

A RHETORIC OF LOVE: A WILL TO PUSH BACK

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

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# A RHETORIC OF LOVE: A WILL TO PUSH BACK

Abstract

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From the time Black folks arrived on the shores of America, they have been indoctrinated into Western Culture, including Christianity. From the time. As a result, much of their African culture has been displaced. Yet there remains Kemeticism, Ma'at, and Nommo, parts of African culture. I arguer that for Black folks to gain their full humanity, it will be necessary for them to understand their African roots, particularly when it comes to the power of the spoken word. Within this dissertation, then, I focus on how Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X infused Western rhetoric with elements of Nommo to get their message across. By understanding the elements of Nommo, African Americans will have a better understanding of the need to love themselves, and with that understanding will have the tools to gain the confidence and courage to push back against the inequalities they face. Because Blacks have had fewer opportunities to become educated, they have relied on their emotional selves, their ethos and pathos, to communicate. Conversely, because white folks have had more opportunities to become educated, they are more logocentric. If we are going to become more harmonized as a society, Black people will have to become more comfortable with their cerebral selves and white people will have to become more comfortable with their emotional selves. If this can be accomplished, the chances of living in harmony are increased, and all of humanity will benefit.

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When the power of love overcomes the love of power the world will know peace.

Jimi Hendrix

## The Power of the Word

### Introduction

Although many have argued that in order for Black people to transcend America's racism they need to embrace a paradigm of love grounded in Christianity or Islam, I argue that Black people will have to ground their love in their Kemetic roots as well. That is the "Nile Valley cultural rhetoric that is based on the fundamental concept of Ma'at: Truth, justice, virtue, reciprocity, balance, and righteousness" (Crawford 113-4). To begin a conversation about Ma'at, it is necessary to give a brief description of Kemeticism. "Kemeticism is a re-creation of the religion of Ancient Egypt and includes the revival of its belief systems, its spirituality and other relevant aspects of its culture, such as literature and art. It is a belief in the Neteru\* (Gods and Goddesses). It is a way of living in harmony with and upholding Ma'at, which is balance in all things: The cosmos, the natural world and that of human society. The practice of the Kemetic religion today strives to be a living revival of the religion of the peoples of Ancient Egypt" ("HYPERLINK "http://www.ecauldron.net/reconegypt.php" <http://www.ecauldron.net/reconegypt.php>"). Ma'at is both cosmic and earthly law that both people and the cosmos are connected to personally and socially (T'Shaka 114). Through DNA, history, and culture it is clear that Blacks have a connection to Kemeticism. One of the ways that Blacks may embrace their

full humanity is by having an understanding of their Kemetic roots. As Molefi Asante states, Africans with dogged determination must make an effort to engage in a renaissance, the rebirth of the culture, philosophy, traditions, and the values of the peoples of Africa, not with romantic notions but in a spiritual and transformative way to assist in living in current times (68). By embracing their Kemetic roots, Blacks can begin to operate out of a place of deep respect and love for their African roots.

Ma'at is a pre-established harmony in the cosmos, felicity supreme, an invitation to all men and women in society to do and speak, think and act, to live according to what is true, normal, harmonious, according to virtue, with all the hieratic, traditional, transcendental, imperative, and absolute implications that the word virtue takes on within the mentality of the African people of the Nile Valley (Obenga 318).

Long before Black folks arrived on the shores of America there have been attempts to discredit or negate the contributions they have made to the world community. Whether through the taking of lands, dismantling of family and community, the dishonoring of art, culture, history, literature, math and science, Blacks have been profoundly economically affected as a result.

As African Studies professor Maulana Karenga points out, the last centuries of Ma'at coincide with the beginning of Christianity, and as a way to discredit Ma'at, it was criticized for its use of symbolism and sacrificing of animals and was outlawed both by Theodosius in the fourth-century and Justinian in the sixth-century (352).

Traditionally, the justification used by Europeans for the enslavement of Africans was

that Africans were heathens and savages who could be civilized by being converted to Christianity (Higginbotham 45). At first, Blacks were told that they were slaves because they did not believe in the Christian God. Many believed that if the Blacks converted to Christianity, their suffering and hardship would be alleviated and freedom would follow. That never happened. Upon realizing that once slaves converted they were human, slave masters changed the rules. They now said that Blacks were inferior because God did not know them, and because of that, even if they turned their face to God, God would not turn his face to them and they would always be inferior (Higginbotham 46). The rhetoric of Christianity was used as a way to further promote the inferiority of Blacks. No matter what Blacks did, they would always be seen as inferior.

In order for America and the world to come into balance, it will be necessary for us to fully recognize and honor the contributions made to the world by people of African descent. The truth in regards to ancient Africa and the role it plays in Western thought will have to be revealed. As Cheikh Anta Diop has shown, the earliest humans to reside on earth resided in Ancient Egypt. After numerous attempts, he finally persuaded his dissertation committee at the University of Paris that his findings were correct and in 1955 published his dissertation, *Negro Nations and Cultures*. Although the region had been studied before, few acknowledged that the peoples were of African descent. Having this knowledge could potentially change how Blacks view themselves and how whites view the contributions Blacks have made to the world. Furthermore, if this truth were known, it would change the whole scope of Western thinking. As Clinton Crawford



points out, this dishonest behavior follows a pattern that continually gets perpetuated to nullify the contributions that Blacks have made to the world (111). One can only imagine how the landscape would change if this knowledge was widely disseminated. The way history has been recorded, one gets the impression that the world came into being at the same time as Christianity and Islam did. But, as scholars have argued and proved, Ma'at was around long before both Christianity and Islam. The same efforts that were put forth prior to slavery continued during and well after slavery ended. Understanding this, one can only wonder why such an effort has been made to discredit Ma'at. Because of this misguided education, most people, both Black and white, have no knowledge of the history of Ma'at and that the history extends back to the beginning of time. They are also unaware of the role that Nommo, which comes out of Ma'at, plays in sign making. As Saint Augustine says, "All doctrine concerns either things or signs, but things are learned by signs, thus every sign is a thing" (9).

Language is a way of ordering signs as a way to formulate the basic stratagems which people employ, in endless variations, and consciously or unconsciously, for the outwitting or cajoling of one another. Phrased another way, "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle 24). On the other hand, with African American rhetoric, which has roots in Kemeticism, reading of the signs or symbols is not used to cajole or persuade, but rather to:

merge with universal cosmic energy. African American

rhetoric is preoccupied with human welfare. In other words,

the orator's concern is with the spiritual harmony of the audience or community, again abiding by the guiding principles of Ma'at. The word set forth by the rhetoric demonstrates that what is morally good is what benefits a human being; it is what is decent for man--what brings dignity, respect, contentment, prosperity, and joy to man and his community. What is morally bad is what brings misery, misfortune, and disgrace (Knowles-Borishade 494).

The point is this: If more attention were given to Ma'at and its concepts, perhaps the race, class, and gender issues would no longer be issues because we would have a better understanding that in order to live in harmony with nature, everyone's humanity must be valued.

Unlike most people who can trace their roots, whether they are from Spain, Italy, France, German, India, or a member of a Native American tribe, for the most part Blacks can only trace their roots either from the south or from the cane plantations of the Caribbean. As a result, most Blacks are completely oblivious to the contributions their race has made to the world as well as the vital role religion has played in keeping people in the dark.

Since the times of slavery, Christianity has been used to forward racist attitudes and to keep Blacks in an inferior state of mind. As Frederick Douglass eloquently explains,

My friends, I have come to tell you something about slavery—what I know of it, as I have felt it. I have suffered under the lash embedded itself in my flesh. And yet my master [Thomas Auld] has the reputation of being a pious man and a good Christian. He was a class leader in the Methodist church. I have seen the pious class leader cross the hands of one of his young female slaves, and lash her on the bare skin and justify the deed by the quotation from the *Bible*, ‘He who knoweth the master’s will and doth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.’ Our masters of the Gospel tell us we were born to be slaves (qtd. Cheesebrough 83).

If we are going to move away from the racist, classist, and sexist place that has become America and academia, it is necessary to begin teaching about the role African American rhetoric has played and continues to play.

Frederick Douglass was a man who had no formal education and yet played a vital role in ending slavery. “Frederick Douglass became the collective voice of the three to four million enslaved African Americans, a number that grew to about eight million by the end of his long activist life” (Mieder 1). Furthermore, Mieder states, “His rhetorical prowess is legendary, he had a solid grasp of rhetorical devices: antithesis, apostrophe, allusion, compare-contrast, definition, irony, metaphor, personal example, and simile to

name of few” (2). A speech written by Douglass entitled, *What to the Slave is the 4th of July*, is an exemplary use of rhetorical devices that educators try to teach students, and yet, to my knowledge, it has never been used as a teaching tool. Another example is *Columbia Reader*.

One has to wonder how a man with so little education learned to be such a great orator. I suggest that he was able to reach the heights he did because he had an understanding of Ma’at and the ability to understand and call upon Nommo. To illustrate Douglass’ understanding of Ma’at, an observer in Cork Ireland described him as such: He was more than six feet tall, stood straight as an arrow, his voice, rich, sonorousness and musical, an ideal orator, one that people never forgot (McFeely 124-25 & Logon 23-24). Although Douglass described himself as a Christian, he was not afraid to criticize the contradictions that he saw and heard by those who professed to be Christians. This is another indication that he understood Ma’at. That is, he had a solid understanding that no human being should live in shackles and that women deserve the same rights as men. These are ideas suggested by Ma’at. His rhetoric was a rhetoric of love.

W.E.B. Du Bois understood the necessity of challenging all aspects of life, including religion, when it is not promoting harmony between man and nature. He states,

May the Lord give us both the honesty and strength to look our own faults squarely in the face and not ever continue to exercise and minimize them, while they grow. Grant us that wide view of ourselves which our neighbors

process, or better the highest view of infinite justice and goodness and efficiency. In that great white light let us see the littleness and narrowness of our souls and the deeds of our days, and then forthwith begin their betterment. Only thus shall we broaden out the vicious circle of our own admiration into great commendation of God (19).

It has been suggested by some that Du Bois was anti-religious, but as Manning Marble states, “Du Bois was simultaneously an agnostic and an Anglican, a staunch critic of religious dogma and a passionate convert to the black version of Christianity” (qtd. in Rabaka 122). He practiced a rhetoric of love, one that calls people to be their best selves. His belief in his people was expressed in his own faith for the world. Du Bois believed early on in his career in religion and the church, but after being told while at Fisk University that it was a sin to dance he began to change his views about the church and religion, and he took issue with the way that the church did not live up to what he thought the church’s mission was: “The paths and higher places are choked with pretentious, ill-trained men and in far too many cases with men dishonest and otherwise immoral” (259). In fact, he became one of the biggest critics of the church and religion. Although, on numerous occasions he affirmed his belief in a force that dominates all life by taking issue with anyone who tried to tie him to any one particular religion or church. He understood that Christianity came from Africa. In an article he wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly* he stated, “It was through Africa that Christianity became a religion of the world” ( qtd. in Rabaka 25). It would appear that he had an understanding of Ma’at and

tried to uphold its tenets, those being an invitation to all to speak, think, act, and live according to what is true (Obenga 318). In terms of studying rhetoric, the role that racism and the church has played in discrediting the contributions Blacks have made to society has done a grave disservice to students and to the general population. Du Bois is one of the greatest scholars this country has produced in the last century, but for the most part his contributions are not studied. In 1929, Du Bois wrote a letter to Gandhi asking for him to send a message to Blacks and in response Gandhi wrote,

Let not the 12 million Negroes be ashamed of the fact that they are the grandchildren of slaves. There is dishonor in being slave-owners. But let us not think of honor or dishonor in connection with the past. Let us realize that the future is with those who would be pure, truthful and loving. For us the old wise men have said: Truth ever is, untruth never was. Love alone binds and truth and love occurs only to the truly humble (qtd. in Lewis 91).

Like Douglass, Du Bois was in touch with his African roots. His grandparents had been slaves. It would appear that he heard stories about what had happened and how people survived, and hearing such stories perhaps motivated him to live a Ma'at kind of life. Du Bois was formally educated and was versed in western rhetoric, but it was his understanding of Ma'at that allowed him, like Douglass, to live his life practicing a rhetoric of truth based on love. That is, a rhetoric that challenges the racist, sexist and classist attitudes that oppress people. He understood that in order to live

in harmony truth must be spoken, and he understood that a price must be paid. He accepted the consequences for the choices he made rather than live a life of comfort that was afforded to him because of his education. Instead he lived life under attack for challenging the misconceptions that both Blacks and whites lived with. As a result, he spent the twilight of his life living in Ghana. Du Bois saw the duplicitousness within the church and religion, and how it affected lives, and spoke to it. To challenge the institution that was the stronghold of the Black community, needless to say, did not go over well, and he was ostracized for voicing his options. Although he co-founded the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*, (NAACP), and was one of the key players in the PanAfrican movement, he was still met with opposition by some Blacks and many whites. He also was a staunch advocate for women's rights. "Among Black men, W.E.B. Du Bois largely filled the role of Douglass as the chief proponent of women's equality. Du Bois' commitment to women's rights began as early as 1887, when as the editor of the *Fisk Herald* he predicted "the age of Women is surely dawning" (Marble 82). "Du Bois understood women of African descent, in particular, to have even greater potential as agents of radical social change on account of their simultaneous experience of, and revolutionary praxis against racism, sexism, and economic exploitation, whether under capitalism or colonialism" (Rabaka 65). His understanding that women deserve the same rights as men is a clear indication of his understanding the value of Ma'at. It is important to include more discussion about Du Bois and his rhetoric, because his critical socio-theoretical framework has immense importance since it

provides critical educational theory and African critical pedagogy with a paradigm and point of departure for developing a multiperspectival social theory that is simultaneously critical of racism, sexism, capitalism, and colonialism (Rabaka 70). And because, he too, operated out of a rhetoric of love.

Kenneth Burke's idea of the pentad and consubstantiality are two important contributions to the world of rhetoric. When these theories are awarded serious thought their relevance becomes apparent. If we look at the pentad, the five elements that compose the pentad are the same elements an actor studies as s/he prepares to take on a role in a play. That is: agent, agency, act, purpose, and scene. It is by having an awareness of the above that allows one to embrace the ambiguity, "and it is in this area of ambiguity that transformations take place; in fact, without such areas, transformation would be impossible" (Burke xix). For example, a person (agent) has been socialized to believe that s/he is not as good as the next person, yet somehow, the individual understands Ma'at: "An invitation to all to speak, think and act, to live according to what is true" (Obenga 318). In this case, what is true is that the individual believes s/he is valuable and lives and speaks according to that truth. Once that truth is established, the individual has to create a picture in the mind of what the scene would look like if the individual lived in a world that valued her or him. Understanding, that in doing rhetoric, the audience is the most important element in the equation. Audiences are going to have their bias based on race, class, and gender, and as a result the actor will be constrained. In other words, the individual has to have an understanding of Kemetics and divinity of Nile



Valley speech and know that it is a gift from the creator, that all of human creation and natural phenomena emanate from the productive power of the word, Nommo, which in itself is life force (Alkebulan 27-28). With this understanding, the actor can use words and their body to help create the kind of scene that encourages the most complete understanding. Once the actor has determined the scene, hers/his next piece of business is to figure out the best way to act in order to enhance the chances of obtaining harmony. Continuing with the example from above, the individual wants to be treated in a way that acknowledges the value that they process. In order to do this, the individual must understand that strictly speaking the pentadic analysis is concerned with words for motives, and it need not be so limited. It is true that in understanding the pentad it should not be limited to words, but rather how words are used in order to convey the message. If more time, space, and investigation were given to African American rhetoric and the idea of Nommo, it would become clear that in order to increase the chances of the words having an impact, they must be spoken with all the elements of Nommo present. That is: rhythm, sounding, styling, improvisation, storytelling, lyrical code, image making, and call and response. When these elements are present, “Nommo gains in power and effectiveness in direct proportion with the moral character, strength of commitment and vision of the individual as well as the skill s/he exhibits. The speaker must direct hers/his creative powers toward a higher level of consciousness by activating spiritual and psychic powers” (Knowles-Borishade 490). The purpose of the individual acting the way that s/he does is to obtain agency.

