet, the story of Black education is not all dismal. It is a testament to the resilience of a people who have creatively struggled to empower themselves, teach their children, and reclaim the most vulnerable of society from despair and nihilism.

THE THREAT OF NIHILISM

In his 1993 essay, "Nihilism in Black America," Cornel West defines nihilism as "the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness."[21] West was addressing the pressing concerns about the plight of African Americans. He argues that the major issue facing the community is not unemployment, infant mortality, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, or violence; it is *the threat of nihilism*—a life void of meaning, hope, and love "breeds a coldhearted, mean-spirited outlook that destroys both the individuals and others."[22] The nihilistic threat, West argues, has been a constant enemy of Black Americans reaching back to the first encounter of the African in the New World. Yet, the secret to survival is the community's cultural armor: "The genius of our Black foremothers and forefathers was to create powerful buffers to ward off the nihilistic threat, to equip Black folk with cultural armor to beat back the demons of hopelessness, meaninglessness, and lovelessness."[23] Black religious and civic institutions are the primary sources of cultural armor by providing a sense of connection and belonging, as well as creating a sense of family and communal networks of support. West asserts that

> Nihilism is not overcome by arguments or analyses; it is tamed by love and care. Any disease of the soul must be conquered by a turning of one's soul. This turning is done through one's own affirmation of one's worth—an affirmation fueled by the concern of others. A love ethic must be at the center of politics of conversion.[24]

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To shift the narrative from feuds to friendships opens the space to explore the myriad of ways HBCU communities have provided cultural armor for generations of students and alumni. Unfortunately, the focus on the Washington and DuBois debate on the ends of Black education has reverberated over the course of time with a hyper-focus on the mechanics of the institution, leaving little room to appreciate the artful moments of the Black college experience. Unfortunately, HBCUSs are often the focus of deficit-laden research that tends to focus on challenges rather than strengths. To introduce the element of friendship in the historical narrative opens new space to move toward a *philosophy of historically Black education* which speaks to the ensouling dimension of Black college experience.

Black colleges have offered spiritual fortitude by training the head and heart. An ensouling education takes as its starting point the well-being, flourishing, and futurity of the learner. Instead of a hyper-focus on intelligence, productivity, or performance, this holistic vision of education is concerned with the heart, mind, body, and spirit of individuals as well as the collective. The aim of ensouling education is providing learners with the spiritual and moral resources needed to transcend the nihilistic threat in order to become contributing democratic citizens. The essence of HBCUs cannot be defined by traditional markers of higher education; these institutions engage in the work of *ensouling*—breathing life and hope into dry bones that they may come alive and not die. What pedagogical tools and practices can we create or retrieve from the past to instill hope, meaning, and love for students today?

A SEASON OF HOMECOMING

Although our pandemic year was grim, there were many moments that displayed our ability to *show up* for each other in our hour of deepest need, namely by turning away from competition and individualism to embrace a sense of communalism and friendship. One powerful example of this cultural transformation was the popular webcast known as *Verzuz*. The virtual series of musical competitions features famous artists challenging each other by taking turns presenting tracks to determine who has the better catalog. Although the battle is designed to spark a rivalry, the competition, inadvertently, creates a

beautiful concert as song after song evokes feelings of joy, hope, and nostalgia. Hundreds of thousands of viewers were tuned in and interacting through the chat feature as they danced and partied, virtually together yet physically apart. The nature of the pandemic forced musicians and poets to abandon rivalry and competition to create a moment of joy at a difficult moment for the world.

As the COVID-19 shutdown led to new collaboration in the world of music, art, and culture, how might we as philosophers of educators, teachers, and students return to school life with a deeper appreciation for life together after a year of virtual learning? How might this year of closures and cancellations lead to an appreciation for friendship and community in institutional life?

Schools and universities are now celebrating a season of "Homecoming," after a whole year of remote schooling. In a strange twist of events, the COVID-19 pandemic has reminded many that school is more than a place of instruction, but the place where we make memories, meaning, and lifelong *friendships*. Learning without proms, commencements, homecomings, games, coffee chats, all the host of other social rituals is bleak. This season is a good time to think about the place of friendship in education.

The 2020 shutdown was more than a temporary inconvenience for colleges and universities. While schools pivoted to online learning, the absence of in-person, embodied interactions tested the limits for many students and teachers who, perhaps, for the first time realized the necessity of human interaction. In addition to the loneliness of isolation, the stress of working from home, and overwhelming grief of COVID deaths, the cancellation of rituals of gathering added to the mounting pressure of the pandemic year. Yet, ironically, the absence of many traditions highlighted the fundamental need of belonging and gathering to human flourishing.

The annual homecoming festivals were one of the major rituals that were canceled due to the pandemic in fall 2020. It was the absence of homecoming that captured the attention of *The New York Times*. In October 2020, *The New York Times* featured a multimedia series on HBCU Homecoming featuring a mini documentary along with essays and reflections from readers on their personal

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reflections. The intention behind the series was to create a virtual collective to digitally celebrate the season through stories, photos, and recollections. Each year, crowds of alumni and students return home to their Alma Mater to rekindle friendships over food, music, and football. Melanye Price, a Political Science professor at Prairie View A&M University in Texas characterizes homecoming as "part family reunion and part revival." She goes on to say:

> Under those tents, generations of Prairie View Panthers or Mississippi Valley Delta Devils or Bethune-Cookman Wildcats communicate the struggles and joys in and out of college. There, in deep and rich communion, dancing to music across decades, Black people shake off the never-ending hostilities and microaggressions that commingle with the daily demands of adulthood, to return to the pace that affirms our intellect, our brilliance, our worth—no matter what the world outside believes about people who look like us.[25]

Yet, the weekend is more than a time of frivolous fun. On a deeper level, homecoming speaks to the ways historically Black education has helped generations of students and alumni resist the threat of nihilism and despair in the face of continued racial oppression. In spite of the degradation and dehumanization, Black colleges managed to breathe life into bones left dry and dead by racism's venom. Through high ideals, academic rigor, rituals of affirmation, festivals of belonging and joy, loving mentorships, words of endearment, the Black colleges have ensouled generations of youth who have gone on to change the world as courageous democratic agents.

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