

## **Cornel West as Transformative Intellectual**

In Cornel West the United States has an example of a public transformative intellectual. West, who recently joined the faculty of Princeton University, is one of the most dynamic African American intellectuals alive. However, West does not place himself only in the paradigm of Afrocentric philosophy. Though his racial identity fuels his concern for anti-racist engagements he draws strongly on European thought, particularly critical theory and pragmatism, in his crafting of prophetic pragmatism, the philosophical position he is most identified with. West deliberately distinguishes his work from others in the African American community such as Asante (1998a,b) who see themselves as working within indigenous African traditions. He does not propose a distinctive Afrocentric epistemology, and neither does he regard the work of European theorists of social and political transformation as racist or irrelevant. Instead he looks to the transformative emphasis in critical theory to reframe that theory as one guide to the creation of a non-racist democracy. In his own work as a transformative intellectual West draws on Gramsci's idea of the organic intellectual (developed later in this paper) to theorize transformative change within the society, and to live out his own praxis of such change in political, theological and even musical spheres. Learning to understand and dismantle racist power structures as part of a broader movement of social transformation is West's project, and he draws on Marx, Foucault and Gramsci (all major figures in the critical theory tradition) for their contributions to keeping the hope of a revolutionary future alive in the African American community. This paper explores his use of critical theory as the intellectual tradition that informs transformative education, and his elaboration of prophetic pragmatism as a form of educational engagement.

As I shall argue in this paper West has clearly committed himself to what he conceives as a transformative educational project. This project is one of helping activists in disconnected fields (anti-racist literature, labor unions, ecological activism, Gay and Lesbian rights etc.) realize their common cause in fighting multinational capitalism and learn from the successful activist practices of each of these. In thinking through what such a project would look like West uses iconic critical theorists to craft his designation of the transformative intellectual. From Marx West takes the idea that transformation is an inherently political struggle that must entail the abolition of the exchange economy of capitalism. From Foucault he cites the importance of studying how as social actors we are implicated in power relations as we exercise power, and in particular how we live out the practice of racism in the minutiae of our lives. And from Gramsci he builds on the idea of the educator as an organic intellectual with one foot holding open the door of theoretical analysis and one foot anchored firmly in the particularities of social movements. If we follow West's line of analysis then to work transformatively is, by definition, to play some kind of activist role in oppositional social movements. Transformative education as a field of practice would therefore require a high degree of political engagement.

West defines himself as “an American Democratic Socialist of African descent” (1991, p. xi) in his introduction to *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought*, thereby signaling his intent to marry the critical tradition to the interests of African Americans. In *Prophesy Deliverance* (1982) he proclaims his “abiding allegiance to progressive Marxist social analysis and political praxis” (p. 12), an allegiance that informs his understanding of the struggle for black freedom as “a struggle that is a species of a radical democratic project that empowers and enhances the wretched of the earth” (West, 1993a, p. x). West’s own role in this struggle is as “first and foremost an intellectual freedom fighter” (ibid. p. 87) who works as a critical organic catalyst; “a person who stays attuned to the best of what the mainstream has to offer – its paradigms, viewpoints and methods – yet maintains a grounding in affirming and enabling sub-cultures of criticism” (West, 1993c, p. 27). This Gramscian-influenced model of transformative intellectual activism links oppositional work within the academy “with political activity in grass-roots organizations, pre-party formations, or progressive associations intent on bringing together potential agents of social change” (ibid. p. 103). At the core of West’s intellectual vocation is his “profound commitment to what I call a prophetic vision and practice primarily based on a distinctly black tragic sense of life” (ibid. p. x). This vision and practice is premised on “the love ethic of Christian faith – the most absurd and alluring mode of being in the world – that enables me to live a life of hope against hope” (ibid. p. xi).

In these self-designated identities – democratic socialist, intellectual freedom fighter, critical organic catalyst, radical Christian – we can see West’s celebrated refusal to remain bounded by traditional categorizations. As commentaries on West have noted (Yancy, 2001; Wood, 2000) his eclecticism has led to criticisms of superficiality and dilettantism, of touching on a concept here, alluding to an intellectual tradition there, with no deep articulation of these traditions. My belief is that West’s eclecticism is a principled eclecticism and a strength of his work as a connected, engaged, transformative intellectual. It is a principled eclecticism because it is in support of his overarching project to keep activist hope alive. West ranges far and wide in his studies because he wishes to indicate the support for social transformation implicit in so many different intellectual traditions. He draws enthusiastically on any insights, from any source, that suggest ways of making democracy a reality in the United States. This breadth is a strength because it allows him to speak to a wide array of constituencies and enclaves and work to unite these in common cause by showing them their points of connection and interest.