The concepts mentioned above can be a bit abstract. In order to help students understand what Burke's pentad is or what Nommo means and how to incorporate the elements into one's life, having an example of a person who embodies these traits will give a clear illustration of how one lives life understanding the pentad and incorporating Nommo into life. By looking at the life and rhetoric of Paul Robeson our understanding of how Nommo is the pentad, and by looking closely at Nommo, our understanding of the pentad will become clearer. Paul Robeson was an outstanding athlete, a lawyer, actor, singer and activist. Like Douglass, and DuBois, Robeson's life was spent fighting for a more just America. And like the other two, Robeson's life had deep roots in slavery and the church. His grandfather was a runaway slave turned preacher and his father became a preacher as well and spent his life fighting for the rights of Black people. It could be surmised that Robeson received his penchant for justice due to the fact that both his grandfather and father were aware of their Kemetite roots and embraced them and taught Paul to embrace them as well. He was also taught to love who he is and where he came from. He knew that to safeguard freedom of thought required vigilance, struggle, and even sacrifice. He believed what Frederick Douglass said in 1857: "If we ever get free from oppression and wrongs heaped upon us, we must pay for their removal" (Robeson 8). He also agreed with Douglass that if the struggle was waged persistently and continued long enough, it would be successful. He was also a forerunner in the campaign to educate the American people concerning the truth about Africa (Robeson 9). Although he was a lawyer and he wrote scholarly articles, he mainly used his voice through acting

and singing as a way to combat the treatment of all oppressed peoples. Based on the way that Robeson lived his life, it can be assumed that he had an understanding of Ma'at, or "The African belief in the pervasive, transformative, even life-giving power of the Word" (Gilyard 12). Robeson started out as a lawyer but after a white clerk refused to serve him coffee, he quit the profession and spent the remainder of his life fighting for justice through music and acting. Although he was a lawyer and could have done his fighting from behind the cloak of the law, he chooses to do his fighting a different way. By studying his speeches, performances in movies and plays, and his performances as a concert singer, our understanding of Ma'at as well as Burke's pentad have the potential to be more solid. Through singing and performing, he made it clear for the students of rhetoric to see the value of including all the elements of Nommo in one's rhetoric and how through understanding the pentad the value in the lessons learned go farther and deeper than just the choice of words. Rather, embracing Kemetics and the values of Nile Valley speech are necessary in order for one to grasp the full meaning of the power and the transformative magic of words. Whether he was singing Negro spirituals, Irish folk tales or Arias, he had the ability to make the audience feel what he was singing or speaking about. In order to grasp the full meaning and power of the Ma'at Blacks, the world will have to dig deeper than their Christian, Islamic, and Judaism roots want to allow.

Martin Luther King's *Letter from the Birmingham Jail* is perhaps one of the most anthologized pieces of literature in teaching rhetorical strategies, but is generally not

talked about in terms of African American rhetoric. But in studying the letter there are elements of Nommo present. In his letter, he uses rhythm, sounding, improvisation, lyrical code, image making, call and response, and resolve, all in an effort to make his argument more persuasive. However, most theorists use his letter as a way to show how he uses Western rhetorical strategies to make his argument. They are correct to acknowledge the Western elements present in his work, but on the other hand, if they had an understanding of African American rhetoric they could discuss how he combined the two. Perhaps students and professors would understand the necessity of incorporating African American rhetorical strategies in writing and teaching. As a result, students' writing would be richer and professor's lectures would be more engaging and both parties would understand that the best writing and teaching combines both, and that Western rhetoric is an outgrowth of Nommo, which comes from Kemetic tradition. If students knew and professors acknowledged what we know about traditional rhetoric having its roots in Africa and spent more time developing an understanding of the contributions made by Africans, maybe some of the racist attitudes that permeate society and academia would dissipate.

Although King's rhetoric is grounded in Christianity, it is apparent that his rhetoric of love is grounded in his understanding of the Kemetics and Ma'at. King states, "Although there is a tendency to conform, we as Christians have a mandate to be nonconformists. The Apostle Paul, who knew the inner realities of the Christian faith, counseled, 'Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of

your mind.' We are called to be people of conviction, not conformity; of moral nobility, not social respectability. We are called to live to a higher standard (King 8). King's statement is very similar to what Obenga says in regards to Ma'at, an invitation to all to speak, think and act, to live according to what is true (318). In his *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*, King not only uses allusions, metaphors, ethos, logos, and pathos, he also uses rhythm, styling, call and response, improvisation, as well as storytelling to convey his message. All of these are elements of Nommo, traits that a good rhetorician possesses.

Finally, by looking at the rhetorical style of Malcolm X it will become apparent too, that his rhetoric was grounded in Kemetics, a rhetoric of love. He, too, had roots in the church and his father was a preacher and involved in the Black Freedom movement during his life. His father staunchly believed that God did not put Black people on earth to serve whites and spent his life fighting the forces that would deny Blacks their rights. Eventually, his father was killed by a group of white supremacists. Perhaps his father's teaching provided Malcolm with the tools necessary to find the courage and strength to believe what he believed. The fact that his father was a preacher gives some insight as to why he might have chosen to become a minister. However, it would appear that he was driven by a deeper force than following in his father's footsteps. Although his father's religion was steeped in Christianity, Malcolm's was steeped in Islam.

The story has been told numerous times, that it was during his time in prison that he met another inmate who introduced him to Islam, and through his conversion met

Elijah Mohammad, whom Malcolm credited with turning his life around. Like Douglass, but unlike DuBois, Robeson, and King, Malcolm did not possess a formal education, a college degree. Although he did not have a document from an institution of higher learning, as pointed out by Ayesha K in her article *Malcolm X: A Mix Legacy*, “It is surprising to hear Malcolm’s speeches--his command over language, ability to form arguments and use of metaphor and analogies, not to mention references to history, philosophy and literature are atypical of someone who had no education after junior high school” (5). His grasp of rhetoric and how to use it, like Douglass, is amazing. In the beginning of his time as a social activist, Malcolm was a supporter of black separatism most of his public life, Malcolm X Shabazz died believing in equality for all men.

Around 1962, Malcolm took his first trip to Africa. It was on this trip that he would experience a transformation that impacted his life until it ended. In the beginning, he believed that white people were devils and that Blacks should get as far away from them as possible. He became a Black Nationalist, a person believes in nationalism as an expression of a desire for some degree of political, social, cultural, and economic autonomy. It is a movement for self determination brought about by centuries of oppression. Black Nationalists believe in unity and solidarity, pride in cultural heritage, and Black consciousness. He challenged Blacks to see themselves and each other differently, to have a sense of pride about who they are. On his trip, he experienced people of all colors getting along and treating each other like they were indeed brothers and sisters. It was also on this trip that he became aware of the similarities between the

oppression the Blacks in America and the issues Africans were facing on the continent. In light of the transformation Malcolm went through on his trip to Africa and his contact with people from all over, his studying of history, there is little doubt that he came across Kemetics and Ma'at.

Upon his return, his relationship with the Moslems began to deteriorate. Malcolm no longer saw every white person as the devil. In fact, he publicly announced his mistake in accusing all white people of being devils. It was soon after his retraction that his relationship to Elijah Mohammad and the Moslems became irreparable, and he severed ties with them. "Malcolm X's political thought was pushed by two things, his unswerving commitment to history as the ultimate determination of the truth or falsity; and his willingness to subject to critical scrutiny and revision all things which he accepted as true" (Sales 53). He believed that truth is the most important, more so than religion. Again, remembering that truth and equality are two of the major components of Ma'at. It is safe to say that Malcolm X had some understanding of Ma'at. Also, when looking at Malcolm from a rhetorical perspective, it is clear that he had some understanding of Nommo, the transformative power of the word, and could incorporate the elements into his speeches. For Instance, his speech *The Ballot or the Bullet*, rhetorically is as good as Douglass' Fourth of July speech or King's letter. He uses allusion, metaphor, rhythm and other rhetorical devices to make his point. But like Douglass' speech, or the rhetoric of Dubois, Robeson, Malcolm X's work is not studied from a rhetorical perspective.

During the initial period when rhetoric was being introduced in Athens, only

certain people were allowed to learn rhetoric. It was thought that only those from a certain background possessed the skills to learn it. Only the wealthy. If one wanted to advance one's life, become a professor, lawyer, politician, or any other profession that had social status, they had to speak the language in a persuasive way. Those in power recognized that if people understood the power of words and how to use them, it would not be as easy to dupe them. Therefore, they went to great lengths to keep the masses ignorant. That was until Protagoras and other Sophists came along and began tutoring people in rhetoric:

The first sophists were the first to offer systematic instruction in the arts of speaking and writing in the West. The emergence of democracy in fifth-century B.C. Athens demanded a broader participation in government and legal affairs created the need for a kind of secondary education designed to prepare young men for a life in the polis. The first or elder sophists--Protagoras of Abdera, Gorgias of Leontini, Prodicus, Hippias, and others--filled that need. These well traveled, charismatic teachers offered to those who could pay their substantial fees an intense and personal training in the technique (art) of rhetoric, i.e., speaking persuasively in public assembly and before judges" (Jarrett XV).

The Sophists assured people that anyone could learn to be a rhetorician, and offered their services to anyone who could afford to pay for them. Protagoras, one of the



first sophists is said to have gathered knowledge from the Egyptians (Crawford 116). The sophists were said to be intellectually meretricious, performing feats of verbal trickery and enchantment. Hippias claimed to be able to recite from memory lists of words after one look, both he and Georgias bragged that they could talk impromptu on any topic and entranced audiences with dazzling figures and prose rhythms (Jarret 2). The way the sophists are described sounds a lot like they understood the elements of Nommo.

However, in the teaching of rhetoric, there is almost never mention of the role Nommo played in the teaching of how to become a good orator. Furthermore, one of the ways that the young men of Athens were taught was through imitation. The teacher would recite a passage or poem, and students would pay very close attention to diction, posture, body language, rhythm, and style and try and copy them. Once it was proven that a student possessed the skills to recite the passage or poem to the teachers satisfaction, he was moved on to the next part of the training. As Quintilian says, “The chief symptom of ability in children is memory, of which the excellence is twofold: to receive with ease and retain with fidelity. The next symptom is imitation; for that is an indication of a teachable disposition, but with this provision, that it express merely what is taught” (Murphy 28). Or as Cicero states, “knowledge was acquired through imitation and repetition, as when learning fencing or some other sport. Hence the Latin word for school, ‘ludus,’ also means ‘game’” (Murphy 25) (Everitt 28).

To be a good rhetorician and writer, it means that one has to practice a lot to acquire the skills to be good. And if one of the best ways to learn the art is through

imitation and repetition, then it seems that it would be wise for teachers of the subject to use the individuals that I write about as models of how to do it well. Whether speaking or writing, these five individuals were masters at understanding how rhetoric works. They understood that the goal is to live in harmony with nature, the transforming power of words, and that truth was more important than material wealth. They all had a very good grasp of the other elements of Nommo as well: Styling, improvisation, call and response, storytelling, sounding, image making, lyrical code, and rhythm. But most importantly, they understood how God and religion were used to oppress people and were willing to challenge both Blacks and whites who used religion as a way to further oppress people. Because they operated out of a rhetoric of love, they could challenge the church.

My dissertation will show that by understanding Nommo and seeing it in action, and by studying these five individuals and their love of Africa, history, self, and community, this put them in a place where they were willing to give up their lives in the fight for truth. Not only for themselves, but for all people, and their willingness to take on religion and those who professed to be following God's words but were treating others in oppressive ways. They also challenged those who believed that white people were put here to be in charge and that the plight of oppressed people was the will of God.

Church has been a stronghold for Black people for a long time. To move to a different place, it will be necessary for Black people to not only embrace their Christian and Moslem roots but their Kemetic roots as well. By doing so this will have positive effects on numerous fronts. First, Blacks will understand that as a people the

contributions made to the world are plenty. They will understand that the most important tool necessary in living a life with agency is truth, and that ultimately one's goal should be to live in harmony. By including African American rhetoric and the rhetoricians mentioned above into the teaching of rhetoric, we could create, "A model of leadership and pedagogical practice marked by forms of political agency and moral courage that expands the meaning of pedagogy to all sites where knowledge and social identities are produced" (Giroux 23). In order to create an atmosphere where this kind of learning can take place and rid ourselves of the old and new racism, we must be willing to talk about religion, from a rhetoric of love, and the role it plays in oppressing people. By looking at these individuals and studying their styles and methods, students and teachers will be given the tools on how to become good rhetoricians and how to become effective teachers who are willing to take risks to get at the truth.

# Understanding the Past in Order to Live in the Present

## Chapter One

Ma'at and Nommo come out of the African religion known as Kemeticism. Kemetic (ancient Egyptian) quality of order, justice, righteousness and balance, and without Ma'at there is no understanding, no harmony and no possible restoration of balance (Alkebulan 25). "She was a goddess who ruled everything. She was not the sun and she was not power and strength, she represented rather an abstraction. She was 'truth' and 'order.' The Egyptians believed that the universe was above everything else an ordered and rational place. It functioned with predictability and regularity. The cycles of the universe always remained constant in the moral sphere" (Hooker 3). The Egyptians believed in balance. The order of the universe (Ma'at) functioned with unswerving accuracy. This meant that the concept of truth meant for the Egyptian the rational and orderly workings of the universe rather than a diverse phenomena (Hooker 3). Or as Theophile Obenga states, Ma'at is the primordial principle which gives order to all values.

Ma'at is the substantive ingredient in the cosmic order, part Truth and Justice that allowed the pharaoh (for all that he was and symbolized) to protect the country from disorder, from chaos, from famine, from misery, and that all men living in society must conform to Justice and Truth, to Ma'at, the Supreme Virtue, guide and measure of all human activity. (317)

"Kemeticism is a re-creation of the religion of Ancient Egypt, and includes the revival of its belief systems, its spirituality, and other relevant aspects of its culture, such as literature and art. It is a belief in the Neteru\* (Gods and Goddesses). It is a way of living in harmony with and upholding Ma'at, which is balance in all things: The cosmos,

the natural world and that of human society. The practice of the Kemetic religion today strives to be a living revival of the religion of the peoples of Ancient Egypt” (“

HYPERLINK "<http://www.ecauldron.net/reconegypt.php>"

<http://www.ecauldron.net/reconegypt.php>"). Ma'at is both cosmic and earthly law, that people and the cosmos are connected to personally and socially (Crawford 114). The Nile Valley cultural rhetoric is based on the fundamental concepts of Ma'at: Truth, justice, virtue, reciprocity, balance, and righteousness, among other tenets (Crawford 113).

Furthermore, the most important objective of Nile Valley Rhetoric is to create a more just society where men and women are treated equally (Crawford 114). To explain in more detail, Ma'at is the ruling force between good and evil. Moreover, when you speak of it as the organizing principle of human society, the creative spirit of phenomena, and the eternal order of the universe, you come close to understanding what the ancient Kemetic civilization understood (Alkebulan 24). One of the keys to understanding Ma'at is having an understanding of the relationship between humanity and the universe. Their understanding of their relationship to the universe guided the ancients and provided them an understanding of their role and interdependence with the universe. It also provided an understanding of the universe, giving them a sense of divine order, balance, symmetry, geometry, truth and immortality (Alkebulan 25). Understanding this, as Molefi Asante states, Africans with dogged determination must make an effort to engage in a renaissance, the rebirth of the culture, philosophy, traditions, and the values of the peoples of Africa, not with romantic notions but in a spiritual and transformative way to assist in living in current times (68).

