
IN THE SERVICE OF NEGLECTED PEOPLE:
ANNA JULIA COOPER, ONTOLOGY, AND EDUCATION

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The most influential accounts of Anna Julia Cooper's work have tended to focus on the question of women's equality. In this respect Mary Helen Washington credits Cooper with providing an "embryonic feminist analysis" in the 1890s.¹ My focus is her understanding of educational matters, which should be seen as a powerful inaugural formulation of an anti-racist pedagogy, detailing the concomitant understanding of the interconnection of race, gender, and class that others have built upon.² Education was often the vehicle she used to exemplify the particular exclusion and marginalization of black women, linking the uplift of the race to the higher education of girls.³

In this essay, I want to consider the historic terms of engagement between race and education and to assess their meaning against the pedagogic imperative of Cooper's avowal of her life's work as "the education of neglected people."⁴ I believe that her declaration synthesizes and adumbrates the underlying and explicit program for action in contemporary black struggles for education.

My own biographical interest in her work grew out of a number of personal and intellectual experiences. As a teacher, education researcher, and parent, I found myself constantly contemplating the disconnection between the consuming passion for education held by the African-Caribbean community that I grew up with in England and the negative perceptions of black people in dominant educational research literature and official policy documents. A commonly held assumption asserts that African-Caribbean people in general are disinterested or do not possess the inherent capacity to value education. Contrary to these pathological characterizations, my research into the history of black diasporic struggles for education found evidence of a complex plurality of agentive identities constructing redemptive visions of education from which black traditions of education emerged. Yet these traditions have been silenced in debates about the education of black children in Britain during the last forty years of large scale Caribbean migration. This absence has rendered African-Caribbean children invisible in the broader redemptive visions of education. In response to this absence, my broad concern is to name black traditions of education and to identify the valuable pedagogic insights and resources from which children of African-Caribbean origin can understand, navigate, and transcend the negativity of their experience of schooling.

Cooper's reflections on education demonstrated that freedom is the basis of development and education advances its course. The approach recognized that historically, the field of education is intimately connected to black people's struggles to improvise agency out of conditions they were not expected to

survive.⁵ It is nonetheless, an engagement shaped in dualness, giving rise to pedagogic orientations, split between accommodation and emancipatory interests. Its doublebind is perhaps best understood by the relational tension between habitus and field, identified by Pierre Bourdieu as a continuum punctuated by “the ongoing dialectic between subjective hope and objective chances which is at work throughout the social world.” This relationship he argues “can yield a variety of outcomes.”⁶ The particularity of her articulation and utilization of the field of education to navigate and transcend the negation of black self-formation must be located in the traditions of resistance that emerged to reconstruct the generative experience of rupture which characterizes the forced incorporation of black people in Western modernity. Cooper, like other nineteenth century black intellectuals were not detached observers of social life. They could not luxuriate in the traditional privilege of academic life by retreating from social life “in order to conceptualise it,” to use Bourdieu’s pertinent phrase.⁷ The passion, the imperative authority of their engagement, came from their internal belonging to a people, immortalized in the description of W.E.B. Du Bois as “bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the *Veil*.”⁸

My argument then is that this internal belonging to black life grounded the ethic of responsibility that grew out of the historical legacy of rupture from which developed a disposition toward education as a *calling*. It is out of the lived experience of neglect that the critical reflexivity of Cooper’s philosophical objective to situate education in the service of neglected people created a pedagogic space of rescue within which the self-authentication of the Black child could find expression. Education was to become a crucial instrument, inextricably linked with the creation of a new pedagogic imperative to fight the ontological insecurity of Black existence.⁹ A pedagogic approach is shaped by one’s view or position in the world. My use of ontology is sociological, in so far as its focus is on the recognition that the complex nature of being is embedded in social life. Generally it accepts that the formation of subjective understandings which drive and propel individuals or groups to action must be situated in the historical and social structural context from which meaning is derived. More specifically, I have found Bourdieu’s social ontology productive for the way in which he understands the complex, but nonetheless, conjoint relationship between the subjective and objective structural circumstances of life. Arguing for recognition of an “ontological complicity” between subjectivity and objectivity, Bourdieu makes use of the concept of “habitus” □ socially formulated perceptions, dispositions, and fields and objective historical relations, as vehicles to make constitutional and empirically concrete this interdependent relationship.¹⁰ The habitus is for Bourdieu, “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures, predisposed to function as structuring structures that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices.”¹¹ A “field” represents a set of objective conditions, historical relations expressed through positions anchored

in, for example, education, the economy, art, and the intellectual, in which individuals or groups compete to secure advantage over the allocation of resources and the benefits conferred by the authority and privilege specific to the field. The value of Bourdieu's approach allows for the interplay between the inculcation of dispositions located in the habitus to be challenged, contested, or confirmed by fields. Since different fields are subject to their own framework of values, obligations, and ambition, their outcomes for agents are not the same. The values operating in fields can circumscribe or interrupt the anticipation of the habitus.¹² For example, the language of humanistic education presents as its pedagogic ideal the holistic development of the child. It sees knowledge as the basis for nurturing reason and the inculcation of the ability to use reasoned argument in the exercise of critical judgment to be fundamental to this purpose. Cooper's utilization of humanistic education to construct a redemptive vision of education developed out of a predilection to appropriate and reconstitute the very epistemologies that presumed absence of substantive human worth. This allows us to see the creative ways in which black traditions of education have operated within the constraints of contemporary educational engagements, for example supplementary schools, which will be discussed in the last section. Furthermore, this example demonstrates that Cooper's utilization of the field is controlled by the principles and regulatory values of the field. Often these values are contradictory, as we shall see expressed in the awkward adjustments and adjudication required between the different relations of radicalized power within the field of education.