West’s traversing of multiple intellectual terrains means that he engages with bodies of thought that are often regarded by their proponents as diametrically opposed. For example, he steadfastly retains “an affinity to a philosophical version of American pragmatism” (1982, p. 12) that is distinctly at odds with critical theory’s mistrust of pragmatism as self-interested vulgar opportunism. But West’s affinity to pragmatism, and his belief in individuality, are part and parcel of his enduring faith in the possibility of transforming society in democratic directions. He consistently warns against the encroachment of the state on individual freedom. Individuals may be formed by culture and society but they are not purely the sum total of traditions and forces. He remains “a

proponent of individuality in terms of the uniqueness, the irreducible and irreplaceable character of individuals shaped by groups and communities” (West, 1993b, p. 126). West also counters the radical pessimism of books such as *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972) with his optimistic belief in possibility and love. Despite his preoccupation with the tragic dimension of existence, his Christianity fuels his enduring sense of hope, a theme common to fusions of Marxism and Christianity (MacIntyre, 1968; Marsden, 1991). He refuses to fall foul of a numbing despair, though in no sense does he underestimate the power of racist, anti-democratic forces, or dismiss the constant presence of disease and death. West’s commitment to the absurd yet alluring love ethic of Christianity allows him to “keep alive a tempered hope for the future” (West 1993c, p. xi).

### **A Racialized Engagement with the Critical Tradition**

West’s work consistently exhibits a racialized engagement with three major figures in the critical tradition – Marx, Foucault and Gramsci – all of whom are held to contribute to crafting a theory of transformative education. The importance of considering seriously but critically the ideas of Karl Marx is a theme that threads throughout West’s attempt to understand the barriers to social and political transformation. For West, Marx’s ideas are “indispensable – although ultimately inadequate – in grasping distinctive features of African-American oppression” (West, 1993c, p. 259). In his view, however, the “richness of the Marxist methodological orientation and analytical perspective in relation to race remains untapped” (ibid. p. 261). This is partly because Marx himself did not conduct an analysis of race as a separate dimension of oppression, nor did he anticipate how “a common denominator of white supremacist abuse cuts across class, gender, sexual orientation” (West, 1993b, p. 131). In the words of the title of West’s best seller Marx failed to anticipate that *Race Matters* (1993d). There are other silences and blind spots in Marx; “a relative inability to understand the complexity of culture - issues of identity and so forth” (1993b, p. 139) and a lack of understanding of how power is “tied to the microphysics of a society” (ibid.). Furthermore, Marxism is irrevocably linked in the American imagination to totalitarianism and Stalinist oppression, which ensures its continuing exclusion from mainstream consideration as a means of understanding American life.

Yet, time and time again, West urges the importance of engaging with Marx as “an inescapable part of the intellectual weaponry for present-day freedom fighters” (1991, p. xiv). While he acknowledges that contemporary matrices of oppression – nationalism, racism, homophobia, patriarchy, ecological abuse – are not accounted for by Marx, he remains convinced that “these complex phenomena cannot be grasped, or changed, without the insights of Marxist theory” (ibid.). Why should this be so? For West it is the rise of global capitalism and the ever-increasing power of multi-nationals that make knowledge of Marx indispensable. In an interview with George Yancy, West states his case as follows; “I don’t see how, in fact, we can understand the market forces around the world and the fundamental role of transnational corporations, the subordination of working people, the tremendous class conflicts going on around the world at the market

place between management and labor without understanding some of the insights of the Marxist tradition' (West, 1998, p. 41). In West's world understanding transformative education is not just a matter of understanding the educational dynamics of major personal change. It is also about learning how capitalist dynamics frame opportunities for personal change, indeed how they frame the conduct of personal relationships themselves.

In *Prophesy Deliverance* (1982) West proposes a blending of Marxism with Black theology, to him the single most important source of philosophical energy for African American transformative activism. Black theology and Marxism both employ a methodology of unmasking falsehood, but in his opinion "Black theologians barely mention the wealth, power and influence of multinational corporations" (West, 1982, p. 113). Neither do they make the link between "the way in which the racist interpretations of the gospel they reject encourage and support the capitalist system of production, its grossly unequal distribution of wealth, and its closely connected political arrangements" (ibid.). Inserting a Marxist element into Black theology would ensure that Black oppression in capitalist America was understood as linked to Black and Brown oppression in the Third World.