Because Ma'at is a pre-established harmony in the cosmos, felicity supreme, an invitation to all men and women in society to do and speak, think and act, to live according to what is true, normal, harmonious, according to virtue, with all the hieratic, traditional, transcendental, imperative, and absolute implications that the word virtue takes on the mentality of the African people of the Nile Valley (Obenga 318). Things at this present time seem to be out of balance and if balance is to be restored, Blacks must embrace their Kemetic roots.

The Nile Valley people viewed creation as a continuous process, like the rising sun and setting of the sun, and they believed that life was to be lived as though one is trying to find order amongst the chaos, and to restore righteousness.

According to Ma'at, our job is to do our part in reducing the chaos and make sense of the chaos that surrounds us. Because the world is damaged, Ma'at calls for the repair of the world, ecologically, socially, and ontologically. Ma'at says that all human beings have an ethical obligation to restore and replenish the world, with the sole purpose of making it more beautiful than it was when we inherited it (Karenga 16). Another feature of Ma'at is the willingness to give to those who are less fortunate. In the Ma'at tradition, one does not give for any other reason than to do one's part in bringing harmony to the world. In other words, if a person practices Kemeticism and understands Ma'at but does not reach a hand out to the less fortunate, they are not doing their part in trying to bring harmony to the world. If all people are equal, then each person has a responsibility to see to it that the other person is living and being treated in a way that honors the individual by practicing Ma'at. To put things another way, people who

practice Ma'at are persons who are focused on having a good family and community, who go about doing what they do for others not out of any obligation, but rather they understand that by modeling the right behavior, they are not only not attempting to live in harmony, but they are also being self-conscious in the sense of being mindful of how their actions will affect others. "Ma'at requires that one is worthy in the eyes of the Creator, nature and people. The idea of worthiness before nature in the Ma'atian tradition evolves out of the understanding that moral worthiness, like existence, is interrelated in every area of life" (Karenga 18). That worthiness means that one is vigilant in one's efforts to try and restore balance. Having an understanding of the interrelatedness of all things keeps one mindful of the necessity to conduct oneself in a way that is demonstrative of living in harmony. To establish such a relationship with the world takes a willingness to speak truth, do justice and rightness. It is these things that will bring the world into balance. Accordingly, in order to do this one has to yield to the idea of solidarity of action and solidarity of understanding. When operating from such a place, acting in others' best interests and developing thoughtfulness, this allows for mutual consideration, and when those things are in place, the potential for balance is increased. When one puts out for the other, not only are they doing something for that person, the individual is also doing something for him/herself, and showing good character (Karenga 229). By showing good character, it increases the positive sense of self. The better one is feeling about oneself is directly related to how one treats others. It could be argued that Ma'at is a rhetoric of love. Ma'at asks people to treat the self, others and nature with a kind of reverence, like everything is holy. It appears to be a task that only a few would have the skills to achieve. However, one must understand Ma'at and the African beliefs

in the pervasive, mystical transformative, even life-giving power of the word (Karenga 12). With Nommo it is possible to live the kind of life that is mentioned above. With an African heritage steeped in oral traditions and: the acceptance of transforming vocal communication, the Afro-Americans developed, consciously or subconsciously, a consummate skill in using language to produce their own alternative communication patterns to be employed by whites in the American situation. Communication between different ethnic and linguistic groups difficult, but the almost universal African regard for the power of the spoken word contributed to the development of alternative communication patterns in work songs, Black English, sermons, and Spirituals, with their dual meanings, one for the body and one for the soul. It is precisely the power of the word in today's black society that authentically speaks to an African past. Thus, to omit black rhetoric as a manifest in speeches and songs from any investigation of black history is to ignore the essential ingredient in the making of black drama (Smith & Robbs 101).

To understand contemporary black rhetoric in America means one must know that Nommo continues to permeate Black activities (Karenga 9). In other words, in the Black community the power of the word is alive and well. Out of the Nommo comes the belief that the word is sacred, indispensable, and has creative power. The word has the power to call into being, to mold, to bear infinite meanings, and to forge a world we all want and deserve to live in, that seizes the hearts and minds of the African American creative community (Karenga 8). Moreover, as Astante asserts, in traditional African



society the word is productive and imperative, calling forth and commanding (81). In African societies, they believed that with the power of words, anything could change and because of that understanding words and the usage of them was a great skill to have. The Ma'atians thought that because things were in their natural state, their responsibility was to do everything in their power to promote a harmonious life. By being conscious of words and how they used them, the Ma'atians were mindful of the power words carry. And unlike the Greeks, the Ma'atians believed that elegant speech could be had by anyone. They believed in the inherent worthiness and the possibilities in each human being. They emphasized the ancient Egyptian concept of rhetoric as essentially an ethical practice defined not only by its truth and truthfulness, but also by its respect for the masses of people who are the hearers and participants in the rhetorical and political project of creating and sustaining a just and good society (Karenga 15). For anyone who takes Kemeticism, Ma'at and Nommo to heart, understands that to find harmony internally and externally is the goal. As Asante puts it, It is the quest for harmony that is the:

source of all literary, rhetorical, and behavioral actions; the Sudic ideal, which emphasizes the primacy of the person, can only function if the person seeks individual and collective harmony....One must understand that to become human....That person is defined as human by performing actions that lead to harmony; our attitude toward this person creates the dynamism necessary to produce a harmonized personality (200).

Furthermore, the people of the Valley see a close relationship between

language, rhetoric and spirituality. Therefore, when one gets ready to speak, there are rituals that take place to indicate the importance of the word. In fact, there is no line of demarcation

between the spiritual and secular in African oratorical events, which is a prime consideration in classical African orature.

This means that in African orature, the Word (Nommo) gains in power and effectiveness in direct proportion with the moral character, strength of commitment, and vision of the caller, as well as the skill s/he exhibits.....the caller must become a poet-performer and direct his/her creative powers toward a higher level of consciousness by activating spiritual and psychic powers (Knowles-Borishade 491).

Understanding that when one speaks one does everything in one's power to invite her/his spiritual and psychic powers to be present to support one as he/she attempts to get the message across. This gives us an indication of how powerful and important the word is to people of the Nile Valley. It is through having this understanding that allows one to recognize the value of the word and begin the process of learning how to value them. Once one learns the power and value of the word, one is free to create the kind of world that one envisions. The Dogon of Mali believe the concept of Nommo carries the vital "life force, which influences 'things' in the shape of the spoken word. The voice of man can arouse God and extend divine action" (Jahn 124). It is believed that by speaking words human beings can invoke spiritual power. As a result, all human creation and natural phenomena emanate from the productive life force of the word,

Nommo, which in and of itself is life force (Alkebulan 29).

The Ma'atians believe that words emote vibrations and the higher the vibrations the greater the chance of the audience feeling what it is that the speaker is saying, and when that happens a spiritual connection has taken place and the both parties are in harmony. In order for this to occur, both speaker and listener must be involved in a give and take relationship. By this, I mean both parties' goals must be to find harmony, and in order for this to happen, the speaker must be saying something and the audience must be listening. Generally speaking, we tend to think that every time we speak someone is listening and every time we listen, someone is saying something. Unfortunately, more times than not, this is not the case. In Western culture, unlike in African culture the use of words has a different purpose. In Western culture when we use words, we use them in an effort to try and get something: A job, a spouse, a house, or car. As Aristotle says, "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means for persuasion." He goes on to say, "But rhetoric we look upon as the power of observing the means of persuasion on almost any subject presented to us; and that is why we say that, in its technical character, it is not concerned with any special or definite class of subjects" (Roberts & Bywater 24). According to the statement above, it does not matter what the subject is, the objective is to be persuasive by any means necessary. And, if this is the case, being careful about the word choice will not have the same impact because rather than trying to find harmony, one is attempting to see what he or she can get from the interaction. If my goal is to gain something, my interaction with you will be different than if my objective is to work together. This is the major difference between African and Western rhetorical philosophies. On the one hand, African rhetorical

philosophy says that the word is one of the most important tools that one can possess in hopes to attain harmony in one's life and with the world. Western philosophy, on the other hand, says the word is the most important tool one can possess if one wants to obtain material possessions. According to Aristotle, there are three means of:

effecting persuasion. The man who is to be in command of them must, it is clear be able (1) to reason logically, (2) to understand human character and goodness in their various forms, and (3) to understand the emotions--that is, to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited. It thus appears that rhetoric is an offshoot of dialectic and also of ethical studies (25).

The basis of Greek education was rhetoric and having verbal agility eventually became the hallmark of an educated and influential person (Herrick 34). Based on the above statement, it would appear that one learns the above not as a way to develop harmony, but as a way to increase one's chances of getting what wants; a competition. If you and I are always competing there can never be harmony. But, if you and I are aware that we both play a part in keeping things in balance, and that is how I relate to the world, it will have a direct effect on how the world relates to me and I will be more mindful of the words I choose and how I treat you. Conversely, because I understand the power of words I will also know how to speak up when your actions or words do not create harmony in my world or society.

It is through the understanding of Nommo that one develops the knowledge of the power of words, and it is through having this knowledge that allows one to operate from

a rhetoric of love. In Nommo there are eight different components that the speaker must be aware of in order to enhance the chances of being in harmony with the audience. They are styling, improvisation, storytelling, lyric code, image making, call and response, and rhythm. In order to understand the significance of each of these elements, it will be necessary to take each one of them and go into some detail how each of them relate to making Nommo, or words having a transforming effect. First, styling. If words are symbols, then it makes sense that when you speak them, not all words are giving the same value in terms of tone, pitch, and length of each syllable. To put things another way, if one were to listen to Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald sing the same song, there would be a marked difference between the two. Their styles are different. Improvisation is another element necessary in creating Nommo. The speaker has to be flexible enough that he/she understands that no matter how well rehearsed one is there are always going to be those moments where one loses one's place while giving a speech or singing a song and will have to improvise as to not lose the connection with an audience. A preacher has his sermon, but every now and again, based on someone's response to something that was said; the preacher veers off topic and responds to what has been said. Or when an actor forgets his/her lines they must be able to improvise as a way of getting things back on track. Storytelling is another component of Nommo. Storytelling may be the most important aspect. In all aspects of Black life, storytelling is used as a way to share history, teach lessons, pass the time, and as a way to show love. Family members often sit back and tell stories as a way to keep special times alive. Lyric code. Lyric code is used as a way to keep family, friends and neighbors in the loop as to what is or has been going on in the neighborhood or community. During slavery, reconstruction, and even the civil

rights movement, lyric code was used to transmit messages without white people having a clue as to what is being said. Sometimes preachers would use lyric code while delivering their sermon. If they used lyric code, it meant the message was important and that everyone should pay attention. There is something about the way the message is delivered that lets the audience know that something of importance is about to be said. The best storytellers are the ones that can paint a picture with words. By painting a picture, the audience has an image that they can connect to the story in order to help bring the story alive. Good storytellers can make the listener feel like s/he is a character in the story being told. The audience can actually smell the roses being described. Call and respond is another important aspect of Nommo. One of the sure fire ways for the speaker to know that his/her audience is following along with what is being said is by responding in some way. Whether it is through nodding of the head, yelling 'amen brother' or some such phrase, clapping hands. Or simply saying 'Preach it, brother.' All these actions let the speaker know that you are listening. Also, when the speaker knows everyone is listening, it allows for the speaker to kick things into high gear, get more animated, pick words more carefully, and to paint the picture with broader strokes. Finally rhythm, it is important like a drummer in a jazz band, if the drummer is not keeping good time, then everything else gets thrown off. Rhythm also helps to create a back drop to what's being said. In other words, rhythm is like the heartbeat, it helps to create music, and if the music is good, people will dance all night. If effort is given in all areas, harmony becomes the result and goal.

On the other hand, traditional rhetoric requires one to be versed in three areas: Understanding human character, logical reasoning, and understanding emotions.

Although traditional rhetoric talks about the above, it really never suggests ways to become the kind of rhetorician that has the tools to be effective. One is told that to be a good rhetorician one has to have an understanding of logic, be able to understand human character and be able to understand emotions, but one is never told how to do any of these things, other than come from a middle class background. That is until the Sophists came along and filled in the blanks. “There has been much disagreement over the interests, characters, and contributions of the Sophists. They were highly controversial. Recent scholarship has done much to dismantle the traditional treatment of these men as merely itinerant speechwriters or rhetorically gifted con artists. They are now often commended for their surprising insights into the power of words and the important social role of persuasion” (Herrick 35-36). The Sophists taught the people of Athens that anyone can learn the art of rhetoric, providing they can afford to pay the teacher. “In many of Plato’s dialogues that Sophist play a role Georgias, Protagoras, and Phaedrus- Plato casts them as self-important, materialistic, even violent” (Jarrett 1-2). Or as described by George Kennedy, many clear but unpleasant pictures of the Sophists have been painted by Plato in his dialogues (28). Kennedy goes on to say that the “Sophists were generalists with a wide range of overlapping interests, they projected great confidence, and they sometimes claimed knowledge of all subjects. The Sophists had schools, a central activity was listening to the Sophists speak or reading versions of his speeches, followed by memorization or imitation of these works as models of argument and style” (30). Furthermore, “It is often ceremonial and cultural rather than active and political, and though moral in tone, it tends not to press for difficult decisions or immediate action. Sophistic rhetoric is a natural spawning ground for amplification,

elaborate conceits, and stylistic refinement, and thus criticized, but has positive qualities that have ensured its survival” (14). Even so, they were seen as “others.” They were all aliens, stranger guests to Athens, who impressed its citizens with their expertise as diplomats, teachers, and performers” (Jarrett 2).

One has to wonder if the Sophists were as bad as the press they received, then why were so many people willing to pay for their services? Even those who could not afford to found ways to do so. If the Sophists were considered a threat to the comfort of Athens, then why have their ideas about rhetoric stood the test of time, and why have their ideas been incorporated into what we call rhetoric today? I have pondered this question for a long time. It appears that perhaps the reason that Western philosophy does not want to give credit to what the Sophists have brought to the world of rhetoric or they would have to acknowledge the influence Kemeticism, Ma’at and Nommo has had on the way we in the West think about rhetoric.

It has been documented that Pythagoras was credited with coining the term “philosophy” (love of wisdom) and it has also been documented that “Pythagoras had secured the appropriate consent from the African priests to study at the Egyptian Mysteries school” (Crawford 127). Furthermore, it also has been documented that Georgias was well aware of the almost magical power and effect the word could have over humans, and that he was associated with practitioners of magic incantations to bring healing such as Empedocles and Pythagoras (Herrick 41). As it has already been pointed out, Pythagoras is said to have publicly acknowledged his debt to the Egyptian teachers “by calling himself a follower of wisdom” (Crawford 115). Although, the above great philosophers, whether Aristotelian or Sophists, in one respect or another acknowledge the



contributions coming from the continent. Still, no real investigation has gone on that speaks to the influence that Kemeticism has on Western rhetoric. More times than not the contributions made are left out. Because there is not much mention of the contributions made by the People of the Nile Valley to the world of rhetoric, it makes one ask, “Why?” If the Egyptian methods are the methods that have shown to be the ones that have worked. That the Sophists adopted their methods from the Egyptians and the methods worked so well that students flocked to them. Yet, the Egyptians are not given much credit when it comes to rhetoric. Upon close reading, one will understand that the Egyptians played a major role in classical rhetoric and by not acknowledging it, this only does a disservice to students. Not only do students lose out, but teachers who teach the subject are not as knowledgeable as they could be and students suffer further. There are many lessons to be learned about rhetoric based on the contributions made by Africans, but if the knowledge is never shared, then people not only lack the knowledge, but they are not prepared with all the tools to live a harmonious life. In Western rhetoric it is stated that rhetoric is defining and using the available tools to persuade. They say that if one understands logic, understands human character and emotions, that one increases the chances of persuading someone. However, a very important ingredient is left out of the equation. Yes, it is said that if pathos, ethos, and logos are present, the chances of persuading are increased. Again, there is no real explanation of what these terms mean and what it looks like when someone has incorporated them. By this I mean, what does it look like when someone is talking or acting in a logical fashion. It is understood, that when we say someone is being logical, it means that what they are saying moves from one thought to the other in a sequential way that gives plausibility to their message. But

what is not talked about is how, depending on the circumstances, that is the environment, the situation, the place, and people involved, the logic used to tell the same story will be different, and perhaps it is in the subtleties or lack thereof that logic is confirmed or denied.