This essay has two sections. The first applies Cooper's work to the African-Caribbean experience in England to re-invoke the historical legacy of a restorative pedagogy, by countering the dominant pathological characterization that black people lack commitment to education. The centrality of value and worth in Cooper's pedagogic message offers a redemptive vision of education to validate black existence. Her intervention constitutes an important creative educational legacy from which contemporary educational discourse can benefit. This first section has three parts. The first examines Cooper's formulation of a pedagogic message derived from the lived experience of neglect. The second looks at her reformulation of education for black people based upon the affirmation of "worth," which addresses issues of access to education and its quality. The final part considers the importance of Cooper's restorative humanistic pedagogy to reinvigorate our contemporary engagements.

BIOGRAPHY AND NEGLECT

Cooper's educational accomplishments give legitimacy and moral authority to the positions she took on educational matters. Her road to academic consecration started in the profane conditions of her birth in slavery. She went on to achieve a postgraduate degree from Oberlin College and became the principal of the acclaimed M. Street High School in Washington. She

successfully defended her doctoral degree on France and slavery at the Sorbonne in 1925 at the age of sixty-seven, only the fourth African-American woman to be awarded one. Her academic achievements were used in the service of the neglected black community. The weight of her accomplishments is further magnified by the circumstances in which they were achieved. Under the intensification of Jim Crow segregation and sexist professional jealousy, Cooper adopted the five orphaned children, the grandchildren of her half-brother, when she was fifty-eight, caring for them at the same time as full-time teaching and doctoral research, regarded by her as “Home work.” These accomplishments should be read as more than an expression of individual disposition of resolve. Yet it is difficult to conceive individual disposition without taking into consideration the social condition of possibilities that the field of education provided. In spite of her gender and racial “otherness,” her academic distinction came from mastering areas of knowledge associated with the sacred and the sublime. “Cultural consecration,” writes Bourdieu, “does indeed confer on objects, persons and situations it touches, a sort of ontological promotion akin to transubstantiation.”¹³

Cooper is best remembered for her book *A Voice from the South*, published in 1892. *Voice from the South* is outstanding for the clarity in which it posits a pedagogic phenomenological platform from which the service of neglected people could find legitimacy, while transgressing the ideology of racial formation where recognition of black humanity was denied.¹⁴ It is an approach that recognizes that how teachers perceive and treat their pupils contributes to their confidence and thereby shapes the quality of the pedagogic relationship. Against the denial of black humanity, Cooper explored what it means to be a man, woman, and child under the racialized, dehumanizing conditions as “chattel” in the New World. Her central questions could be identified as follows: What does it mean to be a woman where traditions of virtue are upheld in law and symbolic culture for one side, but contravened for black women? What does it mean to be a man excluded from the conventions of manhood required for exercising paternal and life-enhancing responsibilities? What is it to be a child entering a world where aspirations have already been limited by prior, racially constituted expectations? These critical questions were formulated against her pioneering recognition of the historic agency of black women. From this understanding she dramatically refuted the view that black men should speak for the “race,” with her famous disclaimer of the black woman’s voice.

Only the BLACK WOMAN can say “when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole *Negro race enters with me.*”¹⁵

With this, she set the conditions for a social ethic of collective responsibility for the elevation of the “race” and an inclusive conception of

humanity not limited by race or masculinity: “*I am my Sister’s Keeper!*” should be the hearty response of every man and woman of the race, and this conviction should purify and exalt the narrow, selfish and petty personal aims into a noble and sacred purpose.”¹⁶ Building communities, Cooper argued, should lay the foundations for social justice. Her characterization of embodied structured existence reverberates with Bourdieu’s formulation of habitus. In essence, the conclusions that Bourdieu draws from his reflexive, reproductive sociology of social practice were understood by Cooper a hundred years before. Cooper’s epistemology recognized that social agents are shaped by their history. It led to her forceful argument that the accumulative impact of historicized structures shapes the social conditions of current, lived experience. On this basis she rejected the racialization of black life as biologically deficient and its methodological study of black life as the systematic measurement of the inherent flaws of the character and culture.¹⁷ She warned that unless the intersection between historical forces of social determinations and subjective endowment were recognized and interrupted, they would ambush the future. Critical accountability and examination of the subjugation of black humanity therefore required “the deed of our estate” and the need to “ferret out their history.” In “What Are We Worth?” Cooper drew the connection between the past, present, and future thus:

The material that goes to make man, the probabilities of his character and activities, the condition and the circumstances of his growth, and his quantum resistance and mastery are the resultant of forces which have been accumulating and gathering momentum for generations. These bodies of ours often come to us mortgaged.¹⁸

With this analysis Cooper chose the field of education to present possibilities within which the interplay of “quantum resistance and mastery” could be utilized to become those durable orientations, propensities in the “modus operandi” of a life structured by rupture. Cooper’s declaration of her life’s work “as the education of neglected people,” then takes us beyond the immediacy and transparency normally associated with biographical or autobiographical narrative. Her apprehension of the phenomenological hermeneutics of social life allowed her to reject artificial dichotomies that in the language of contemporary conceptual antinomies we now describe as subjectivity and objectivity, agency and structure dualisms.¹⁹ She was able to interpret children as part of a whole social experience. Reading Cooper, there is a rich quality to her understanding that the subjectivity of experience arises out of real objective structures of existence. She reveals to us the ontological and methodological necessity of reflexivity of social practice. As a member of a “race” denied the capacity for self-conscious reflection, knowing that this idea was the outcome of human construction, she and other black intellectuals had an existential interest in working towards its obliteration and associated practices. They literally had nothing to lose but their chains. A prerequisite of

Cooper's critical engagement for change came with her signification of the worth of Black humanity.

WORTH AND ONTOLOGICAL INSECURITY

Cooper used the facticity of black life to explore and act upon issues of education that sought to construct an alternative reality for black humanity other than that of the racial order which emptied it of "worth." Her conception of worth constructed black life as value enhancing, potent with intentional multiple struggles for self-actualization. Recognition of the positive human affirming value of worth animates Cooper's *raison de'tre* of her life as: "the education of neglected people" and is thus foundational to her pedagogical phenomenology. Instructional neglect is but one side of her pedagogical discourse, the other side relates to the more serious denial of black existence. Her pedagogical phenomenology resonates with the Durkheimian distinction between pedagogy and teaching. Pedagogical phenomenology is always underpinned by moral regulatory values, and its purpose is to give access to the kind of being it seeks to develop. Pedagogy should not be reduced to empirical technique.²⁰

From the perspective of value, Cooper confronted the substantive question of Black existence in one of the most arresting essays in *Voice from the South*. "What Are We Worth?" has a special significance. Its overriding concern was to reaffirm the worth of black humanity against the ubiquitous dehumanizing racism. She constructed her own counterinventory of the past and sought to use a re-envisioned education as a route to redemption and "purification." A functional chattel-like existence attributed no substantive worth to black humanity. Skin color signified embodied worthlessness, absence of historicity. Denial of, or concession to, rudimentary instruction was itself connotative of lack of worth. In this she held that deliverance from the ontological crisis of a "colorphobic" world required understanding of the conditions that gave rise to the negative anti-human valuation that forced the question "What are we worth?" What do we represent to the world? What is our market value? Are we a positive and additive quantity or a negative factor in the world's elements? What have we cost and what do we come to? These reflexive and existential questions were contemplated against the popular opinion expressed by the Congregationalist preacher, Henry Ward Beecher, brother to the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Beecher concluded the worth of Africans thus:

Were Africa and the Africans to sink tomorrow, how much poorer would the world be? A little less gold and ivory, a little less coffee, a considerable ripple, perhaps where the Atlantic and Indian Ocean would come together-that is all; not a poem, not an invention, not a piece of art would be missed from the world. (*WWW*, 161)

In response to this devastating denunciation and denial of the humanity and worth of black people, Cooper made her own counterinventory and offered a holistic meaning of human worth. Even by the racial order's own measurement of the exchange value of black people, Cooper insisted Europeans were the chief beneficiaries of conquest. The exacting conditions of the "unremunerated toil" of slavery and the relentless "colourphobia" and continued dehumanization, systematic discrimination, and unequal service and treatment depreciated rather than enhanced their value (*WWW*, 180). In this, she, like Du Bois, refused to construct black people as problems and instead focused on the problems they faced. This is a fundamental methodological tenet of subsequent anti-racist practices. She honored the worth of Africans "the original timber" that entered the New World with their "honour," "honesty," and "chastity." Cooper's self-restorative balance sheet demanded more from black existence than its serviceability to the white racial order. In the essay, Cooper explained worth by drawing attention to the coarsening and impoverished conception of life when an infant is judged simply in terms of the naked rationalistic calculation of cost. She contended that if we were to assume a purely utilitarian monetary measurement, "unsentimentally and honestly," we might regard the infant as a "parasite" who "thrives on another's existence" (*WWW*, 167). However, understanding parental commitment invites recognition of worth. It communicates adult submission to love, altruism, and care when it is in the presence of innocence.

In the essay "Ethics of the Negro Question," Cooper took the opportunity to expand her critical engagement with worth by addressing the limits of reason in ways that anticipated postmodern critiques of reason.²¹ Cooper identified the impact of the penetration of rationalization and governmentality on reason, which meant that reason itself was easily disposable in the calculation of black life as mere chattel. With her interrogation of the contradictions and differences in lived experience, Cooper was able to historicize reason, documenting its economic and political contingencies. She used her excavation of contradictions at the heart of reason to unsettle its certainty.