As a way of illuminating the interconnected nature of racial and class oppression West also calls for a "Marxist influenced genealogical materialist analysis of racism" (1993c, p. 268) that would probe the logic of white supremacy through a "micro-institutional (or localized) analysis of the mechanisms that promote and contest these logics in the everyday lives of people" (ibid.). Such an analysis would explore "the ways in which self-images and self-identities are shaped, and the impact of alien, degrading cultural styles, aesthetic ideals, psychosexual sensibilities and linguistic gestures upon peoples of color" (ibid.). Concurrent with this micro-institutional analysis would go a macro-structural exploration of "class exploitation, state repression and bureaucratic domination, including resistance against these modes, in the lives of people of color" (ibid.). Transformative education in this analysis is education that must entail a strong element of anti-racist practice and analysis.

This emphasis on a genealogical analysis of racist practices in everyday life demonstrates West's acknowledgment of another major figure in the critical tradition, the late French cultural critic and historian Michel Foucault. West declares that "Foucault's perspective can be valuable for Afro-American philosophers whose allegiance is to a revolutionary future" (West, 1983, p. 58) because it helps illuminate how the power of racist ideology is made manifest in daily conversations, gestures, rituals and interactions. By fusing Foucault's ideas with a neo-Marxist analysis "Foucault's viewpoint can be creatively transformed and rendered fruitful for a genealogy of modern racism, in both its ideational and material forms" (ibid.). This genealogy of racism would not just analyze the way dominant discourse inaugurated the category of race and excluded positive notions of Black beauty, culture and character from its discursive field. It would also "put forward an Afro-American counter discourse, in all its complexity and diversity, to the modern European racist discourse" (ibid.). Such a discourse would "exercise and evaluate how the Afro-American response promotes or precludes a revolutionary future" (ibid.). In *The*

*American Evasion of Philosophy* (1989) West does criticize Foucault for his surreptitious ascription of agency to discourses, disciplines and techniques (1989, p. 225) but overall he acknowledges that the particular philosophical stance of prophetic pragmatism “promotes genealogical materialist modes of analysis similar in many respects to those of Foucault” (ibid. p. 223).

Finally, West peppers his works with approving references to the Italian political economist Antonio Gramsci, describing himself as a Gramscian Marxist and calling Gramsci “the most penetrating Marxist theorist of culture in this century” (West, 1982, p. 118). Explaining his affinity to Gramsci he writes “my particular stand within the Marxist tradition is linked primarily to that of Gramsci, which always places stress on historical specificity, on concrete circumstances and situations” (1998, p. 41). Just as he claims Foucault’s work reflects the spirit of prophetic pragmatism, so he believes that “prophetic pragmatism is inspired by the example of Antonio Gramsci (who) exemplifies the critical spirit and oppositional sentiments of prophetic pragmatism” (West, 1989, p. 230). West is drawn to Gramsci’s (and later Raymond Williams) idea that hegemony is always contested and open to being undermined by specific actions taken in specific situations. He is drawn also to Gramsci’s emphasis on cultural products – in contemporary terms, films, books, rap music CD’s - as sites of counter-hegemony. In particular, West refers, repeatedly and explicitly, to Gramsci’s idea of the organic intellectual as serving as a useful descriptor both for his own work and for the work of critical Black intellectuals in general. He believes, as did Gramsci, that “the aim of philosophy is ... to become part of a social movement by nourishing and being nourished by the philosophical views of oppressed people themselves for the aims of social change and personal meaning” (ibid. p. 131). If we think of philosophizing as a form of transformative educational practice, this inquiry ceases to be conducted for its own sake. Instead, it becomes a kind of political practice geared to working with disenfranchised groups.

This situating of philosophy in everyday transformative practices and struggles is a defining feature of the organic intellectual. In *Keeping Faith* (1993c) West reframes the concept slightly as that of the critical organic catalyst, “a person who stays attuned to the best of what the mainstream has to offer – its paradigms, viewpoints and methods – yet maintains a grounding in affirming and enabling sub-cultures of criticism” (p. 27). In his view Black intellectuals should function as organic intellectuals. They should be scholar-activists who are grounded in the experiences and struggles of the African American community while having their transformative efforts informed by the wisdom of allies outside that racial group. This model of intellectual engagement “pushes academic intellectuals beyond contestation within the academy ... and links this contestation with political activity in grass-roots groups, pre-party formations, or progressive associations intent on bringing together potential agents of social change” (ibid. p. 103). Such groups include activists of color, feminists, lesbians and gays, black churches, ecological movements and rank and file labor caucuses, and Black nationalists.