In African American rhetoric it is said that there are eight elements that must be in play to increase the chances of Nommo happening, the magic of the word so that it becomes transformative. On the other hand, if in my conversation I am being logical without inviting my whole self into the situation, as Western rhetoric suggests, then even in my being logical, my message has less chance of being conveyed. It makes sense that if I have eight ingredients to put into the mix as opposed to one, whatever it is that I am trying to convey has a greater chance of being perceived the way I want it to be because I have more tools to work with. And if some of the finest rhetoricians and philosophers have admitted great debt to Egypt, why is more time, energy and effort not given to the study of the people, culture, and language? It would appear that our own selfishness again keeps us from gaining the knowledge needed to live in harmony. “Because Sophists taught effective public speaking, shrewd management of one’s resources, and even some aspects of leadership, it is not surprising that many young men of ancient Greece saw a sophistic education the key to personal success” (Herrick 36). In George Kennedy’s *Classical Rhetoric & Its Christian and Secular Tradition*, he states that *The Instruction of Ptahhotep*, written in Egypt in the early second millennium B.C., is sometimes regarded as the earliest handbook of public speaking. Also, Asa Hillard, Larry Williams and Nia Damali translated *The Teachings of Ptahhotep*, the oldest surviving book in the world (Crawford 114). Again, to quote George Kennedy, he states, “*The Book of Proverbs*, in

its present form probably one of the latest parts of the *Old Testament*, has a special rhetorical interest in that it includes a number of precepts about fine speech. These resemble an are partly derived from the Egyptian wisdom literature, such as *Instruction of Ptahhotep* (143). In all the above cases, mention is made of the book *Instruction of Ptahhotep* and its influence on the Sophists and the writers of the bible as well, but there is no mention of the contributions its authors made to the field of rhetoric or where the Sophists got their knowledge. It seems that prior to the Sophists introducing their brand of rhetoric, what was called rhetoric was not really rhetoric because it does not seem that rhetoric gained any credibility until the Sophists showed up in Athens. But what is more ironic, is that rhetoric as we know it today is influenced by the Egyptians, yet, little or no mention is made of the role that Egyptians played in creating what we now call Western rhetoric. Even more ironic is the fact that although the Sophists and their rhetoric was considered foolery, once they showed up in Athens, students flocked to them to learn what they knew, and furthermore, no single group has had more of an impact on rhetoric than the Sophists. It seems strange that a group of people who were generally despised could have such an impact on how business is conducted. Trying to make sense of these contradictions, one can only surmise that the reason that little credit has been and still is given to the Sophists for their contributions is due to the fact that the knowledge that the West gained in regards to rhetoric was gotten from the Egyptians and because the Egyptians were Black, it would mean acknowledging that Blacks have made major contributions to the world of education. Sophists were innovators in discovering and drawing attention:

to particular forms and elements of style, and through the power

of instruction and effective personal demonstration they influenced adoption of rhythmic patterns, tropes, and other constructions. Sophists were leaders in advocacy of verbal precision And by teaching means of analyzing linguistic structures, they made their contemporaries aware of the workings and service of language. The Sophists countered naiveté, ignorance, and innocence with a rhetorical view, that the only way to truth is through examination of both sides (Bartlett 38).

All evidence points to the fact that a lot of what we know about rhetoric was learned from the Egyptians, yet, little or no effort is made in terms of giving them credit for what they have taught us. It appears that the Egyptians have taught us a lot but we seem to pretend that we have gained no knowledge from them. If it is true that the idea of Nommo and the power of the word was learned from the Egyptians, and the objective of the word is to be transformed by living in harmony, then how can we live in harmony and balance if this truth is continually denied?

Throughout this chapter I tried to show the role that the Kemetic idea of Ma'at and Nommo has influenced the way that we think and act in Western society. Numerous examples have been given to show that the West has learned valuable lessons from Africa. In the area of rhetoric, Africa has contributed a lot to the way the West thinks.

A lot of whites believe that everything of value that has been contributed to society has come from them. Because this is how they are taught, many do not believe that a person of color, particularly a Black person, could teach them anything. Conversely, many Blacks believe that whites have all the answers and are the chosen

people, so they do not want to embrace their African heritage, but instead embrace everything European. However, if more energy were put into teaching people about rhetoric and the contributions that were made by Black people, perhaps then, we would see a change in how Blacks see themselves and how whites see Blacks. Perhaps awareness about the contributions made to society by Blacks would rise, and more effort would be put into teaching students about the contributions Africa has made, particularly when it comes to the power of the word. The world will come to recognize that when it comes to making magic with words, moving mountains, making memories or allowing words to transform, Blacks have a lot to teach.

In today's school system, not unlike any other time in the history of America, our children are not doing well in school, but the numbers for kids of color, especially Black kids are very low. It appears with the push for material gain, "The money and missile sense of reality needs to be challenged through a different vision of public life, one which demands a reallocation of resources away from killing machines of the defense industry to programs that insure that every child in this country has the opportunity for gaining access to a free and equal education, and that public schooling be seen as one of the most essential institutions in this country for reconstructing and furthering the imperatives of a democratic and just culture" (Giroux 30). In all fairness, one would have to admit to pull off such a task would be nothing short of a miracle. But on the other hand, if some serious thought and implementation were given to the idea of Ma'at, then, maybe, education would be different. If everyone were taught the power of the word, that is, "Ma'at is the pre-established harmony in the cosmos, felicity supreme, an invitation to all men and women in society to do and speak, think, and act, to live according to what is

true, normal, harmonious, according to virtue, with all the hieratic, traditional, transcendental, imperative, and absolute implications that the word virtue takes on in the mentality of the African people of the Nile Valley” (Obenga 117). And teaching becomes again a sacred and spiritual task that one wholeheartedly engages in to instill in the next generation the power of the word (Crawford 127).

It appears that the only way that we are going to reach the place we are seeking, where harmony is the norm, is by us going to the source and learning. In this case, the source is the Egyptians. It does not make sense that if we want to teach someone how to be a good rhetorician, someone who understands the power of the word and engages them to promote harmony, that we do not look to the Egyptians, as they are the experts. By not looking to the Egyptians, it would appear that our attitude about education is not a serious one. I have already documented some of the ways that Western rhetoric owes a debt of gratitude to Egypt through the Sophists. But because not enough time and energy put into learning more about the Egyptians, and by not doing so, we are doing a disservice to our students; particularly our students of color. For Black and white students, by giving more information about Kemetics, Ma’at and Nommo, they will come to learn the importance of words. According to Ma’at, truth and harmony is what should be strived for and one of the ways that you do that is by seeking for and living the truth. And if we are not telling the truth, there can and never will be balance.

Our jobs as educators, those of us who teach rhetoric and composition, is to teach students how to be good writers and rhetoricians. As we all know, understanding how words and rhetoric works is a great skill to have. Then, it becomes our responsibility to put our students in the best possible place so that they can become contributing members

of the polis. As Protagoras states, “People could improve their lot and social conditions, acquire an education, rise in the social order. Society moves and is open, not static and closed. From this perspective, learning and convention dominated in affecting the ways people came to their codes of ethics, political structures, and social perspectives” (Barrett 13). If learning and convention affects the way people come to their codes and ethics, then what kind of messages are we sending to our students when we are not teaching the truth about rhetoric. One might very well ask, what is truth? In this case, the truth is that rhetoric in the West is heavily influenced by Africa and if we are going to teach about rhetoric, and not talk about the Egyptian influence, then we are not really teaching rhetoric. We are not coming from a place of truth and therefore harmony cannot be obtained. Furthermore, when we do not teach the truth about rhetoric, students of color are not shown the contributions that people who look like them have made, and the sense of confidence that would come from knowing that people like them have made major contributions is denied them. White students, on the other hand, are not taught the about the roles Africans have made in this major way, and rather than dispel some of the myths they come to class with, the myths are perpetuated, thus exasperating an already tenuous situation. In order to change the way we do things and offer students the best possible way to secure the tools to support them in living harmonious lives.

As a way to counter this lack of education, I propose an alternative to the way rhetoric is taught. If rhetoric is learning the value of the word, how to be persuasive and developing the skills to live a harmonious life, then it makes sense to study individuals who demonstrated that they had the skills that we are trying to teach our students. If one wants to learn a sport, one finds the best at the sport and studies everything about that

person, how they stand, how they swing a bat, how they run down to first base. One watches and studies the person's every move and imitates them, until one is even talking like that person. Well, it is the same with rhetoric. If we are trying to teach students how to be good rhetoricians, why not have them study the best and how they do rhetoric? America has produced five of the greatest rhetoricians and if we study how and what they did, the chances of becoming a good rhetorician will increase. They are Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X. By listening to their speeches, watching videos and movies and reading their work, it will become clear that these men understood Kemetism, Ma'at, and Nommo. Each of these men spent their lives fighting for justice and trying to find harmony in a world that treated them like second class citizens because of the color of their skin. These men all operated out of a rhetoric of love that was rooted in the church, but were not afraid to challenge the church when it came to the pursuit of racial justice and harmony.

In ancient Egypt and Greece if a young man wanted to become a government official, he either found a school or a tutor. "In the Nile Valley, schoolboys studied and copied their lessons not only for penmanship and literary form but for decorum, ethics, and social values" (Crawford 129). Before the Sophists arrived in Athens, the schools mainly focused on acquisition of simple reading and writing skills, the principal activity seems to have been the memorization and recitation of epic lyric poetry. The Sophists introduced a revolution in education, one resisted by conservative thinkers in the fifth century. There were no provision for practice in original composition and no encouragement of original thinking. Students of the Sophists, for the first time, were encouraged to engage in original composition and in argument and to question traditional



values (Kennedy 33-34). As Clinton Crawford states, “The challenge for the twenty-first century person and the teacher, more specifically for our purpose, is to transform himself or herself by uniting with the Ma’atian order that advocates balance between human and cosmos, human and the divine world, human with the state, human with society, and human to himself or herself. The role of the teacher is directly related to educating the new generation for governance” (133). If this is the role of the teacher, what better people and rhetoricians to study than these five individuals: Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X. Not only were these men great rhetoricians in the classical sense, they were all grounded in their Kemetic roots, understood Ma’at, and clearly understood the transforming power of the word.

At the best schools lessons were given in rhetoric, or the art of public speaking. The Romans and Greeks believed that it was possible to establish a system of oratory that could be taught. They spoke of training public speakers under five traditional headings: *Inventio*, seeking out ideas or lines of argument; *collocatio*, structure and organization; *elocutio*, diction and style; *actio*, physical delivery; and *memory*, all of which these five individuals possessed. Not only did they have the skills mentioned above, they also lived *Nommo*. They had style, rhythm, sounding, improvisation, storytelling, lyric code, image making, call and response. Not only did they possess all these traits and do them extremely well, but most importantly, they spent their lives trying to find harmony. They were proud men, they understood that Africa contributed in a big way to the West and as a result, they could stand tall in their Blackness. They are some of the greatest rhetoricians that this country and the world has produced. According to Cicero, (this passage is long), but I think it is worthy of repeating in its entirety:

A leading speaker will vary and modulate his voice, raising and lowering it and deploying the full scale of tones. He will avoid extravagant gestures and stand impressively erect. He will not pace about and when he does so not for any distance. He should not dart forward except in moderation with strict control. There should be no effeminate bending of the neck or twiddling of his fingers or beating out the rhythm of his cadences on his knuckles. He should control himself by the way he holds and moves his entire body. He should extend his arms at moments of high dispute and lower it during calmer passages... (Everitt 29).

These five men had these skills and much, much more. If our jobs as educators are to prepare students to succeed, then why not teach these individuals' lessons? They were social critics, preachers, actors, writers, teachers and students. Their body of work is plentiful.

Our students, both Black and white, need to study these individuals like they study their bible. Although these men were as religious as the next person, they all had something else working for them. Because they were grounded in their Kemetic roots, they could speak their truth with confidence even though they all were met with major opposition, not just from the white public, but from some Blacks as well. Yet, despite the attacks on their characters, they all believed in their truth and spoke it with all the dignity that knowing Nommo and the transformative power of the word would allow.

Like classical times, if we take the best and have students imitate them, these five

people would be the people that we would use. And if that system seemed to work during classical times, why not try it here? By using them as models in teaching rhetoric, not only would students be learning from the best, but they would also become aware of the racism that has plagued our country since its inception. A doorway would be constantly open that would provide a way to talk about race, class and gender by way of rhetoric, as is Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*. In most books that talk about rhetoric and how it works, King's letter is used as an example of a well written document in terms of its rhetorical value. By looking at the works of the others, students would learn a lot about history, women's rights, slavery, civil rights, the pan African movement and so much more. And if Blacks had more knowledge of these men and their rhetorical prowess, several things would happen. They would learn the power of the word, Blacks would learn about the history of Black people in this country, and most importantly, they would learn about the contributions Blacks have made in regards to the way we think in the West, and because of their knowledge of the contributions made by people who looked like them, their sense of pride would increase. They would be inspired to want to learn, and most importantly, they would learn the value of making harmony their goal.

# No Struggle No Progress

## Chapter Two

Frederick Douglass should be the poster child for rhetoric. In every class whose focus is on argument and rhetorical strategies should be using Douglass as a model of what good rhetoric looks like. His rhetorical prowess is legendary; he gained considerable fame in both the United States and in Great Britain as a vocal abolitionist, civil rights activist, and publisher in social reform journals. Nothing, it seems, could stop this vigorous crusader from fighting for a better world where people of both genders and all races could live together in harmony. He fought his valiant battle against slavery not with a gun but with words before and during the Civil War and until the passing in 1865 of the Thirteenth Amendment outlawing slavery and in 1870 of the Fourteenth Amendment giving African Americans the right to vote. He was a social and political agitator in the best sense of that word, always arguing for the strength of morality, equality and democracy (Mieder 1).

There began to arise a fear that his power as an orator would prove too great. It seemed well enough for him to tell the story of servitude, but when he indulged in logic and flights of fancy and invective, it was feared that he would be considered an imposter. So straightforward and earnest was his development as an orator that he soon overcame all doubts, and those who had once urged him to curb his intellectual flights learned to admire his courage (Washington 73- 75).

Frederick Douglass was born into slavery and it seemed from the time that he was

born, he knew that slavery was an abomination against God and his every waking moment was spent figuring out a way to escape. From an early age he knew that regardless of the color of his skin, he did not deserve to be treated like a slave. That for one man to own another was going against nature. Although he never knew his father and was separated from his mother at an earlier age, Douglass understood the power of the word *Nommo*, and set out to learn how to read and write. He understood that the first thing he needed to do was learn how to use the language of the slave master. At first people taught him, thinking it was cute to see the little colored kid trying to put letters together to make words and words to make sentences. In fact, in the beginning his mistress taught him, that is, until her husband found out and said, “Learning will spoil the best nigger in the world. If you teach that nigger how to read, there would be no keeping him” (Douglass 47). Despite the degradation, Douglass did not lose hope. He continued teaching himself to read and write. He says, “Though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble to learn how to read” (47). With his understanding of the value of learning to read and write, one cannot help believe that he had some knowledge of *Ma’at* and *Nommo*. *Ma’at* on the one hand is the “pre-established harmony in the cosmos, felicity supreme, an invitation to all men and women in society to do and speak, think and act, to live according to what is true, normal, harmonious, according to virtue, with all the hieratic, traditional, transcendental, imperative, and absolute implications that the word virtue takes on in the mentality of African people of the Nile Valley” (Obenga 318). On the other hand, *Nommo* is “the African belief in the pervasive, mystical, transformative, even life-giving power of the Word” (Gilyard 12). It is Douglass’ understanding of the

above that allows him to say when confronted for speaking out:

Sir, I have been frequently denounced because I have dared to speak out against the American nation, against the church, the northern churches, especially, charging them with being the slaveholders of the country. I desire to say here as elsewhere, that I am not at all ambitious of the ill opinions of my countrymen, nor do I desire their hatred; but I must say, as I have said, that I want no man's friendship, no matter how high he may stand in church or state, I want no man's sympathies or approbation who is not ready to strike the chains from the limbs of my brethren. I do not ask the esteem and friendship of any minister or any man, no matter how high his standing, nor do I wish to shake any man's hand who stands indifferent to the wrongs of any brethren. Some have boasted that when Fred Douglass has been at their houses, he has been treated kindly, but as soon as he got into their pulpits he began to abuse them--that as soon as the advantage is given to him, he takes it to stab those who befriended him.---Friends, I wish to stab no man, but if you stand on the side of the slaveholder, and cry out 'the Union as it is,' 'the Constitution as it is,' 'the Church as it is,' you may expect that the heart that throbs beneath this bosom, will give utterance against you. I am bound to speak, and

whenever there is an opportunity to do so. I will speak  
against slavery (Foner 82).