Professing a religion of sublime altruism, a political faith in the inalienable rights of man as man, *these jugglers with reason and conscience* were at the same moment stealing heathens from their far away homes, forcing them with lash and gun to unrequited toil, making it a penal offence to teach them to read the word of God begetting of their own flesh among those helpless creatures and pocketing the guilty increase, the price of their own blood in unholy dollars and cents.²²

Her critique of Western modernity helped to shape the counterdiscourse of Western modernity that was to follow. She is a central figure in the "counter critique" of modernity in the black Atlantic, even though she is often unacknowledged or inadequately recognized in the one-sided, masculinist

mainstream interrogations of modernity.²³ Imperative to her critique was the need to construct an alternative validation of black existence. Indeed, this was the essence of Cooper's restorative pedagogic vision. Her interrogation of the one-sided humanism led her to conclude that moral progress is not always on the side of those who claim supreme, transcendental, privileged access to knowing better its truth. In this she demanded recognition of the epistemological, and perhaps more importantly, the experiential limits in the application of Western reason.

The foresight of Cooper's critical reflection on reason is at the heart of much of Michel Foucault's genealogical critique of a transcendental notion of reason unscathed by the historical political context shaping its role in the will to power.²⁴ Denied the capacity to reason, black people come into visibility through the body and not the mind. Under slavery "for two-hundred and fifty years," the brutalizing dichotomy of "the old education" privileged "the hand" and "deliberately sought to suppress or ignore the soul."²⁵ She, along with Du Bois, rejected its re-affirmation in industrial education, which came with the denigration of "training intellect, sensibilities, and the will" (*OE*, 252). Their pedagogic commitment to broad humanistic education came from *knowing* their own humanity and those to whom they belonged. On this basis they rejected forms of knowledge and pedagogy based upon a negation of worth. Aspects of these issues have been reconfigured in contemporary engagements, the theme of the final part of this section.

CONTEMPORARY ENGAGEMENTS

In resistance to their dehumanizing characterization, black racial subjects have had to learn to "resuscitate" those authentic reflections of self that went beyond negative racial imaginations.²⁶ I believe the ways in which this past has shaped diasporic visions of education is important. The meaning we attach to our existence determines how we elaborate the three dimensional relational consciousness of past, present, and future. We activate the values we place on the past in the belief that it has something important to teach us. Our existence is implanted in the heritage of the past, whether it is negative or positive, and thus we strive to prevent it from slipping away from consciousness. The pedagogic transmission of the past communicates who we believe we were, what we are in the present, and what we aspire to become. Education instrumentalizes the past through its institutional negotiation with the present and in its aspirations for the future. This process is always historically, culturally anchored and contested.

Cooper's humanistic education praxis, in its critique of the naturalization and radicalization of educative qualities and the distribution of education on that basis, is an important exemplar of the inculcation of necessary pedagogic values and skills associated with the resuscitation of positive critique and self-reflection. At the heart of the humanistic tradition of education is the view of education as an act of cultivation, the training of the soul, personality,

character, taste, and judgment. Although generally assumed superior to utilitarian, specialist training of the hand, not all was regarded as suitable for its transforming grace. This tension is deeply embedded in the history of educational thinking. The Cartesian dichotomy between the soul and the body has historically been an awkward juxtaposition for black people. Regarded as not possessing a soul or a mind, they could not seek refuge there. The body was always the signification of the “fixed” absence of a soul and mind.²⁷ The black body therefore became the source and signifier of the profane. This absence was instrumentalized in education, constituting a defining terrain upon which black people have struggled to be considered thinking, rational subjects, against the representational dominance of the surface as the burial place of meaning. Cooper explained its structuring of racial educational ideology:

the fact that the Negroes ability to work had never been called in to question, while his ability to learn Latin and construe Greek Syntax needed to be proved to sneering critics. “Scale the heights!” was the cry. “Go to college, study Latin, preach, teach, orate, and beaver!”

Stung by such imputations, as that of Calhoun that if the Negro could prove his ability to master the Greek subjunctive he might vindicate his title to manhood, the newly liberated race first shot forward along this line with energy and success which astonished its most sanguine friends. (*WWW*, 176)

The values of the field of humanistic education and the unequal collective position of her group determined her provision of an enabling academic curriculum to the poor, one steeped in Greek and Latin to equip them for university education. After all, it was in those very high status areas of the curriculum that assumptions of black congenital inferiority sought justification. She recognized that race, poverty, and gender not only kept black people confined to the vocational areas of the curriculum, but also too readily transmitted obedience and subservience, emptying training of intellectual content. The derision of culture as “mere culture,” she argued, neglected the formative aspects of education involved in cultivating internal dispositions. Culture “is the term for those studies which disclose the child to himself and puts him into possession of his dormant faculties,” she argued (*OE*, 258). Her advocacy of humanistic pedagogy concluded “On Education” thusly:

Any scheme of education should have regard for the whole man□ not a special class or race of men, but man as a paragon of creation, possessing in childhood and even in youth almost infinite possibilities for physical, moral and mental development. (*OE*, 258)

Cooper sought to transcend the dichotomy between mental and manual labor, instead, insisting that education, if it is to be “truly educative,” should train how to think (*OE*, 251). She appealed to universal developmental aims of

education as the criteria upon which to judge how the “Negro” should be educated. “[T]ried and tested,” for its ability to give “direction of thought-power, power of appreciation, power of willing the right,” should be the what is appropriate for black children. Education, whose rationale is the fermentation of autonomy, cannot be denied to children based on predefined crippling notions of the limits of their identity and capacity for self-formation in the world. “This places the educative before the occupative□ the cultural before the special, the developmental before the industrial (*OE*, 256).

In this respect, she was opposed to utilitarian pedagogic practice requiring premature vocational specialization dictated by the labor market, rejecting industrial education, the dominant modality of education that emerged for impoverished former slaves after emancipation in America, the Caribbean, and Africa. It sought to rationalize education on the basis of physical utility in ways that reinforced the strongly racialized classification between mental and manual labor. Industrial education was charged with the task of constructing a rational instrument for legitimizing black subordination. The systematic institutionalization of educational recognition was based on the hand and separated from the mind.

A variant of these issues about forms of knowledge and the quality of pedagogic transmission appropriate to black children resurface in the contemporary history of the education of children of African-Caribbean backgrounds in Britain during the 1980s and 1990s. This time its modality was not industrial education but liberal multiculturalism. At a time when progressive and liberal educators were celebrating multiracial education, Maureen Stone called upon Antonio Gramsci’s pedagogic formalism, along with other structuralist readings of education, to substantiate her courageous critique of that debate. She attacked its prevailing psycho-social therapeutic explanations of black and working class children’s underachievement and the assimilation of these explanations in the sociology of education. These conceptualizations failed to appreciate the determining role “of unequal access to power, to resources, of every kind, that middle class children take for granted.”²⁸ The most serious pedagogical consequence of liberal multicultural education, according to Stone, was its subordination of instructional and performance discourse in favor of an expressive pedagogic practice embedded in notions of cultural pathology. A pedagogic discourse that replaces access to instructional knowledge with psychological therapeutic models must be exposed. It is determined by its perception of the internalization of “victimhood” racial status in the child, family, and community cultural pathologies. Understanding the interconnection between structures of economic opportunities and educational inequalities was for Stone a more adequate basis to explain the marginal position of black and working class children.

The current consolidation of the neoliberal ideological educational agenda in the 1990s and beyond provides some analytical reinforcement to

Stone's approach.²⁹ More dramatically, Jonathon Kozol encapsulates these as "savage inequalities" in the provision of resources in white schools compared to those in urban black schools.³⁰ Marketization of education has allowed the expansion of the strategic breadth of the "decisional field,"³¹ as Bourdon describes it, within which the middle class can operate to exercise "choice and voice" over black and working class groups. "Choice and voice" not only determine access to privileged schools, but shape curricula and pedagogy and enforce boundaries of social, cultural, and racial exclusion. These choice policies institutionalize exclusionary competition between parents, schools, and local education authorities and operate against the spirit of equity, freedom, and justice that Cooper advocated. She argued that progress is only partial when it is based on the exclusion of certain groups and located in a duplicitous racism. These ideas resonate in the critique of desegregation of education revealed through the application of critical race theory. Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate note that change becomes palatable when whites derive the most benefit "regardless of whether African American and other students of colour achieve."³²

According to Phillip Brown, since the 1970s, state-sponsored politicization of parental choice, best described as a "parentocracy" which characterizes the "third wave" in the ideological development of British education, does not represent democratization. Rather, it intensifies inequalities, and a child's education becomes progressively "dependent upon the wealth and wishes of parents, rather than ability and efforts of pupils."³³ What Brown sees as the growing "power struggle for educational certification" is noted by Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski as the middle class impelling the direction of demand for academic credentials to ensure the perpetuation of their historic class advantage in education. They have the capacity for "utilisation of the specific powers of the education system as an instrument of reproduction."³⁴

Black working class minorities, lacking in structural resources, have not benefited from regimes of market choice. On the contrary, research indicates that their situation worsens when schools have power to select pupils. Selection then coincides with race and class, accompanied by the subjection of children to more and more testing and measurement. In the case of black children, the governing discourse within which they become objects of power/knowledge in education resurfaced in *The Bell Curve*. It reinforced the historical burden of inferiorization which states that black people as a group are not naturally members of the "cognitive elite" and therefore are more at home in the "cognitive underclass."³⁵ These negative values placed upon black educability still re-echo the concerns Cooper addressed over a hundred years ago. In so doing they shape the common negative undercurrent about the worth and value of black children and thereby justify the limited usefulness or sense of futility in the energy expended on their behalf.