As organic intellectuals, African American philosophers have specific transformative responsibilities in West’s view. These focus particularly on transforming African

Americans' awareness of the distinctive, racially based, elements of their own lifeworld. In a Foucauldian vein, they must "articulate a new 'regime of truth' linked to, yet not confined by, indigenous institutional practices permeated by the kinetic orality and emotional physicality, the rhythmic syncopation, the protean improvisation and the religious, rhetorical and antiphonal repetition of African-American life" (ibid. p. 82). They must also conduct "a critical self-inventory" (ibid. p. 85) and work to create and reactivate "institutional networks that promote high-quality critical habits primarily for the purpose of black insurgency" (ibid. p. 83). West is clear on the need for the critical spirit to be applied to African Americans philosophizing and organizing and is critical of overly charismatic activists who leave no organizational or community structures in the communities they visit. In approving contrast to this he cites Martin Luther King as "an organic intellectual of the first order – a highly educated and informed thinker with organic links to ordinary folk" (ibid. p. 273). King's roots in the black church "gave him direct access to the life-worlds of the majority of black southerners" (ibid.), his education provided him with an analysis of anti-colonialism as well as bringing him respect within the Black community, and he "facilitated relations with progressive non black people, thereby insuring openness to potential allies" (ibid.). King's contribution was that he tried to produce transformative structures and processes that would outlive his presence. Hence, an important element in the transformative intellectual's work is creating structures that will galvanize the activism of others after the transformative intellectual has left the scene.

As the foregoing discussion clearly shows, West's work draws strongly on critical theory – in particular the work of Marx, Foucault and Gramsci - as one of the central intellectual traditions contributing to his project for African American philosophy. This project is summarized by the titles of his books *Restoring Hope* (1997) and *Keeping Faith* (1993c). To him "the principal task of the Afro-American philosopher is to keep alive the hope of a revolutionary future ... in which the multifaceted oppression of Afro-Americans is, if not eliminated, alleviated" (1983, p. 57). In pursuing this task West believes that African American philosophers must preserve critical theory's notions of negation and transformation and initiate "a serious confrontation with the Marxist tradition and, among others, the recent work of Michel Foucault" (ibid.). But African American philosophy must also be "indigenously grounded in the prophetic religious and progressive secular practices of Afro-Americans" (ibid.) and have as its particular project the generation of guidelines for transformative social action that springs from the true needs of African Americans. He summarizes "the major function of Afro-American critical thought" as being "to reshape the contours of Afro-American history and provide a new self-understanding of the Afro-American experience which suggest guidelines for action in the present" (West, 1982, p. 22).

There are several elements to this project. One is, as we have seen, to conduct a genealogy of racist ideas and practices. Another is "to provide a theoretical reconstruction and evaluation of Afro-American responses to white supremacy" (ibid. p. 23). A third is to explore the cultural roots and sensibilities of African Americans. A fourth is "to present a dialogical encounter between Afro-American critical thought and progressive Marxist social analysis" (West, 1982, p. 23). This encounter is much more

than an interesting philosophical confluence for West. Indeed, he sees such an intellectual fusion as crucial to democratic social reconstruction declaring confidently that “in an alliance between prophetic Christianity and progressive Marxism ... lies the hope of Western civilization” (ibid.). Finally, West sees the task of African American critical thought being to disentangle and interpret the African, European and American elements in black experience. As West writes “the life-worlds of Africans in the United States are conceptually and existentially neither solely African, European, nor American, but more the latter than any of the former” (ibid. p. 24). The intertwined intersections of African, Native American and European cultures is one important reason why the Africentric adult education scholar, Scipio Colin III (2002) has generated the term ‘African Ameripean’ as an alternative to ‘African American’.

### **Pragmatism as an Inherently Transformative Tradition**

To critical theorists and Africentrists alike, the most challenging (and, to many, perplexing) aspect of West’s thought is his constant attempt to integrate the philosophical spirit of pragmatism into his project for the reconstruction and transformation of African American life. After all, pragmatists do not usually describe themselves as transformative intellectuals or freedom fighters. But West is very consistent in declaring his “affinity to a philosophical version of American pragmatism” (1982, p. 12) alongside his recognition of Marxism. Despite pragmatism’s avoidance of racial analysis, and the conduct of its discourse in the white walled labyrinth of Eurocentric philosophy, its contributions to African American thought are “enormous” in West’s view (1982, p. 21). He writes of pragmatism that “through its historicist orientation, for example, Afro-American thought can avoid both absolutist dogmatism and paralysis in action” (ibid.). For West “pragmatism provides an American context for Afro-American thought, a context that imparts to it both a shape and a heritage of philosophical legitimacy” (ibid.).