In this lengthy passage, it makes clear what the old colored preacher said to him: “The lord had a great work for him to do, and that he must ready himself” (Washington 69). And ready himself he did. In this passage he uses metaphor, parallelism, anaphora, hyperbole, and metonymy, to name a few of the rhetorical devices, and he uses them well. Furthermore, he speaks with such conviction that it gives the impression that he is doing what he is doing because some higher authority has instructed him to say what he does. In short he sounds and acts like a preacher. It could be argued that Douglass is operating from a deep sense of confidence. One has to wonder where he got the courage to take the stand he does, considering the fact that he had no formal education. It could be surmised that he got his ability, willingness, and confidence from his understanding of Ma’at. It makes sense considering he was born a slave and it would seem that he had been around enough Black people who had direct knowledge of Ma’at and the stories he heard as a young kid influenced his belief in the power of the word. He had also spent a considerable amount of time listening to preachers. Douglass somehow seems also to be aware of Quintilian’s idea that rhetoric should be incorporated into the whole of education. This is perhaps the greatest significance of his work. Rhetoric is to him, following Cicero, the centerpiece in training of the leaders of society and the responsible citizen (Kennedy 116). With his confidence, logic, credibility, and emotions, it is common knowledge that Douglass did not possess a formal education otherwise it could be argued that he studied rhetoric with the great teachers like Cicero and Quintilian. He had all the qualities that a good rhetorician is suppose to possess.

Again, according to Quintilian, a good orator, a rhetorician “has the ability to lead, to influence, even to dominate a situation” (Kennedy 117). It is clear that Douglass had these qualities, as one reviewer wrote, he represented a “fair view of ideas, but no printed sentences can convey any adequate idea of manner, the tone of voice, the gesticulation, the action, the round, soft, swelling pronunciation with which Frederick Douglass spoke, and which no orator we have ever heard can use with such grace, eloquence and effect as he” (McFreely 213).

Ma’at is all about truth and it is the willingness to challenge the myths that were and are perpetuated. It will not be until myths are challenged that the negative attitudes that people have about others will be changed because the truth will always come to light. Case in point, it has been suggested that rhetoric came from the West, and in actuality it came from Egypt. According to Herald Bartlett:

Most significantly, the sophists introduced Athens--  
and the rest of Greece--to a new vital philosophy.

We call it humanism, using the term in reference to  
human nature, interests, resources, society, ways of  
being, growth and development, and like matters.

They brought about consciousness if community  
and the use of the intellect in purposeful living.

They stimulated awareness of political, social, and  
natural phenomena affecting people’s lives and  
taught that influencing forces can be analyzed



systematically and can be understood through use of the disciplined mind (36).

According to Ma'at, the speaker's objective is to help transform and elevate society through his or her artistic expression. Traditionally for Africans, the role of art is to serve as a vehicle for improving society, balancing it harmoniously. While the creativity of the rhetoric is essential, the artist as a transforming agent is paramount (Alkebulan 36). This is exactly what Douglass tried to do and according to Bartlett, this idea was first brought into Athens by the Sophists but he does not mention where the sophists got it from, and considering that the Egyptians were around longer than the Greeks or sophists, it makes sense that the sophists got it from the Egyptians. Yet, it appears that no one wants to talk about rhetoric before the sophists and the Greeks. Frederick Douglass did just that and tried to transform and elevate society, but one has to wonder where he got it from. He could not have understood what Quintilian, Cicero, Plato or Aristotle were talking about because he did not have the formal training. Although he did not have the training in the sense that he never went to a university, Douglass handled rhetoric and words as well as anyone. It is true that he had spent a lot of time in church and around preachers, but even that exposure does not explain how he developed the confidence and the belief to know that all the power that one needed lied in one's ability to use the word and to speak the truth. Although Douglass was a lay preacher (Mieder 30), and his faith in God was apparent, he had something else working for him. It appears that Douglass kept one foot in his African roots and another in the world of Christianity. Unlike a lot of preachers, who knew that the church to a certain degree was a silent partner in slavery and did not want to deal with the consequences of

speaking up, whether losing the financial benefits, or in some cases, life, but for whatever the reason did not speak up. Although, there were others like Douglass who spoke up, but not nearly enough. Douglass lashed out at the church and those who called themselves Christians, those who sat by and let slavery continue. He believed in freedom so much and in the ideal that he took on the church whenever their actions did not follow the scriptures.

Douglass as a child spent a lot of time around elders and listened to them talk, and this afforded him the opportunity to absorb the oral traditions of Africa and the slave community-particularly the traditions of secular storytelling and religious preaching. These traditions provided Douglass with many chances to encounter the power of the spoken word and its ability to comfort, console, sustain, unify, inspire, motivate, and help his fellow slaves to cope in their times of distress.

Douglass was an avid reader of the Bible and knew it well. Even though he held the teachings of the Bible close to his heart, his African roots were a part of his soul, “and he takes pride in the power of an indigenous practice to counter the notion that only Christianity can provide salvation” (Babb 368).

He got in a fight with his overseer and ran to the woods for fear of what would happen to him for raising his hands to a white man. He came across an old Black man, Sandy, that he knew and explained to the man what had happened. Sandy gave him a root to put in his pocket for protection. To please Sandy, he took it and put it in his pocket. Shortly thereafter, Douglass left the wood and made his way back to the big house. When Douglass finally made his way out of the woods and made his way toward the big house, it was almost as if the overseer Covey expected him at that moment because as Covey

came walking out of the house, Douglass walked up. Their eyes met and Covey spoke kindly to Douglass. Douglass was shocked; he was not sure if he should attribute Covey's attitude to the root that Sandy gave him or the fact that it was Sunday and Covey was on his way to church. Talking about the root, Douglass says:

Sandy impressed the necessity with such earnestness, telling me it could do no harm, if it did no good. To please him, I at length took the root, and, according to his directions, carried it upon my right side. This was Sunday morning. I immediately started for home; and upon entering the yard gate, out came Mr. Covey on his way to meeting. He spoke to me very kindly, bade me drive the pigs from the lot near by, and passed on toward church. Now, this singular conduct of Mr. Covey really made me begin to think that there was something in the root that Sandy had given me; and had it been on any other day than Sunday, I could have attributed the conduct to no other cause than the influence of that root; and it was, I was half inclined to think that the root to be something more than at first I had taken it to be (79).

Although Douglass had been around a lot of preachers and Christianity was the order of the day, he never abandoned his African roots. In fact, it was his acknowledgement of his African roots that allowed Douglass to become the person he became. There were many other slaves who had seen and endured what Douglass had,

yet, of all who became freedom fighters and wrote narratives, Douglass is the one who stands out most:

His narrative, however, is not superior simply for aesthetic reasons, because it is more polished than others; it is better in large measure because Douglass, more than any other author of a slave narrative, is able and committed at once to articulate and mediate between the fact of existence of slavery in a Christian, democratic society and state and the facts of his life as felt and understood by the person Frederick Douglass (Gibson 449).

In other words Douglass was going to tell his story, his truth, the way that he wanted to tell it and no one was going to dictate to him how that was going to be done. He, more than anyone else, understood the power of the word and made it his mission to learn how to use words to gain his freedom and the freedom of others. Strangely enough, it was four years after the fight with Covey that Douglass became a free man. Prior to his fight with Covey, Douglass felt that he had been beaten down and that all hopes of ridding himself of his horrid life had passed him by, but once he took on Covey who saw that Douglass was getting the best of him, Covey declared the battle over and Douglass saw himself as being free psychologically. Douglass says, "I was no longer a servile coward, trembling under the frown of a brother worm of the dust, but my long-cowed spirit was roused to an attitude of independence. I had reached the point at which I was

not afraid to die. This spirit made me a free man in fact, though I still remained a slave in form. When a slave cannot be flogged he is more than half free” ( 143). As Gibson states, “A person is a slave, then, not when his body is held captive but when the psyche is not his own, when his self does not belong to him, when he does not exert resistance against those who would define them. Being a slave, ‘in fact’ has to do with one’s attitude towards one’s condition” (Gibson 556). Perhaps this is what happened to Douglass, after getting whipped as much as he did, his spirit was broken, but once he decided he was going to stand up for himself and took Covey on, his psychological agency began to take shape and that made a way for his physical agency to follow. In fact, Douglass says:

If at any time of my life more than another I was made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery, that time was during the first six months with Mr. Covey. We were worked in all weathers. It was never too hot or too cold; it could never rain, blow, hail, or snow, too hard for us to work in the field. Work, work, work was scarcely more the order of the day than of the night. The longest days were too short for him and the shortest nights too long for him. I was somewhat unmanageable when I first went there, but a few months of this discipline tamed me. Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about me died. The dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute” (94-95).

In order to be free it has to start with the self. One has to get in their mind that freedom is what they want and deserve, and once that happens, the process of planning to become physically free. Slaveholders understood this and made a concerted effort to break slaves, sometimes in the process of trying to break them, slaves were killed. When a slave was killed, it did not make a difference. The attitude towards Blacks was one that said, “Half a cent to kill a Negro and half a cent to bury him -- the luxury of killing and burying could be enjoyed by the poorest members of Southern society, and no strong temptation was required to induce white men thus to kill and bury the black victims of their lust and cruelty” (Foner 369). However, there were many slaves who survived such barbaric killings, but in that case slaveholders tried to kill the mind. It did not always work as many slaves used wisdom to outsmart their master. They understood, as Douglass states, “Ignorance is a high virtue in a human chattel; and as the master studies to keep the slave ignorant, the slave is cunning enough to make the master think that he succeeds. The slave fully appreciates the saying, ‘where ignorance is bliss, ‘tis folly to be wise’” (172).

Even though, Frederick understood this, he realized that the only way to obtain freedom was to comprehend what was happening to him, find the words and symbols to identify how he felt being a slave, and then find the courage to challenge those who felt that they had the right to determine someone’s humanity. Douglass at an early age probed the depths of his psyche asking questions about his existence, and seeking salvation:

God, deliver me! Let me be free! Is there any God?

Why am I a slave? I will run away. I will run away.

I will not stand it. Get caught or get clear, I’ll try it.

I had as well die with ague as with fever. I have one life to lose. I had as well be killed running as die standing. Only think of it; one hundred miles straight north, and I am free. Try it? Yes! God helping me, I will. It cannot be that I shall live and die a slave. I will take to the water...Meanwhile, I'll try and bear up under the yoke. I am not the only slave in the world. Why should I fret? I can bear as much as any of them (Douglass 96-97).

This self talk is indicative of two things, first, it is an indication of the rhetoric of love that Douglass begins to display toward himself, and it is also an indication of his understanding of the “transformative power of the word,” whether he was conscious of it or not. As it has already been established, it is only through the word that real transformation happens. Douglass is a great example of this as his words carried him from slave to statesman.

Although Douglass throughout his life fought for the rights of all human beings, some theorists have contended that in order for Douglass to reach the heights he did that he had to forgo his blackness and adopt a white persona in order to get his message out. For example, Houston Baker suggests, “that Douglass’s authentic self is distanced from the authentic voice of black American slavery to the extent that the voice is one transformed by an autographical act into a sharer in general public discourse about slavery” (43). It appears that Baker is suggesting that Douglass is no longer authentically Black because he transformed himself in such a way as to be able to use the language in

such a way to reach white folks. Although I agree with Baker that one has to be transformed in order to engage in public discourse, I disagree with him in his assertion that in order to speak in a clear and concise way is an indication of distancing one from one's authentic self. If it is true what Baker is suggesting, then both Ma'at and the ideas of classical rhetoric have no value. According to Ma'at and Kemeticism, the idea of symbols, words are used to communicate with each other as a way to promote harmony. According to Aristotle and the philosophers of that time who taught and lectured about rhetoric, they concluded that the purpose of rhetoric is to prepare young men to become leaders in society. It would seem that under any circumstances where one is engaged with others, particularly when it comes to trying to work out social issues, one is going to have to make some adjustments in her/his style or approach, including how one speaks in order to assure the greatest possible chance of having one's message received. It appears that what Douglass understands is how important the audience is, and that adjustments have to be made. But in making those adjustments that does not mean that one's authentic self disappears. Rather, one allows his/her other self to become the dominate one in hopes of forging harmony. Furthermore, in creating as Baker suggests a "autobiographical act," one has to be transformed, but the very idea of autobiographical suggests telling one's own story, and by relating tales of one's own life, through the process of sharing, naturally one is transformed because through the process of sharing, one learns, teaches, and contributes, in order to do that, one must be willing to be changed because to change is to be transformed. "The role of art, traditionally for Africans, is to serve as a vehicle for improving society, balancing it harmoniously. While the creativity is essential, the artist as a transforming agent is paramount. The intelligent speaker knows that speaking



is an emotional as well as an intellectual process and that how one alters phoneme or a word in vocal expression is significant” (Alkebulan 36), (Asante 60). Douglass is a great example of what can happen when one understands that his/her life is valuable enough that one would rather be dead than live under such horrendous circumstances. It seems like it is only when faced with death are we are willing to allow ourselves to be transformed. Again, Douglass’s willingness to die is more evidence of him being connected to his Kemetite roots. In the Kemetite way of thinking, individuals are immortal. As Clinton Crawford states, “While neither time nor space allows for a protracted explanation on the ancient Egyptian origin of Western philosophy, one must not neglect to reflect on the doctrine of the soul and the immortality of the soul attributed to Aristotle and other Greek philosophers. The Greek eyewitness and historian Herodotus categorically stated that the ancient Egyptians were the progenitors of this doctrine and that they were the first to have maintained that the soul of man was immortal” (116).

It seems that as soon as Douglass made the decision that he was willing to die rather than be beat is when his transformation really began to happen. It appears that when Douglass made the decision that he was willing to die, he had a spiritual awakening. As Donald Gibson explains in his essay, *Reconciling Public and Private in Frederick Douglass’ Narrative*, although the quote is long, it is worth reproducing here as it illustrates the point very well:

In order that we may comprehend the full meaning of his conflict with Covey, Douglass must make known that his antagonist is not simply any overseer who is cruel and unsympathetic to the slaves in his charge. Covey’s dimensions

are larger; and the larger Covey's dimensions, the better we understand the significance in Douglass' own mind of his feat in coming to terms with him. Undoubtedly Douglass did see Covey as larger than life in that the overseer embodies at once the authority of the whole slave system, of all whites, especially males, and in his character, attitudes, and actions the worst features of slavery. The outcome of the struggles produced 'a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom'" (Douglass 105).