Indeed, this argument was recently developed by David Gillborn and Deborah Youdell, who noted the inferiorization of capacity of children of Caribbean origin encoded in “eugenicists IQism,” operating through the “common-sense,” “unrecognized” application of the category of “ability.”³⁶ The concept of ability still “operationalises” fixed hereditary notions of the capacity to learn. The most restrictive exercise of the concept of ability was revealed in their exposé of the operation of entry to the tiered General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examination taken in England by the majority of students at sixteen. Entry to different tiers is based upon teachers’ assessment of pupil ability. Gillborn and Youdell record white teachers’ continued opposition to what they regard as the “inflated opinions” African-Caribbean children have of their ability. Such children are disproportionately entered for the foundation tier that in effect ensures that they have failed before they have taken the exam, since they cannot score the C grade regarded as the minimum pass by employers and further education. This situation demonstrates an important aspect of what Bourdieu regards as the ideological concealment function of the presumption of objectivity in the paradoxical quality of testing regimes in education: “By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the education system demands of everyone alike that which it does not give.”³⁷ In this respect, Cooper’s awareness of the dominance of “test and measurements,” “percentages and retardations,” normalizing judgments about the inherent incapacity of black children connects not only with Bourdieu, but also to Foucault’s exploration of the systemization of disciplinary power through examinations.³⁸

What struck me in reading Gillborn and Youdell’s conclusion was the force of the notion of absence of capacity, which inhibits any mediating agency of an enabling pedagogy when dealing with black children. As such, it articulates a fundamentally antagonistic relation between the black tradition’s sense of its own role as a transforming pedagogic agent in black children’s life, and white schools that see their role as one of containment. Containment is diametrically opposed to the reconstituting significance that Cooper’s educational philosophy, the education of neglected people, has come to represent for the pedagogic ambition of black educators. To further that ambition, African-Caribbean parents in England have responded by establishing supplementary schools as a pedagogic space where their children are allowed to *be*: a space where their existence and worth are validated, taken as given, and allowed to grow with confidence, not limited by the multiple pathological discourses of racism. This pedagogic commitment is still imperative and continues to be at the centre of moral emancipatory pedagogic ambition in the education of black children.

Black British children do not constitute ideal pedagogic subjects. They represent the most excluded, and black boys are between four and fifteen times more likely to be excluded than their white peers. The pedagogic ambition of

their community fuels the recurrent critical accusations by white teachers of the exaggerated expectation that black parents are said to have for their children's education. Cecile Wright's research is a catalogue of the disturbing "typifications" by which teachers' recognize and misrecognize the black children in their charge. In their classification of pupils, black children deviate from the construction of the "ideal pupil," naming them in the public space of the school, identifying them as aggressive, insubordinate, emotionally unstable, cantankerous, lacking in motivation, and easily distracted. Wright further exemplifies the excessively harsh language that renders black children visible when for example, a six year-old girl is described as a "thoroughly objectionable bitch" and a six year-old boy is viewed as a future murderer.³⁹ Lisa Delpit raises similar issues in the American context.⁴⁰

Cooper saw this form of objectification in education, reinforced by varying homogenizing epistemologies, resulting in "a people who are habitually reasoned about *en masse* as separate, distinct, and peculiar" by "the multitude counselors." On this Cooper wrote:

Every journeyman tinker thinks he can tell you what to do with the Negro; what sort of clothes he should wear, what sort of meat he should eat, what sort of books he should and should not study: in short, just what sort of education is sane, sensible and "practical" for one of his texture hair and hide. (*OE*, 250)

This overdetermination of race also has a structuring impact upon the operation and disciplining of black subjectivity in education. The objective promise of release from racial marginalization through education gives the field its subjective appeal. In so doing, it can encourage an unrealistic evangelical zeal about the virtues of educational "consecration," to use Bourdieu's term, from those able to ascertain its academic embellishment. For example, Du Bois noted that many loving black parents, in the hope that educational and material improvement would compensate or, assist understanding of "racial facts of life," often forced their children into white pedagogic spaces knowing that the development of their ego might be compromised.⁴¹ This is a contradiction that still ensnares us. Furthermore, the desire to overcome racial subjection can encourage the toleration of rigid pedagogic practice and the subjection to conditions that should be resisted. In this, Cooper warned black educators against the reduction of education to the mechanical transmission of instrumental techniques and rigid discipline in which the overall development and spirit of the child is lost by congealing individuality due to fear of exclusion. In spite of the encumbered contradictions of the racial terms of engagement of her lived experience, the sociological appeal of Cooper's pedagogic practice lay in its orientation towards Max Weber's notion of *verstehen*, in which she shaped her understanding of and empathy with the multiplicity of structured lived experience. The value orientation that she identifies as invested in the act of nurturing also fits Weber's typology of "affectual" action, action motivated by ultimate value.⁴² The value of nurturing

is satisfying in its own right, worthwhile for its own sake. This is an orientation that is increasingly under attack from the instrumental rationality of our neoliberal age.