Why should African American intellectuals take seriously a philosophical tradition viewed as a compromised element of white supremacy by some in the African American intellectual community, in McClendon’s words as “bourgeois through and through” (1983, p. 38)? West makes his case by citing across his writing two distinctive contributions pragmatism can make to building an African American praxis. First, he reads Emerson, Peirce, James and Dewey as spokespersons for a morally grounded philosophical tradition tied to social transformation, in their case to the creation of a true democracy. To this extent pragmatism is an inherently transformative tradition. In his major book on the subject he speaks of pragmatism’s “unashamedly moral emphasis” (1989, p. 4) and its “yearning for principled resistance and struggle that can change our desperate plight” (ibid.). He locates its transformative impulse in “a plebian radicalism that fuels an anti-patrician rebelliousness for the moral aim of enriching individuals and expanding democracy” (ibid. p. 5). Pragmatism “tries to deploy thought as a weapon to enable more effective action” (ibid.), particularly action taken to promote “the flowering and flourishing of individuality under conditions of democracy” (1993a, p. 32). Pragmatism does not support action for action’s sake. Although it puts “a premium on human will, human power and human action” (ibid. p. 37) it is neither vulgar practicality

nor unprincipled opportunism. In an unconscious echo of another pragmatically inclined intellectual activist – the adult educator Eduard Lindeman – West sees pragmatism as directed towards furthering the democratic way of life (coincidentally the title of one of Lindeman’s last books (Smith and Lindeman, 1951). To West pragmatism is “preoccupied with ... the democratic way of life” (West, 1993a, p. 31), that is, with creating a society of “unique selves acting in and through participatory communities (in) an open, risk-ridden future” (ibid. p. 43).

Its self-critical strain is a second argument West adduces in support of his advocacy of pragmatism. He particularly admires Dewey’s belief that philosophizing requires the constant critical analysis of assumptions. Although West works outside the adult education discourse community, his emphasis on the importance of critical analysis is framed in terms very familiar to adult education scholars preoccupied with critical reflection and transformative learning. Central to transformation, in Mezirow’s (1990, 2000) view, is the identification and critical analysis of assumptions. Although this activity is not usually identified by transformative educators as an imperative drawn from pragmatism, this is the intellectual tradition that informs this process. Thus, a pragmatic orientation “constantly questions the tacit assumptions of earlier interpretations of the past. It scrutinizes the norms these interpretations endorse, the solutions they offer, and the self-images they foster” (1982, p. 20). To pragmatists (as to transformative adult educators) “norms, premises and procedures ... are never immune to revision” (ibid.). Pragmatism is defined by its “calling into question any form of dogmatism” and its belief in a form of fallibilism in which “every claim is open to revision” (1993a, p. 43). It is not to be confused with an anti-theoretical stance, or with the idea that anything goes depending on context. Instead, “it subtly incorporates an experimental temper within theory-laden descriptions of problematic situations (for instance, social and cultural crises)” (West, 1993c, p. 137).

This anti-foundational strain of pragmatism, in which experimentation and problem-solving run strong, is fused with West’s religious beliefs, and his commitment to critical theory, to produce a new variant of pragmatism which he calls prophetic pragmatism. Prophetic pragmatism is West’s unique blend of Judeo-Christian traditions, European critical theory, American pragmatism and Black theology, a blend that to him best fits the fight against the nihilism and cynicism he sees as destroying both the African American community and the broader society. In its religious affiliations prophetic pragmatism draws on “traditions of Judaism and Christianity that promote courageous resistance against, and relentless critiques of, injustice and social misery” (ibid. p. 139). In Biblical fashion these traditions “help keep alive collective memories of moral (that is anti-idolatrous) struggle and non-market values” (ibid.). From critical theory prophetic pragmatism incorporates that tradition’s micro-structural and macro-structural analyses of the dynamics of oppression embedded in the works of Marx, Gramsci and Foucault. Prophetic thought and Marxism “both focus on the plight of the exploited, oppressed, and degraded peoples of the world, their relative powerlessness and possible empowerment” (West, 1982, p. 107).

From American pragmatism its prophetic variant draws the spirit of self-criticism and the pursuit of the democratic way of life. Hence, “critical temper as a way of struggle and democratic faith as a way of life are the twin pillars of prophetic pragmatism” (West 1993c, p. 140). Here the anti-foundational willingness of Dewey to experiment with multiple approaches to realizing democracy is harnessed to the project of combating racist ideology and practices. Finally, from Black theology prophetic pragmatism draws the desire “to bestow dignity, grandeur and tragedy upon the denigrated lives of ordinary black people and to promote improvisational life-strategies of love and joy in black life-worlds of radical and brutish contingency” (ibid. p. xii). Like critical theory, Black theology begins with negation, in this case “negating white interpretations of the gospel” (West, 1982, p. 108), the necessary precursor to “transforming past understandings of the gospel into new ones” (ibid. p. 109). It also shares with critical theory a desire “to link some notion of liberation to the future conditions of the downtrodden” (ibid. p. 108). However, because of the lack of class analysis in Black theology West views it as insufficient to be a stand-alone tool for the furtherance of African American interests.