The effect of the struggle with Covey the archfiend was to bring Douglass back from the dead and to propel him into heaven--again suggesting something of the religious and mythical scope of his conception of his circumstances (105). It appears that the fight functioned as a rite of passage for Douglass. He understood that in order to become the person he wanted to be, his vision could not be actualized if he remained afraid of white folks. But more than being afraid of white folks, he could not be afraid of death. It is when he comes to terms with the fact that he would rather die rather than stay in his present situation. It was through the power of the word that allowed him to imagine something else for himself, something other than slavery. It appears that it was through the power of the word that Douglass was able to master the tools of his oppressors and use them to expose the masters' inhumane treatment of him and other Black people. I suggest that being in touch with his African self created a space for Douglass to realize the power of the word that gave him the impetus to risk being killed for making an effort to become educated, but he also learned that with becoming educated there is a price to

pay. He states, “I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wicked condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to the ladder upon which to get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow slaves for their stupidity. I have often wished myself a beast. I preferred the condition of the meanest reptile to my own. Anything, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me...The silver trump of freedom had roused my soul to eternal wakefulness” (53).

Once freedom rouses one’s soul, one is faced with the task of honoring the feelings. In Douglass’s class, those feeling were the feelings of being free. It is one thing to want to be free, it is another to actually make an effort to do so. For this reason, it is understandable why Douglass makes the comment, “I envied my fellow slaves for their stupidity.” Once one decides one wants to be free, the question then becomes, how does one do that? In the case of Douglass, the issue was how, how do I become free when I have such yoke of oppression around my neck that is so tight that moving and speaking are near impossible tasks? “When under the panoptic lens, how in Foucault’s paradigm the external supervisory gaze might be internalized by the person who is being observed and how this internalization might lead a person, as a consequence, to police his or her own behavior” (Axelrod & Axelrod 122). If one is being policed or feels like one has to police oneself, the connotation is that one has done something wrong, criminal. As long as one feels like one is a bad person, one will believe that he/she deserves the yoke. The first order of business is to convince oneself that one is good, that having black skin does not equal less than, no matter how one is being treated. Once that has been determined, one has to set out to persuade those who believe that they have the right to place a yoke

around one's neck are a disgrace to nature and creating an imbalance. In both cases, it is the power of the word *Nommo* that affords one the tools to take on both these monumental tasks. On the one hand, despite how one is being treated, one has to find the words to express that no matter what, because one is created by the creator, one is special. On the other side, one must find the words to talk to the oppressor so as to make the oppressor listen. It is through the process of getting the audience to listen that the greatest possibility for harmony is obtained. It is through harmony that space is created so that transformation can take place.

Douglass was brilliant at this, understanding that in order to have the biggest impact he would have to speak to both groups of people. He needed to get white folks to understand that the way that they behaved toward Black folks was an abomination against God. "Ladies and gentlemen, one of the most painful duties I have been called on this platform in the advocacy of the abolition of slavery has been to expose the corruption and sinful position of the American church" (qtd. in McFreely 127). And he also had to get Blacks to understand that the way that they were being treated was unjust and that they needed to speak up, to be agitators. Again, he states, "What we, the colored people, want, is character and this nobody can give it to us. It is a thing we must get for ourselves. We must labor for it. It is gained by toil--hard toil. Neither the sympathy nor the generosity of our friends can give it to us. It is attainable--yes, thank God, it is attainable. There is gold in the earth but we must dig for it--so with character. It is attainable; but we must attain it, and attain it each for himself. I cannot for you and you cannot for me" (qtd. in Meider 21). The passages quoted above are good examples of how Douglass changed how he spoke depending on the audience he was addressing. In

the first quote, he uses different language, syntax, and rhythm, and the first quote is not as warm as far as tone is concerned. The second, on the other hand, is more conversational and fatherly; it has a preachy quality to it. It is as if he is preaching to the congregation. In the second quote it is ironic how he says, “I can’t do it for you and you can’t do it for me,” but he is doing exactly what he says he cannot do: Fight for Black people. Again, I disagree with Baker when he suggests that Douglass loses his authentic self, and I disagree with Andrea Deacon’s suggestion that Douglass “appropriates.” In her essay, *Navigating “The Storm, the Whirlwind, and the Earthquake” Re-Assessing Frederick Douglass the Orator*, she states, “It seems that Douglass’ oratory--particularly his ‘What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?’ is a perfect example of an address which enacts the performance of civic republicanism since Douglass appropriates the style, delivery, and identity of white republicanism to simultaneously deconstruct this social construct while fashioning a new collective identity for African Americans” (78). It would appear that because Douglass understands that in order to get his message across to his audience he has to speak to them in a language they will understand, which means he has to make adjustments to his authentic self to appear to be appropriating whiteness. It is interesting that neither of the above theorists seems to think that the Greeks or Sophists appropriated from the Egyptians. Furthermore, to say that he takes on a white identity is to not really appreciate Douglass’ rhetorical prowess.

While Baker and Deacon mentions Douglass “distancing himself from his authentic voice” and that “he appropriates a white identify” and Deacon uses his fourth of July speech as an example of how he takes on a white persona, she does not explore it deeply enough and it appears that she is not aware of components of Nommo, and in

order for them to be present would suggest that his authentic self is present at the same time. For instance, he uses: Call and response, styling, rhythm, improvisation, storytelling, sounding, image making, and lyric code, all in the hopes of achieving harmony. That is to get the audience to see his humanity and their collusion in a system that is deeply flawed. In order for these elements to be present, it would seem that his authentic self would have to be present. It appears that scholars are not sure where to place Douglass' rhetoric, on the one hand we have scholars saying that he moved away from his "authentic self" and then we have scholars saying that he adopted a "white persona," then, throw into the mix another analysis that describes the reason that studying Douglass has not for the most part occurred is because "Douglass' reputation is indeed curious, one possible reason for his lack of serious attention may stem from Douglass' rhetoric being perceived merely as epideictic or ceremonial" (Deacon, 79). Aristotle says in regards to the three kinds of rhetoric, "Political speaking urges us to either to do or not to do something: One of these two courses is always taken by private counselors, as well by men who address public assemblies. Forensic speaking either attacks or defends somebody: one or other of these two things must always be done by the party in a case. The ceremonial oratory of display either praises or censures somebody. Looking at Douglass' Fourth of July speech it appears that he does more of the political and the forensic styles of argument as opposed to ceremonial, according to Aristotle's definitions of the three different styles of arguing. Aristotle's definitions contradict what Deacon offers up as a reason for the lack of respect that Douglass gets in the world of rhetoric.

Douglass started out as a voiceless piece of property and rose to become one of the greatest orators that this country has produced; yet, he is not studied as a matter of

course in the world of English. As Aristotle says, “It is clear, then, that rhetorical study, in the strictest sense, is concerned with the modes of persuasion. Persuasion is clearly a sort of demonstration, since we are most fully persuaded when we consider a thing to have been demonstrated” (Corbett 22). And according to Jackson and Richardson, rhetoric “seeks not simply to persuade, but to share, to inform, to question, and to search for and explore possibilities for social, and humane conditions. And it is in this regard that it is an active call to counsel and collaboration in the ongoing quest for effective ways to solve human problems, elevate the human spirit, reaffirm the right, create expanding space for maximum human freedom and human flourishing and constantly bring to the world” (6). Regardless of which definition one chooses, Frederick Douglass exceeded both. “By 1855, Douglass had become an accomplished writer accustomed to composing about a half-dozen editorials weekly. He had published at least one poem, a novella, and many thoughtful reviews of autobiographies, novels, pamphlets and speeches. As editor of the longest continuously published antebellum black newspaper, Douglass had written more than one thousand editorials. Between 1845 and 1855 Douglass had also perfected his rhetorical techniques by delivering more than one thousand speeches in the United States, England, Scotland, Ireland, and Canada” (Blassingame, Xiii). “Douglass was a social and political agitator in the best sense of the word, always arguing for the strength of morality, equality, and democracy” (Meider 1).

Although Douglass has been described the way he has been, a great orator, a brilliant rhetorician, and a social activist par excellence, his rhetoric is not studied in a serious way. Of all his works, his narrative is probably the most widely known work of his and it is usually read as a slave narrative. As a slave narrative it is a remarkable story,

but there is so much more to Douglass that students are not learning about because teachers are unwilling to give Douglass his just due in the Academy and English departments. And as much as professors talk about creating a just classroom and society, very little time and effort is giving to Douglass and it has been established on several fronts what a great rhetorician he was. Perhaps one of the ways to explain the reasoning behind such negligence is as Patricia Bizzell states, “The focus over the last thirty years or so in this relatively young discipline has been the desire to theorize, and therefore legitimize, the teaching of writing in the academy”(165). Assuming this has been the motivation over the last thirty years as Bizzell claims, and for the sake of argument, one agrees, then one’s next question should be, if in fact efforts over the past thirty years have been in theorizing as a way to give rhetoric validity, then what better example is there than Douglass? Douglass is proof of the power of words and what can happen when one learns how to use them. Not only that, but he was an excellent example of someone who was engaged in critical consciousness, and his motivation was social justice, and there is ample space to discuss the rhetorical moves he used to convey his message. Using Douglass as an example when theorizing about rhetoric would be a great way to point out the rhetorical moves he makes.

If our jobs as educators are to teach students how to read and write, develop critical consciousness, and how to be able to express themselves orally and on paper; then, one can only ask, why hasn’t Frederick Douglass been used as a model in the teaching of rhetoric? If educators would begin discussing Frederick Douglass, several things may happen. Students would understand the power of words and make a concerted effort to learn how symbol making works. They would get a better sense of their history,



issues of race, class and gender would come up, and space would be opened to enter the contact zone and perhaps some serious informative discussions would take place.

Students would begin to get some understanding of Nommo and the Egyptian idea of Ma'at. More importantly, they would become more aware of the contributions Blacks have made to the way we do language in America, and with any luck the sense of intellectual superiority some folks tend to have would dissipate. As for professors, the next question is whether or not we should be teaching about morals. Frederick J.

Antczak, a professor of rhetoric at the University of Iowa, in his article called *Teaching Rhetoric and Teaching Morality: Some Problems and Possibilities of Ethical Criticism*, quotes Allan Bloom who wrote *The Closing of the American Mind. How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Improvised the Souls of Today's Students*. In his book, Bloom states that, "we educators are failing our students individually and our community collectively by failing to teach morality--by failing to attend to the role of our disciplines play for students and practitioners in the formation of their character. But questions as complicated and momentous as whether education in a discipline should aim to develop moral character, how should it do so, and how it can do so without damaging the spirit and skills of free inquiry are hardly such simple questions as they are often depicted. On the one hand, professors of rhetoric have no apparent special training in such ethical issues, nor is it clear why they would have special obligations" (15). It is through moral character that Frederick Douglass was able to do the work he did. By incorporating the work of Frederick Douglass into the classroom as a teaching tool, one can focus on the rhetorical moves he makes. One such tool he uses is moral persuasion and discussing how he uses it could lead to some great discussions, and naturally,

questions about morality are more likely than not to enter into the conversation by virtue of the subject matter. Questions about race, class, gender, and the influential role religion plays in our lives are bound to come up. Furthermore, if rhetoricians knew more about Kemeticism, Ma'at and Nommo and included instruction on these subjects, it would become clear that the role of the teacher "is directly related to educating the new generation for governance, and that the moral character of the student must not be neglected; hence, cosmology, cosmogony, a strong moral ethical foundation of doing good, speaking truth to power, and an all around spiritual development should be included in the curriculum. Self-development and skills development must complement each other" (Crawford, 133). Furthermore, as Bell Hooks makes clear, "The movement from slavery to freedom, sexism to feminism, discrimination to greater openness...all these incredible movements for social justice succeeded when they evoked an ethic of love rooted in the embrace of the spirit" (183). Frederick Douglass operates out of a rhetoric of love and by studying him people will get a clear understanding of what it means to fight for one's humanity. Without having to direct students, they will bring the moral questions into the discussion.

Douglass was the voice for millions of Americans, and it was through his rhetoric that helped persuade Lincoln to sign the Emancipation Proclamation He encouraged Lincoln to use black soldiers in the Civil War, as well as being an advocate for women's rights. In our culture, where success is base on numbers, one can only imagine the disservice we educators of rhetoric do to our students, ourselves, our institutions, and society when we do not spend time with the texts of Douglass. As Bizzell points out, "Orators like Douglass were so successful in effecting social change because they were

able to utilize their knowledge of the dominant culture to build a rhetorical bridge between their audience and their own culture and political agenda. Even though these nineteenth-century texts are not current, introducing them to students is important; especially for those from disenfranchised or marginalized groups.” Bizzell continues, “It’s exciting to see that the full tradition of contributions by people from their communities is being granted the respect due to efforts sustained over time with some success” (Bizzell & Herzberg, 58).

It would appear that our culture is so fixated on race that someone like Douglass, who was one of the greatest rhetoricians and orators that this country has produced, until recently, his work has not been worthy of serious scholarship in rhetoric and composition. It is interesting that Bizzell claims that nineteenth-century texts are not current. I find this statement to be confounded and grossly misleading. To say that these texts are not current is like saying reading Karl Marx is not current. It would appear that English departments are reluctant to teach Douglass, not because his work is not relevant, but rather because Douglass does a great job at pointing out how America and religion has treated her darker children, and rather than look at the inhumane treatment of Black people by white people, it is easy to put the focus on marginalized people and study them as if though they are the problem opposed to an oppressive system that is called America. Furthermore, when it comes to the usage of language, there is not a group of people who took a language that was not their own and adopted it to make it their own in greater fashion than Black people. And by creating space in the classroom and curriculum for studying Black rhetoricians, professors would have to deal with the inhumane treatment of people and have to be willing to look at the history of America through an honest lens,

and there is too much shame for professors to want to traverse such evil ground. But, if our job is to help students become critically consciousness individuals, and contributing members of society in efforts to promote harmony, then we are shirking our responsibility as educators, and we are not preparing our students to be the best agitators they could be. In addition, by studying Douglass space would be created to bring religion into the conversation. Every aspect of American life is influenced by religion, yet little, if any, conversation in class revolves around how our lives are affected by religion. As Elizabeth A. Rand points out, “We typically argue that agency cannot be asserted until the self becomes reflexive enough to gain a ‘sense of itself’ as socially produced in and through language. Only then, it would follow, can one be set free or ‘born again’ in some sense: Empowered to resist cultural codes that create suffering and alienation” (360-61). It is true that humans are ‘socially produced’ and the only way to resist social codes that create alienation and suffering is to develop a sense of oneself. That is easy to say, but the question becomes what does it mean, and how does language play a role in developing a sense of self. By studying Douglass, students would be exposed to someone who exemplifies what Rand is talking about. Through Douglass, students would have a chance to experience how one who starts out voiceless and with no agency, through personal struggle develops a voice which gives rise to agency and as a result gives him confidence and courage enough to turn his gaze outward as well as inward. Because of his courage, millions of people were freed.

If it is true that we all are here to make the world a better place when we leave than it was when we arrived, what better person to study than Frederick Douglass? His narrative, in and of itself, is a wonderful piece of literature and is inspiring, but when it

comes to understanding how rhetoric works and its value, studying Douglass would prove invaluable. His ability to speak in a language that the uneducated could understand and at the same time speak a language that those who would do the oppressing could understand is truly impressive. As all rhetoricians know, audience is the most important part of rhetoric. The job of the rhetorician is to persuade and without an audience persuasion is not going to happen. The trademark of a good rhetorician is the amount of change for the better he or she can promote, and Frederick Douglass convinced an entire nation to change its ways. Also, according to Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, Quintilian, as well as others, one of the best ways to learn the art of rhetoric is through imitation. If one is going to learn how to do something through imitation, it makes sense to imitate someone who does well at what it is that one is trying to learn and when it comes to rhetoric no one does it as well as Frederick Douglass. All students could learn about themselves and their responsibility, but for students of color, Douglass could add value. For many students of color, academic settings are not the most comfortable place to be. Students are sometimes made to feel like their experiences are of no value and treated in ways that render their presence invisible, but by studying Douglass, students of all colors will learn about the magic and transforming power of words, but students of color will be filled with pride and perhaps be inspired to want to learn how to use these symbols in ways that promote harmony.