CONCLUSION

I started this essay by affirming Cooper's critical awareness of neglect and the activation of its pedagogic purpose. I now want in the conclusion to draw attention to a later essay by Cooper, "Sketches from a Teacher's Notebook: Loss of Speech through Isolation." Cooper evocatively discussed the weighted reality of a racialized world through a family silenced by the weight of social suffering (to use Bourdieu's phrase). Cooper's narrative details the children's exclusion from the pedagogic message of the school. Indeed her description of their failure to comply with behavioral norms, their inability to absorb the instrumental, and the expressive order of the school is uncanny in its contemporary resonance. They experienced only the disciplinary technology of the school being frequently subjected to suspension and exclusion. When Cooper got to know the family she understood their tragedy with the grim struggle of life. Their father, an innocent man, had been torn from their mother's arms by a mob and lynched.

I draw on this essay to exemplify the vicissitudes from which Cooper's devotion to the education of neglected people grew. New World Africans thus developed traditions of education imbued with the pedagogic discourse of a calling. Using education to reconfigure this legacy of rupture has encouraged a kind of sacralization of education. Cooper expressed education as a "loving consecration." She described black educators as "ministers of the gospel of intelligence" (*OE*, 250), along with Du Bois who defined the role of teachers "as the giver of immortal life."⁴³ Education was the technology through which to speak the language of secular redemption. Black pedagogic discourses historically work within the confines of a social reality of suffering, but despite this suffering, people like Mrs. Berry and her family carried on "head bloody but unbowed."⁴⁴

I want to end this discussion with a powerful sociological attestation by Bourdieu in his supremely apt titled *Weight of the World: Social Suffering and the Contemporary World*. His demonstration of the inscription of the objective in the subjective is useful in further enhancing the brilliant foresight of Cooper's *verstehen* pedagogic practice.

(N)arratives about the most "personal" difficulties, the apparently most strictly subjective tension and contradictions, frequently articulate the deepest structures of the social world and their contradictions. This is never as obvious as it is for occupants of precarious positions who turn out to be extraordinary "practical analysts."⁴⁵

Education does not have all the answers. It operates both discourses of redemption and discourses of stratification and exclusion. Black educational discourses, while acknowledging the structural limitations within which education operates, nonetheless assiduously defend their appropriation of pedagogic goals that seek to transgress educational neglect and its socio-genic roots. Cooper did this by bearing witness to the emotional and social needs of children, the most voiceless of the neglected, by seeking to transform the lived conditions of racism. In the words of Cooper, “I have faith to believe that God has not made us for naught and He has not ordained to wipe us out from the face of the earth.”⁴⁶ This faith secured her sense of a calling of education, and in doing so, appealed for the creation of a broader concept of humanity across the bridges of race, class, and gender. I strongly believe that the prodigality of Cooper’s *Voice from the South* continues reverberations of suggestive curative pedagogic action. Its legacy is intrinsic to the memory and practices of the African-Caribbean diaspora in Britain, despite the inadequacy of resources to fully operationalize and institutionalize its message in the practice of the educational system that continues to doubt their educational worth. In the exemplification of Cooper’s life, along with other nineteenth-century black thinkers, we have the elucidation of human possibilities at their most desirous, and all the more remarkable for having emerged out of the barbarous circumstances of black dehumanization. The grandeur of their ambition is still impressive and should be reclaimed in order to infuse contemporary democratic struggles, in and outside education, against exclusion, marginalization, and invisibility.

NOTES

1. See Mary Helen Washington’s introduction to Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1988), xxviii.
2. For an indicative statement on the reconfigurations of black feminism see the edited collection by Joy James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *The Black Feminist Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 2000); bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (London: Pluto Press.1982); Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*. London: Women’s Press 1982); Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987); Patricia H. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Routledge 1991); Joy James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectuals* (New York: Routledge1997); T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminism* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield 1998).
3. I want to thank Celia Jenkins who kindly read and made valuable and insightful comments on drafts of this essay. My gratitude to Lewis and Jane Gordon for their facilitation of my visit to America where I was given the opportunity to present some of the ideas developed in this essay. I must also

thank my wonderful daughters who read this essay and reinforced the importance of the nurturing of critical pedagogic disposition. In addition, I want to thank my son for his interior understanding of this.

4. Cooper, “My Racial Philosophy,” in Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 236.

5. Walter Rodney, *The Grounding with My Brothers* (London: Bogle-L’Ouvverture, 1969).

6. Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J.D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Oxford: Polity Press 1992), 130.

7. Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Cambridge: Polity Press. 1988), xiii.

8. I am grateful to Anthony Montario for his discussion with me on the emancipatory significance of belonging embodied in Du Bois’s reflection in the forward to W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (London: Longmans 1965), vi.

9. Anthony Giddens conceives “ontological security” as basic to people’s sense of safety and trust in the world. He argues that late modernity threatens this sense of security. In contrast, my position is that the very constitution of Black formation in western modernity dictated a condition of existence based upon living and negotiating ontological insecurity. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cowley Oxford: Polity Press, 1990).

10. Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Toward a Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Stanford University Press, 1990), 194.

11. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72.