The element of fallibilistic self-criticality endemic to prophetic pragmatism has a particular resonance for a transformative practice of adult education. In its skepticism regarding theoretical dogma and reified, standardized models of practice, prophetic pragmatism provides a justification for a critically reflective practice of transformative adult education emphasizing openness, flexibility and contingency in the pursuit of democratic change. In West’s words the “critical temper” of prophetic pragmatism “promotes a full-fledged experimental disposition that highlights the provisional, tentative and revisable character of our visions, analyses and actions” (West, 1993c, p. 140). In adult educational terms, possessing a critical temper means avoiding a slavish adherence to a particular methodology for transformative education, whether this be andragogical, self-directed, or didactic. It means that continuously researching the different contexts in which adults are learning, whether these are adult basic education programs, community action groups, organizational teams or higher education classrooms, becomes an imperative of good practice. A critically reflective stance towards adult education practice, like a prophetically pragmatic one, abandons any premature commitment to one approach, no matter how transformative this might appear. Instead there is a principled methodological eclecticism, a readiness to experiment with any and all approaches in the pursuit of transformative learning. This is particularly the case with adult education initiatives that see themselves as anti-racist (Hayes and Colin, 1994).

The methodological eclecticism of prophetic pragmatism can be called principled for two reasons. First, it eschews any pretence that adult education lacks a socio-political dimension and acknowledges instead that practice is driven by moral and political transformative impulses: in West’s case by the furtherance of African American interests, the fight against racist ideology and the democratic transformation of society. A prophetically pragmatic approach (and, by implication, a critically reflective form of adult education) “begins with social structural analyses” and “makes explicit its moral and political aims” (West, 1993c, p. 23). Such an approach is unashamedly “partisan, partial, engaged and crisis-centered” (ibid.). Yet, combined with its openly

acknowledged intent of changing minds, practices and structures, prophetic pragmatism “always keeps open a skeptical eye to avoid dogmatic traps, premature closures, formulaic formulations or rigid conclusions” (ibid.). Its solicitation of critiques of its aims and procedures is a defining feature of its internal logic.

Second, a prophetically pragmatic approach is principled because it shares with a critically reflective orientation a commitment to the collective creation of knowledge. Prophetic pragmatism conceives of knowledge as developed “within the conceptual framework of intersubjective communal inquiry” (West, 1982, p. 21) in which “knowledge claims are secured by the social practices of a community of inquirers” (ibid.). As such, prophetic pragmatism exhibits a direct connection to one of the strongest traditions in the adult educational field. This is the tradition of community-based, dialogically inclined, groups of activists and citizens working collaboratively to examine their experiences and practices with a view to transforming society in democratic directions. This is the tradition of Lindeman, Horton and Freire and, in Gyant’s (2002) view, also that of Alain Locke, the first African American President of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education. It ascribes an explicit transformative social purpose to adult education, and frames adult educational practice as an analog of the very participatory democracy it is intending to bring about. It privileges collaborative dialog over individual analysis and fights any tendency to the privatization of knowledge.

It is interesting that the White and Latin American adult educators emblematic of this tradition – Lindeman, Horton and Freire – all arrived toward the end of their lives exemplifying the spirit of critical temper that West associates with his own formulation of prophetic pragmatism. Although a theme in much of these three adult educators’ earlier work is the importance of non-didactic modes of practice, after a lifetime’s practice all three advocated a principled methodological eclecticism. Lindeman declared that he was open to using any methodology in adult education for social change depending on the circumstances and learners’ past experiences (Brookfield, 1987). Horton admitted that at times he would give presentations as a way of building trust and meeting activists’ half way before moving to work dialogically, and that the timing and modalities of how he contributed to dialog depended very much on his research of a situation (Horton 1990; Horton and Freire, 1990). Freire reversed his condemnation of lectures as the epitome of banking education, emphasized the importance of rigorous, line by line critical reading (with a dictionary if necessary) and allowed that lectures could be critically stimulating while apparently dialogic groups could be exercises in insidious manipulation (Shor and Freire, 1987; Freire and Macedo, 1995). All three also committed themselves to anti-racist practices, with Lindeman being one of the few white adult educators to publish in the *Journal of Negro Education* and the Highlander Folk School becoming an adult educational center for Civil Rights’ activists.