In conclusion, by studying Douglass, students will have a solid understanding of what it means to be human and the responsibility we all have to make the world a better place. As Douglass states:

Let me give you a word of the philosophy of reform. The whole

history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims, have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all absorbing, and for the time being, putting all other tumults to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. The struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will (qtd. in Mieder 28).

In teaching students about the necessity and value of participating in the struggle, we must expose them to the many voices who have contributed mightily in the efforts to make the world a better place. And in teaching them about those who participated and who participate, let us not let our ignorance prevent us from providing our students with the best models that we possibly can to help them understand the value of the word and encourage them to become invested in learning how to use words to build a more just world.

# We Must Accept Equality or Die: The Work of W. E. B. Du Bois

## Chapter Three

W.E.B. Du Bois, like Frederick Douglass, spent his life challenging both Black and white America to rise up and become the people and nation God intended them to become. Like Douglass, Du Bois was just as connected, or more connected, to Africa as he was to America, and it was through his understanding and connection to Africa that fortified his connection to his Kemetic roots. “He realized early that he had a mission in life and began earnest preparation for its fulfillment” (Moon 13). The above statement sounds as if though it could have come right out of *The Instructions of Ptahhotep*. Ptahhotep’s instruction reflected the major tenets of Kemetic culture; to know, to study, and to become wise (Hillard 79).

Douglass was born into slavery, and Du Bois was born in 1868, three years after the Civil War ended, but the blood was still drying, and the anti-Black fever was running high. Although Du Bois was born and raised in Great Barrington, Massachusetts and was not exposed to the same harsh treatment that Blacks received in the south, Du Bois was aware of the color bar (Moon 12). Du Bois understood that to fight for others’ humanity it was necessity for him to come to terms with his own humanity. In 1913 he wrote an essay titled *A Philosophy for 1913*, and although it is long it is worth quoting at length for it gives a foundation for the rhetoric of love that Du Bois expressed his entire life:

I am by birth and law a free Black American citizen. As such I have

such rights and duties. If I neglect my duties my rights are always in danger. If I do not maintain my rights I cannot perform my duties. I will listen, therefore, neither to the fool who would make me neglect things I ought to do, nor the rascal who advises me to forget the opportunities which I and my children ought to have, and must have, and will have. Boldly without flinching. I will face the hard fact that in this, my fatherland, I must expect insult and discrimination from persons who call themselves philanthropists and Christians and gentlemen. I do not wish to meet this despicable attitude by blows; sometimes I cannot even protest by words; but may God forget me and mine if in time or eternity I ever weakly admit to myself or the world that wrong is not wrong, that insult is not insult, or that color discrimination is anything but an inhumane and damnable shame. Believing this with my utmost soul, I shall fight race prejudice continually. If possible I shall fight openly and decidedly by word and deed. When that is not possible I will give my money to help others to do the deed and say the word which I cannot. This contribution to the greatest of causes shall be my most sacred obligation. Whenever I meet personal discrimination on account of race and color I shall protest. If the discrimination is old and deep seated, and sanctioned by the law, I shall deem it my duty to make my grievance known, to bring it before the organs of public opinion and to the attention of men of influence, and to urge relief in



courts and legislatures. I will not, because of inertia or timidity or even sensitiveness, allow new discriminations to become usual and habitual. To this end I will make it my duty without ostentation, but with firmness, to assert my right to vote, to frequent places of public entertainment and to appear as a man amongst men. I will religiously do this from time to time, even when personally I prefer the refuge of friends and family. While thus fighting for right and justice, I will keep my soul clean and serene. I will not permit cruel and persistent persecution to deprive me the luxury of friends, the enjoyment of laughter, the beauty of sunsets, or the inspiration of a well-written word. Without bitterness, (but also without lies), without useless recrimination (but also without cowardly acquiescence), without unnecessary heartache (but no self-deception), I will walk my way, with uplifted head and level eyes, respecting myself too much to endure without protest studied disrespect from others, and steadily refusing to assent to the silly exaltation of a mere tint of skin color or curl of hair. In fine, I will be a man and know myself to be one, even among those who secretly and openly deny me my manhood, and I shall persistently and unwaveringly seek by every possible method to compel all men to treat me as I treat them. (100)

Two of the major tenets of Kemeticism are that one is self affirming and has

willingness to challenge those who would deny one his/her humanity. In the quoted piece above, Du Bois makes it clear about how he feels about himself and how he will respond when he is not treated like a valuable human being. As Richard L. Wright states in his essay, *The Word at Work: Ideological and Epistemological Dynamics of African American Rhetoric*, “from a rhetorical state point this is not language of deprivation but a language of self-assertion” (95). In order for Du Bois to continue the forge a harmonious life for himself and others, where the color of one’s skin or gender did not impede one from living the best possible life one could so that he or she could become contributing members of society in the struggle against oppression. He understood the necessity of practicing a rhetoric of love for himself and others, and he also displayed a willingness to push back when his humanity was not honored.

Du Bois was aware of Aristotle’s idea of happiness and realized that if people in general, and Black people specifically, bought into Aristotle’s notion of happiness that chances of becoming a country that strove for harmony was unlikely to ever happen. According to Aristotle, “It may be said that every individual man and all men in common aim at a certain end which determines what they choose and what they avoid. This end, to sum up briefly, is happiness and its constituents. We define happiness as posterity combine with virtue; or as independence of life; or as the secure enjoyment of the maximum of pleasure; or as a good condition of property an body, together with the power of guarding one’s property and body and making use of them. That happiness is one or more of these things” (Roberts & Bywater 38). However, Du Bois understood clearly that in order to be happy and prosperous meant that one had to manipulate others in order to obtain the material to “happy,” and that America following Aristotle’s advice

went all out in attempting to be happy by enslaving Black people and using guns and words to secure their material happiness. They thought of themselves as superior, and his rhetoric set out to prove that what they did was, just that rhetoric, and had no truth to it. Like Socrates, Du Bois let his accusers, America, know that he will soon reveal how lacking in cleverness he is, unless they label clever one who speaks the truth. He will tell the truth, that there will be no flowery language, that he is confident in the justice of his cause, that he will speak in his usual way, without affection, and that since he has never been to court before, the jury should excuse his inexperience and consider only whether he says what is just or not, “for truth is the excellence of a juryman, and of an orator it is to speak the truth (Kennedy 54). Although the above words were spoken by Socrates, they very well could have been spoken by Du Bois; the parallel is astounding. In Socrates’ case he faced an actual judge and jury. In the case of Du Bois’, the world was the judge, and the people were the jury. Like Socrates, Du Bois was willing to take whatever punishment handed out to him because the truth was that important, an indication that Nommo was active in his life.

As much as Du Bois chastised white America, his bigger concern was how Blacks responded to the issues that faced them. He was always confronting Blacks, imploring them to stand up for themselves; and while it was important to be vigilant in keeping the pressure on society as a whole and America specifically, he wanted Blacks to not let what others had to say be the determining voice. He believed that Blacks had a deep and rich history and because of that, there was no reason to carry oneself or behave in a way that did not celebrate that history. As Du Bois asserts:

They expect always to be able to crush, insult, ignore and exploit 12,000,000 individual Negroes without intelligent organized opposition. The organization is going to involve deliberate propaganda for race pride. That is, it is going to start out by convincing American Negroes that there is no reason for their being ashamed of themselves; that their record is one which should make them proud; that their history in Africa and the world is a history of effort, success and trail, compatible with that of any other people. We can refuse to deliberately to lie about our history, while at the same time taking pride in Nefertiti, Askia, Moshesh, Toussaint, and Frederick Douglass, and testing and encouraging belief in our own ability by organized economic and social action” (158).

To further illustrate the point, Manning Marble states, “It was not until the Great Depression that Du Bois grew frustrated and disappointed in the possibility of a Black capitalist solution, and lamented that Black entrepreneurs as a group had absolutely no ethics or morality regarding their own people (147).

In fact, Du Bois was so confident in his assessment of the situation of Black people that he was not opposed to taking on anyone, Black or white, who he felt did not have the best interests of the Black masses in mind. At the time that Du Bois was being

thrust into the light as a leader of the enfranchise Blacks, in the south Booker T. Washington was the man. He created a situation where Blacks began to obtain some semblance of the American Dream. That is, “Mr. Washington’s program naturally takes an economic cast, becoming a gospel of work and money to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life (Du Bois 246). One may respond that the higher aim in life is work and money. This is true if one believes in Aristotle’s idea of money. On the other hand, if one is familiar with the idea of Ma’at as it appears that Du Bois was, then one would understand that the higher purpose of life is to live in harmony with all living things, that nothing was superior or inferior to anything else, especially Black people to white people. Du Bois’ rhetoric was all about love. That Black people as well as white and every other person on the face of the earth deserved the right to live with dignity. “In all the history of nearly all other races and peoples the doctrine preached at such crises has been that manly self-respect is worth more than lands and houses, and that people who voluntarily surrender such respect, or cease striving for it, are not worth civilizing (Du Bois 246). Du Bois had his own ideas about how Blacks should proceed in gaining full equality into American life, and as a response to the Tuskegee National Negro Business League, the group that Washington headed up, he created his own group to counter the ideology that was being promoted by Washington. He gathered some Black intellectuals from the north and met in Niagara Falls for the first time and they called themselves the Niagara Movement. For Du Bois, the only way for Blacks to open doors that had been closed for so long was by becoming militant, protesting, and agitating those he felt stood in the way of Blacks gaining their right to citizenship of the United States. Washington and what is referred to as the Tuskegee

machine believed as Washington stated in a speech, where he assured his white audience that, “The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly” (Rabaka 88). Washington assured whites that he was conservative. He was conservative in the sense that Manning Marble describes:

Generally speaking, conservatives from the Civil War to the present have agreed on a philosophy which can be outlined accordingly; first, a theoretical and programmatic commitment to capitalism as an economic system in which Blacks can take part as full and equal partners. Black conservatives are traditionally hostile to Black participation in trade unions, and urge a close cooperation with white business leaders. Hostile to the welfare state, they call for increased ‘self-help’ programs run by Blacks at local and community levels. Conservatives often accept the institutionalized forms of patriarchy, acknowledging a secondary role for Black women within economics, political life and intellectual work (182).

Washington also did not believe that the way to right the wrongs that had been committed against Blacks was to hold whites responsible for the killing and enslavement of millions, or that this was necessary in gaining rights for Black people.

Washington denied wanting to take part in politics, but when Roosevelt became president and asked for Washington's help in making appointments of Southerners to his cabinet, Washington did not hesitate to jump on board and get members of his machine appointed in the administration. Although Washington professed publically that he had no interest in politics, behind closed doors he was always playing politics in order to get one of his people a position that had some clout within the government. Some of the appointments he was responsible for had major impact on how Blacks would be treated especially in places like Alabama that had segregation laws. However, many Blacks still did not trust Washington because he was saying one thing in public and doing another behind closed doors. On the other hand, although Du Bois made some mistakes, he always dealt with things above board. Even when he made decisions or suggestions that proved to be wrong; he admitted his shortcomings and made the necessary adjustments to his thinking in order to serve the Black community in a way that would enhance their chances of obtaining the full citizenship that they deserved. For example, his idea of the Talented Tenth shows his willingness to reexamine his idea and make the necessary changes in order to make the idea more palatable. When he originally penned the idea, he said, "The Negro Race, like all other races, is going to be saved by exceptional men" (Du Bois 1). In his revised edition of 1948 he changed the beginning to read that, "African American uplift rested squarely on the shoulders of both black man and women of character. Black men and women who had the willingness to seek: Self-knowledge, self-realization, self-control, a willingness to sacrifice, understand the need and have a desire to do service, and be committed to the struggle (Rabaka, 2008, p. 94). In other words, if one understood the ideas of Ma'at and strove to find harmony in life, one would possess

the traits that Du Bois believes are required to help build community, and in order to build community, it is imperative to have people who understand the value of teaching and are committed to the education of all those they come in contact with.

Reading Du Bois' essay on his theory of the Talented Tenth it is clear that his ideas are influenced by the ideas put forth by Aristotle, Plato, Cicero and the others, but it is also clear that his ideas are influenced by Nommo. His idea is very similar to the Greek notion that only a few could study rhetoric and become rhetoricians. They believed that only a select few had the talent to learn the skills necessary to become leaders. Where his thinking departs from those thinkers who are famous for developing the way we conduct business today, is that their motivation for becoming leaders was to fill their coffers, thus gaining and maintaining power. Du Bois, on the other hand, was aware that making the pursuit of money one's mission does not guarantee one's humanity will be respected, nor does it do anything for the millions who do not have the education that affords them the opportunity to live a better life. That includes having the ability to understand language and how it is used to keep people in the dark. The foundation of Du Bois' rhetoric of love was education. He believed that if one was educated and knew about his or her own history as well as the history of others, one would be in a better place to counter the assaults on one's character. He also believed that by becoming educated and having a sense of one's African history, one would understand that Africa made many contributions to the world in many areas and that there was nothing for Blacks to be ashamed about regardless of the propaganda. Du Bois was convinced that for Blacks to take their rightful place amongst the citizens of America that they had to be militant in their efforts. Du Bois insisted that voting is necessary to modern manhood, that color



discrimination is evil, and that all boys, not just white boys need to be educated (Du Bois 48-51). Like the ancient Africans, Du Bois believed that education must cultivate learners and listeners in an educational setting that focuses on education for governance and human harmony with nature and cosmos (Crawford 132). Although, like Washington suggested, it is important that Black people have the skills and talents to be able to make a living, but insure the greatest possibility for one to live in harmony, their focus cannot as Du Bois for eighty years taught, just be about money. He believed like Marx that when one's life is geared to only making money that it causes one to live an alienated life and that it promotes competition and as long as there is competition there is always going to be a winner and loser, and as long as that is the case there cannot be any harmony. Du Bois had read a lot of Marx and believed in many of the ideas that Marx put forth. In fact, Du Bois for a long time was accused of being a communist and when he finally left the United States for Africa, he did announce to the world the he was a communist. He like Marx believed that:

The relationship of the worker to the product of his labor as an alien object that has power over him. This relationship is at the same time the relationship to the sensuous exterior world and to the natural objects as to an alien and hostile world opposed to him. The relationship of labor to the act of production inside labor. This relationship is the relationship of the worker to his own activity as something that is alien and does not belong to him; it is activity that is passivity, power and weakness, procreation and castration, the worker's

own physical and intellectual energy, his personal life (for what is life except activity?) as an activity directed against himself, independent of him and not belonging to him. It is self-alienation (McLellan 89).

In other words, man has to find more than work to make him feel complete. If man relies solely of his work to give him a sense of self, the chances of him being fulfilled is unlikely to happen. By focusing purely on work man is prevented from developing a real relationship with his fellow man, and as a result, he is alienated from nature. “That man lives from nature means that nature is his body with which he must maintain a constant interchange so as not to die. That man’s physical and intellectual life depends on nature merely means that nature depends on itself, for man is part of nature” (99).

What I am trying to say is this: If all of one’s energy is put into work, at first man does not realize how alienated he is, until he tries to develop a relationship with another woman or man and realizes that they have nothing in common. What they do not realize is that through nature we all are related but if all of one’s time is spent working, thus being alienated, the most important relationship is not recognized because no time has been spent communing. Du Bois was well aware of this and did his best to try and get Blacks to realize that if they allowed themselves to be conciliatory and become just laborers that they would never be considered full human beings and as result become a part of a dominate culture that perpetuated some of the most horrendous crimes against humanity that has ever been committed, simply for material gain. Du Bois was so convinced of the results of becoming like the dominate culture who used the church and

religion as a way to further perpetuate their white, racist and patriarchic agenda. Du Bois loved Black people so much that he was willing to take on the church knowing that by doing so was going to cause him more grief than any one person should have to deal with. Yet, understanding the wrath he would receive, he committed his entire life to taking on those who were unwilling to stand up and be counted. He tried to create harmony by calling attention to their behavior in hopes of them finding the courage to be transformed. Blacks and most people are taught to keep their mouth closed, they are taught that if they keep quiet that somehow the truth will not reveal itself. What they did not realize, and Du Bois did, is that there is power in the word and that the only way to be transformed is by understanding the power of words and using them to create the kind of world that one hopes for. By keeping silent, for Du Bois this meant one of two things, either one did not believe that a better life could be had, or that one was so afraid so one chooses to keep their mouth shut in order to survive. Unlike Du Bois, they were afraid to ask the pressing questions:

O I wonder who I am--I wonder what the world is--I wonder  
if life is worth the striving--I do not know--perhaps I shall  
never know. These are my plans to make a name to make a  
name in science, to make a name in literature and thus to  
raise my race. Or perhaps raise a visible empire in Africa  
thro' England, France, or Germany. Heaven nor Hell, God  
nor Devil shall turn me from my purpose till I die. I wonder  
what will be the outcome? Who knows? I will go unto the  
king--which is not according to the law and if I parish--I

perish (Bloom 18).