12. I have found Fanon’s reading of Bigger Thomas’s negotiation with the objective conditions of the ubiquitous racist culture productive: “To put an end to his tension, he acts, he responds to the world’s anticipation.” This is a pertinent example to highlight differences in outcomes of habitus that might conform to similar objective conditions but have different proximity to fields through which there can be forms of actualization of subjective possibilities. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Mask* (London: Paladin, 1970), 99.

13. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (London: Routledge 1986), 6.

14. See Max van Manen *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an action Sensitive Pedagogy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990).

15. Cooper, *Voice from the South*, 63 (emphasis in the original).

16. *Ibid.*, 64.

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17. See Lewis Gordon's illuminating analysis of Fanon discussion on the black body as lived absence in "Existential Dynamic of Theorising Black Invisibility," in *Bad Faith and Anti Black Racism*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon (New York: Humanity Books 1999).
 18. Cooper, "What Are We Worth?" in Lemert and Bhan, eds., *Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 164–65. This work will be cited as *WWW* in the text for all subsequent references.
 19. Manen writes: "hermeneutic phenomenology is a philosophy of the personal, the individual, which we pursue against the background of an understanding of the evasive character of the *logos* of the *other*, the *whole*, the *communal*, or the *social*" (*Research Lived Experience*, 7).
 20. Emile Durkheim, *Education and Sociology* (Toronto: The Free Press 1956).
 21. On the matter of the limited reflexivity of dominant critiques of western modernity, see the seminal study by Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso 1993).
 22. Cooper, *The Ethics of the Negro Question*, in Lemert and Bhan, eds., *Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 207 (emphasis added).
 23. See Joy James's critique of the general invisibility of black women's historical agency from the writings of black intellectual history and Paul Gilroy's failure to discuss black women intellectuals, Cooper among them, who crossed *The Black Atlantic* (*Transcending the Talented Tenth*).
 24. Michel Foucault, "Space, Knowledge and Power: An Interview with Michel Foucault," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books 1984).
 25. Cooper, "On Education," in Lemert and Bhan, eds., *Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 251. This work will be cited as *OE* in the text for all subsequent references.
 26. Tsenay Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 53.
 27. Fanon, *Black Skin White Mask*, 82.
 28. Maureen Stone, *The Education of the Black Child in Britain* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1981), 8.
 29. Mark Olssen, John Codd, and Anne O'Neill, *Education Policy: Globalisation and Democracy* (London: Sage Publications 2004).
 30. Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's School* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 3–4. See his disturbing equation between segregation in contemporary urban schools with those that characterized 1896 in *Plessey versus Ferguson*.
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31. Cited in Maureen Stone, *Education of the Black Child in Britain*, 31. For a comprehensive statement on the market agenda see: Philip Brown, A.H. Halsey, Hugh Lauder, and Amy Stuart Wells, "The Transformation of Education and Society: An Introduction," in *Education, Culture, Economy, Society*, eds. A.H. Halsey, Hugh Lauder, and Amy Stuart Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). See also Stephen Ball and Carol Vincent, "New Class Relations in Education: The Strategies of the Fearful Middle Classes," in *Sociology of Education Today*, ed. Jack Dermaine (London: Palgrave Publishers 2001), 185.
 32. Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate, VI, "Towards a Critical Race Theory of Education," in *Education, Globalisation and Social Change*, eds. Hugh Lauder, Phillip Brown, Jo-Anne Dillabough, and A.H. Halsey (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005), 575.
 33. Phillip Brown, "The 'Third Wave': Education and the Ideology of Parentocracy," in Halsey, Lauder, and Wells, eds., *Education, Culture, Economy, Society*, 392.
 34. Stephen Ball, Richard Bowe, and Sharon Gewirtz, "Circuits of Schooling: A Sociological Exploration of Parental Choice of School in Social Class Context," in Halsey, Lauder, and Wells, eds., *Education, Culture, Economy, Society*, 420.
 35. Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press 1994).
 36. David Gillborn and Deborah Youdell, "The New Iqism: Intelligence, 'Ability' and Rationing Education," in Dermaine, ed., *Sociology of Education Today*, 75, 81, and 86.
 37. Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," in *Power and Ideology in Education*, ed. Jerome Karabel and A.H. Halsey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 494.
 38. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1977).
 39. Cecile Wright, "Ethnic Relations in the Primary Classroom," in *Ethnic Relations and Schooling*, ed. Sally Tomlinson and Maurice Croft (London: The Athlone, 1995), 49–51.
 40. Lisa Delpit, *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (New York: New York Press, 1995), xii.
 41. W.E.B. Du Bois, "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?" in *The Oxford W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (New Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 426.
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42. Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York: Free Press, 1949).
 43. W.E.B. Du Bois, “Careers Open to College Bred Negroes,” in *W.E.B. Du Bois Speaks: Speeches and Addresses 1890–1919*, ed. Philip Foner (New York London: Pathfinder, 1970), 93.
 44. Cooper, “Sketches from a Teacher’s Notebook: Loss of Speech through Isolation,” in Lemert and Bhan, eds., *Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 229.
 45. Pierre Bourdieu et al., *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 511.
 46. Cooper, *Ethics of the Negro Question*, 214.
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