## **Conclusion: The Inescapable Directedness of Transformative Education**

West is clear that transformation is not an open-ended process that contains its own justification. Transformation for transformation's sake, irrespective of the political direction of such transformation, is not what he is advocating. A truly transformative education is normatively grounded for him in a commitment to work for a socialist, anti-racist, democracy. He eschews the idea that transformation can happen in a purely internal, intra-psychic manner. For him individual and socio-political transformation are intertwined. Transformation is also inherently directive. Transformative intellectuals work to galvanize grass roots activists to fight global capitalism's manifestations in their own neighborhoods. In this sense West is very close to the Gramscian-inclined position articulated by Newman (1994, 1999) and Baptiste (1998, 2000) which holds that those engaged in transformative work must see themselves as fighting a war of position against capitalism. In outlining the tactics of such a war Australian adult educator Michael Newman argues that an over-emphasis on helping people to analyze their experiences (itself a strong element of humanistically influenced transformative learning) leads inevitably to "the voluntary suppression of organized action" (1994, p. 108). The focus on self-understanding can lead members of oppressed groups to divert their attention away from the real problem of defining the enemy into a preoccupation with their experiences as victims. He states his case as follows:-

"Rather than helping learners look at themselves, we should help them look at the thugs and the bigots, the people who do not care, the people who intrude, the people who misuse their authority .... by doing this we can encourage people to be outward-looking, to be active and activist. We can help them focus their anger on the cause of their anger. And we can set up situations in which we and the people we are working with think, plan, learn and decide action" (1994, p. 144).

The directive, mobilizing role of adult educators is also taken up by Baptiste (1998, 2000) in two provocative papers outlining pedagogies of disempowerment and coercive restraint. Drawing partially on Newman's work mentioned earlier, Baptiste argues that adult educators must practice an ethically grounded pedagogy of coercion in which they help learners identify their 'true enemies' – those who "intend, *on principle*, to frustrate the goals of their opponent because their opponent's goals stand in opposition to theirs" (p. 29). To Baptiste, adult educators already use forms of justifiable coercion but are queasy about admitting to that fact. He argues that a pedagogy of measured coercion is justifiable if it uses "force sufficient to stop or curb the violence or injustice. The aim is not necessarily to annihilate the perpetrators but rather to render them incapable of continuing their pillage" (p. 43).

Baptiste believes that in situations where there is a clear imbalance of power adult educators should take uncompromising stands on the side of those they see as oppressed. An inevitable consequence of doing this will be the necessity for them "to engage in some form of manipulation – some fencing, posturing, concealment, maneuvering, misinformation, and even all-out deception as the case demands" (Baptiste, 2000, pp. 47-48). Baptiste points out that if adult educators do admit that manipulation is sometimes justified, then an important learning task becomes researching and practicing how to improve one's manipulative capacities. Through studying ethically justified

manipulation, adult educators can “build a theory that can legitimize and guide our use of coercive restraint” (ibid. p. 49).

Although West is rarely cited in adult educational literature he is arguing for precisely the same sort of activist involvement as Newman and Baptiste. To be a transformative intellectual is to commit oneself in advance to activism designed to create a socialist, anti-racist democracy. Such a project requires the transformative intellectual to immerse herself in the culture and conditions of those with whom she identifies. Transformative work is best furthered when she is open to continuous self-critical experimentation. West’s willingness to assist (as in the case of Bill Bradley and Ralph Nader) and generate (as with Al Sharpton) Presidential campaigns, his production of a rap CD (“Sketches of My Culture”), and his dialogues with those that the dominant culture often casts as being against African American interests (as in his 1995 book with Michael Lerner *Jews and Blacks*) are some of the more nationally publicized examples of his own living out of the role of a transformative intellectual. His numerous engagements with local churches, community schools, environmental movements and union groups receive less press but are equally emblematic of that role. Those who profess to work as transformative educators would do well to engage with his ideas and study his practices.

## **Bibliography**

Adorno, T.W. 1973. Negative dialectics. New York: Seabury Press.

Asante, M.K. 1998a. Afrocentricity: A theory of social change. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press (Revised edition).

Asante, M.K. 1998b The Afrocentric idea. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Baptiste, I. 1998. “Towards a pedagogy for disempowering our enemies”. In Proceedings of the 39<sup>th</sup> Adult Education Research Conference. San Antonio, TX: University of the Incarnate Word.

Baptiste, I. 2000. “Beyond reason and personal integrity: Toward a pedagogy of coercive restraint” Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education. 14,/1, 27-50.

Benhabib, S. 1986. Critique, norm, and Utopia: A study of the foundations of critical theory. New York: Columbia University Press.

Brookfield, S.D. (ed.). 1987. Learning democracy: Eduard Lindeman on adult education and social change. London: Croom Helm.

Colin, S.A.J III. 2002. “Marcus Garvey: Africentric Adult education for selfethnic reliance”. In, E.A. Peterson (ed.). Freedom road: Adult education of African Americans. Malabar, Fl: Krieger (rev.ed.).

- Fay, B. 1987. Critical social science: Liberation and its limits. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Freire, P., and Macedo, D.P. 1995. "A dialogue: Culture, language, and race". Harvard Educational Review, 65/3, 377-402.
- Fromm, E. 1941. Escape from freedom. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Fromm, E. 1956. The sane society. London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul.
- Gramsci, A. 1971. Selections from the prison notebooks London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Gyant, L. 2002. "Alain Leroy Locke: More than an adult educator". In, E.A. Peterson (ed.). Freedom road: Adult education of African Americans. Malabar, FL: Krieger (rev.ed.).
- Habermas, J. 1984. The theory of communicative action, volume one.: Reason and the rationalization of society. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. 1987. The theory of communicative action, volume two, lifeworld and system – A critique of functionalist reason. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Hayes, E. and Colin, S.A.J. III (eds.). 1994. Confronting racism & sexism. New directions for adult and continuing education # 61. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Horkheimer, M. 1974. Eclipse of reason. New York: Continuum.
- Horkheimer, M. 1995. Critical theory: Selected essays. New York: Continuum (originally published 1937).
- Horkheimer, M. and Adorno, T. 1972. Dialectic of enlightenment. New York: Seabury Press.
- Horton, M. 1990. The long haul: An autobiography. New York: Doubleday.
- Horton, M., and Freire, P. 1990. We make the road by walking: Conversations on education and social change. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lerner, M., and West, C. 1995. Jews and Blacks: Let the healing begin. New York: Grosset/Putnam.
- MacIntyre, A.C. 1968. Marxism and Christianity. New York: Schocken Books.
- Marsden, J. 1991. Marxism and Christian Utopianism. New York: Monthly Review Press.

- Marcuse, H. 1964. One dimensional man. Boston: Beacon Press.
- McClendon, J.H. 1983. "Eugene C. Holmes: A Black Marxist philosopher". In, L. Harris (ed.). Philosophy born of struggle: Anthology of African-American philosophy from 1917. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, pp. 37-50.
- Newman, M. 1994. Defining the enemy: Adult education in social action. Sydney: Stewart Victor Publishing.
- Newman, M. 1999. Maeler's regard: Images of adult learning. Sydney: Stewart Victor Publishing.
- Outlaw, L.T. Jr. 1983a. "Philosophy, Hermeneutics, Social-Political Theory: Critical Thought in the Interests of African-Americans". In, L. Harris (ed.). Philosophy born of struggle: Anthology of African-American philosophy from 1917. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt
- Outlaw, L.T. Jr. 1983b. "Race and Class in the Theory and Practice of Emancipatory Social Transformation". In, L. Harris (ed.). Philosophy born of struggle: Anthology of African-American philosophy from 1917. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt.
- Outlaw, L. T. Jr 1996. On race and philosophy. New York: Routledge.
- Outlaw, L.T. Jr. 1998. "Lucius T. Outlaw". Interview in G. Yancy (ed.). African-American philosophers: 17 conversations. New York: Routledge.
- Shor, I., and Freire, P. 1987. A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming education. Westport,CT: Bergin and Garvey.
- Smith, T.V. and Lindeman, E.C. 1951. The democratic way of life. New York: New American Library.
- West, C. 1982. Prophesy deliverance: An Afro-American revolutionary Christianity. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.
- West, C. 1983. "Philosophy, politics, and power: An Afro-American perspective." In, L. Harris (ed.). Philosophy born of struggle: Anthology of African-American philosophy from 1917. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt.
- West, C. 1989. The American evasion of philosophy: A genealogy of pragmatism. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- West, C. 1991. The ethical dimensions of Marxist thought. New York: Monthly Review Press.

- West, C. 1993a. Prophetic thought in postmodern times. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press.
- West, C. 1993b. Prophetic reflections: Notes on race and power in America. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press.
- West, C. 1993c. Keeping faith: Philosophy and race in America. New York: Routledge.
- West, C. 1993d. Race matters. New York: Vintage Books.
- West, C. 1997. Restoring hope: Conversations on the future of Black America. Boston: Beacon Press.
- West, C. 1998. "Cornel West". In G. Yancy (ed.). African-American philosophers: 17 conversations. New York: Routledge.
- West, C. 1999. The Cornel West reader. New York: Basic Books.
- Wood, M.D. 2000. Cornel West and the politics of prophetic pragmatism. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Yancy, G. (ed.). 2001. Cornel West: A critical reader. Malden, MA: Blackwell.