Du Bois, being aware of his Kemetic roots, understood that his responsibility was to live a life that was in harmony with the cosmos, to do all that he could to be in communion with his brothers and sisters of the world. Du Bois practiced what Villanueva says when he states, “Change is possible. Language used consciously, a matter of rhetoric, is principle means-- perhaps the means--by which change can take place. Rhetoric, after all, is how ideologies are carried, how hegemonies are maintained. Rhetoric, then, would be the means by which hegemonies could be countered” (121). Du Bois, having studied the classics and knowing about Ma’at, knew just how powerful the word was, and perhaps that was behind his reasoning for taking on Washington and the establishment when it came to the idea of educating Blacks to be do other things besides be laborers. Although, he was not opposed to Blacks learning a trade. Moreover, he believed that along with an industrial education, Blacks needed to be trained in the liberal arts. Du Bois thought being trans-disciplinary and grounded in the academic or disciplinary developments of history, philosophy, sociology, political science, and economics, along with the industrial subjects would afford students the greatest possible chance at success, that in hand accommodations would do nothing to enhance a person’s sense of self (Rabaka 98).

By having a grounding in the liberal arts, students would obtain the tools necessary to become critically conscious, and being critically conscious they would learn how to think for themselves and come to terms with the fact that they come from a deep and rich history, and begin to understand the truth about who they are and as a result begin to challenge those who would treat them in ways that did not honor their humanity.

Also, Du Bois felt that once one became educated he or she would go back to their community and help others in their quest to remove the shackles. He states:

I am an earnest advocate of manual training and trade teaching for Black boys, and for white boys, too. I believe that next to the founding of Negro colleges the most valuable addition to Negro education since the war has been industrial training for Black boys. Nevertheless, I insist that the object of all true education is to to make men carpenters, it is to make carpenters men; there are two means of making the carpenter a man, each equally important: the first is to give the group and community in which he works, liberally trained teachers and leaders to teach him and his family what it means; the second is to give him sufficient intelligence and technical skill to make him an efficient workman; the first object demands the Negro college and college-bred men--not a quantity of such colleges, but few of excellent quality; not too many college-bred men, but enough to leaven the lump, to inspire the masses, to raise the Talented Tenth to leadership; the second object demands a good system of common schools, well taught, conveniently located and properly equipped (8).

When Du Bois wrote his essay on the Talented Tenth, he was under the impression that Black leaders and Black intellectuals would sacrifice and selfishly serve the Black masses. He quickly found out that the spirit of Jeffersonian individualism and

simple-mindedness was not something wholly plaguing whites, but that many blacks bought into the idea as well. It disappointed him deeply and he set out to revise it (Rabaka 101).

During his revision process he started reading and studying Marx and his revision was infused with Marx's idea of a democratic socialism. He believed, like Marx, that change could only happen if the masses were involved in the struggle, they were the real people. He came to realize that talent not only belonged to the Talented Tenth but within the masses could be found many who had skills that could be utilized in helping make the playing field more level. By including a wider pool of talent it would also prevent the selfish few from taking advantage of things. With his understanding of Marx and Marxism, Du Bois came to realize that racism did not stem from ignorance, but rather from the exploitation and political oppression, linked to economic structures and psychological power (Blum 41). Because of his understanding of the above, Du Bois set out to change things on both fronts. In regards to political oppression, he came up with his idea of the Talented Tenth, which he later revised when he realized that his thinking was limited and did not create the greatest possible chance for Blacks to change their position. As an attempt to change the psychological oppression that many Blacks were dealing and living with, and as a way to get Blacks to look at how they were included with white folks, he took on Booker T. Washington and the white political machine that was backing him. Du Bois also took on the church, the stronghold of the Black community. Du Bois truly believed that Blacks could change how the world saw them and how they saw themselves. Much of his rhetoric of love was directed at Black people to change how they saw themselves, and by changing how they saw themselves that

would give them the courage to stand up to white people. His critique of Blacks and the church was so strong that there have been plenty of books and essays about his relationship with the Black church. In fact, there was much speculation that Du Bois was an atheist. To some Du Bois appeared to be a saint, to others a sinner. He touched a lot of people but for each person he touched in a positive way there were many more who thought he was an infidel, interested in doing harm to the church rather than promoting spirituality (Blum 6).

Du Bois was well aware of how whiteness was connected to the idea of the divine, and realized that if there was going to be any progress for Black people in the world, their conception of religion and God had to be challenged. He put forth the notion that blacks, because of their oppression, had access to a spiritual world that was unique to them. Du Bois was aware of racial categories, and how they served as spiritual, cosmic, and eternal realities. A lot of white folks used religion as a way to explain whiteness and blackness, that whiteness was angelic and blackness devilish, and because they were white God gave them dominion over these devilish people. Again as Blum states:

If race in general had religious components, then blackness and whiteness in must be understood with relation to how America invested them with sacred significance. Du Bois considered religion at the core of the social and cultural construction of whiteness. The white race, he maintained, was created as a category to offer working-class southern and northern whites, including European immigrants, a 'psychological wage' that differentiated them from African

Americans in their same economic grouping. But whiteness also had spiritual currency. The association of whiteness and godliness provided whites a sense of eternal value, a value they denied African Americans, whom whites linked to the demonic, the vile, and the profane. The spiritual wage of whiteness (and the alleged spiritual bankruptcy of blacks) led white Americans to displace the true Christian God with a deity made in their own image--a white god. Much of Du Bois' career, in fact, was dominated by his efforts to expose and destroy this white god and rituals to honor him. (15-16)

Du Bois understood how religion was used to discredit Black people and set out to dispel the myths. Du Bois had read a lot of literature about Africa and how from the very beginning, a concerted effort was made to discredit what Blacks had contributed to the world stage, and because of this knowledge, Du Bois set out to teach Blacks just how Christianity contributed to their inhumane treatment. Because people did not understand Ma'at and the African way of thinking, because they used animals, art, and architecture symbolically, the invaders considered them to be pagans, and in the fourth century under the order of Theodosius, and in the sixth century by a Justinian dictum, Ma'at was outlawed (Karenga 352). As it has been discussed earlier, the sophists learned a lot from the Egyptians in regards to rhetoric and because sophists could do things with language and words that were unthinkable. Until they showed up on the scene, they were thought to be using some kind of 'black magic' to do what they did, as there was no other explanation. As Kenneth Burke says:



If you look at recent studies of primitive magic from the standpoint of this discussion, you might rather want to distinguish between magic as 'bad science' and magic as 'primitive rhetoric.' You then discover that anthropology does clearly recognize the rhetorical function in magic; and far from dismissing the rhetorical aspect of magic merely as bad science, anthropology recognizes in it a pragmatic device that greatly assisted the survival of cultures by promoting social cohesion. For rhetoric as such is not rooted in any past condition of human society. It is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols. (Burke 43)

In fact, as James Herrick states, "Recent scholarship has done much to dismantle the traditional treatment of these men as merely itinerant or rhetorically gifted con artists (35). Or as Herald Barrett says, the teachings of the sophists did not go over too well with the religious teachings of the Greeks. The interpretations of the sophists' ways and ideas proved to disconcerted, defensive citizens with plenty of reasons to complain. For people who were discontent with the present circumstances found the sophists to be easy targets to condemn (31-32). It appears that Du Bois realized that religion was being used to interpolate people, part of what Athuessuer calls the Ideological State Apparatus. In brief,

the Ideological State Apparatus, “Constitutes an organized whole whose different parts are centralized beneath a commanding unity, that politics of class struggle applied by political representatives of ruling classes in possession of State Power, the Ideological State Apparatuses are multiple, distinct, ‘relatively autonomous and capable of providing an objective field to contradictions which express, in forms which may be limited or extreme, the effects of the clashes between the capitalist class struggle and the proletarian class struggle, as well as their subordinate forms” (Brewster 14 & 42).

There are two kinds of state apparatuses, the ideological and the repressive. The ideological state apparatus includes institutions such as: courts, church, school, family, and political party. The repressive state apparatus includes such intuitions like the armed forces and police. The difference between the two is that the repressive state apparatus uses violence. Although there are many different factions in the United States, in order to maintain order these factions have to build alliances. Although there are differences, when it comes to maintaining power, those who are part of the ideological state apparatus all agree that when their power is threatened, they will resort to the repressive apparatus (Brewster 139).

Du Bois saw this happening with Blacks and the relationships that Booker T. Washington had developed with the white establishment, and he also saw how the relationship that Blacks had with Christianity also promoted the ideology of White Supremacy. As a way to counter what was happening, Du Bois thought the best thing Blacks could do was become educated and as a result they would begin to understand how the ideological state apparatus works and by having an understanding they would be able to push back against the ideology that was invested in keeping Blacks in an inferior

role. As a way to uplift Blacks, Du Bois forged literary associations between images of God and oppressed people. He discussed a Black God, a Black Christ, a Black Madonna, a Black Buddha, and even a Black female God, all in hopes of inspiring Black people to see themselves differently (Blum 18).

Du Bois was well versed in Marx's idea that:

the value of the products regularly exchanged in the open market depends upon the labor necessary to produce them; that capital consists of machines, materials and wages paid for labor; that our finished product, when materials have been paid for and the wear and tear and machinery replaced, and wages paid, there remains a surplus value. The surplus value arises from labor and is the difference between what is actually paid laborers for their wages and the market values of the commodities which the laborers produce. It represents, therefore, exploitation of the laborer, and this exploitation, inherent in the capitalistic system of production, is the cause of poverty, of industrial crises, and eventually of social revolution (Zuckerman 131).

Furthermore, Du Bois had a clear understanding of Marx's statement "that man lives from nature means that nature is his body with which he must maintain a constant interchange so as not to die. That man's physical and intellectual life depends on itself, for man is a part of nature" (90).

It was because of this understanding that Du Bois was willing to take on Washington and his accommodationalist church plays in the Black community he attacked

the church for the way they seemed to condone the behavior of society as a whole. Du Bois, with his knowledge of Kemetism, realized that the preacher and teacher are perhaps two of the most important people in any community. In regards to preachers he says, “The Negro priest, therefore early became an important figure on the plantation and found his function as interpreter of the supernatural, the confronter of the sorrowing, and as the one who expressed, rudely, but picturesquely, the longing and disappointment and resentment of a stolen people” (qtd. in Rabaka 130-131).

Du Bois is someone who heeded the call of the people of the Nile. That is to say that he spent his life trying to create harmony amongst people of the world. He devoted himself to public speaking, for he realized that he must agitate:

It was not pleasant--it was putting himself in jeopardy; he was called upon to lose friends in some cases, and in all cases to make himself unpleasant, insistent, persistent, telling of things that people did not want to hear about, because they are not interested in them. He must interest people in things which they were not interested before, which is a hard task in this busy world; and yet, nevertheless. The man that has a grievance is supposed to speak for himself. No one can speak for him--no one knows the thing as well as he does (qtd. in Zuckerman 116).

Looking at the above closely, it becomes apparent that what Du Bois is talking about is understanding the power of the word and realizing that one has a responsibility to speak up when things appear to be out of harmony with nature. In this case, the treatment of Black people. In Western tradition a rhetorician is one who tries to persuade for the benefit of self, in the African American tradition, the rhetoricians job is to teach in hopes of creating a more harmonious world. He was aware of the needs of the group, the deep inner psychic needs, the frustrations and rejections which generated self-rejection. Always the teacher, Du Bois launched through the *Crisis* a program to teach Negro history, to correct deficiencies within the group and, above all, to instill self-esteem of which the Negro had been systematically robbed by white society through generations of slavery, segregation and suppression of the race's history. He understood this and made it his mission to confront the forces that wanted to continue to strip Blacks of their Humanity.

Many a time, as a student of rhetoric and composition, one comes across the theories of Marx, Gramsci, Aristotle, Plato, and all the other theorists who try to explain this thing called life and the conditions that have caused our present circumstances. In 1903 in the introduction to *Souls of Black Folk* called the Forethought, Du Bois stated, "The problem with America is the problem of the color line," and spent his whole life trying to help America to come to terms with this dilemma. In the last twenty years as composition and rhetoric have become more popular, many conversations deal with how language has been used, and how it continues to be used to oppress people. But in our conversations, to understand how language is used to oppress people, the outcomes of using language to these ends, and understanding ways to combat such use of language,

rarely, if ever, is the work of Du Bois used in helping students understand the role that Du Bois played in bringing the life and history from the margins closer to the center.

Du Bois was a prolific writer. He published more than twenty books and thousands of essays and articles. He was editor of numerous newspapers and magazines, he wrote poetry and fiction. He was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and was instrumental in creating the Pan-African movement. It is no surprise that Du Bois has been recognized by many as one of the most influential cultural and intellectual giants that this country has produced, and although he has been widely praised as being a political leader, and a noted man of letters, not much time is giving to his work or the contributions he has made in the areas of culture, race, class and gender (Zuckerman 2 - 3).

However, despite the credentials and contribution Du Bois made to the world of intellectual inquiry, his work is not a staple in the world of rhetoric and composition. With such rich and in depth scholarship, one has to wonder how come his work is not more widely used in trying to have discussions about how things have gotten to where they are and solutions to try to make changes, it would seem that the work of Du Bois would be one of the major theorists that is used in trying to understand how capitalism works and how religion was used as a way to promote hegemony's agenda.

Furthermore, by studying Du Bois's work, students would have an opportunity to see how the rhetoric of love works. Du Bois loved himself and Black people and America enough to give himself, mentally, spiritually, and physically. Du Bois received his PhD from Harvard, graduating at the top of his class, and studied in Germany. With the connections he would have forged at both places as well as his work ethic, it would

appear that Du Bois could have made a lot of money, but he instead chose to follow the Ma'at way of living and tried to create harmony in a society that did not seem to care too much about harmony. He was also a person who was willing to push back. Not only did he implore the white establishment to change how they saw their darker brothers and sisters. He also challenged Black people to see themselves differently. Du Bois believed that Blacks have a contribution to make to the world, which no other race can do, and in order to do that Blacks and the world need to become knowledgeable about Africa, its people, history, thoughts, beliefs and value system and the truth about the contributions that Africa has made to the world.

By studying Du Bois, students would get a clear understanding of what rhetoric is and how it has been used to oppress people and that the way to change perceptions is by having a willingness to find different solutions. In the search to find different solutions, having a strong will is the order of the day. Blacks need to embrace their African roots, and by embracing their roots, they will begin to realize that the only effective way to open doors of opportunity is to adopt tactics of militant protest and agitation; by employing this style of rhetoric it will change how one sees oneself and eventually how the world sees one. Also, studying Du Bois would make clear the notion that we are all in this together and that if one group of people is oppressed, then we as human beings are not doing our job in regards to living in harmony. Du Bois not only fought for the rights of Black people, but he advocated for women and all peoples of the world (Rabaka 41-42).

In other words, by studying Du Bois and his rhetoric students would become aware of how religion was used to oppress people because of the nature of the subjects

Du Bois wrote about. The opportunity to have discussions about topics that generally cause conflict would arise, and professors would have a chance to have meaningful conversations about how rhetoric is used as way to identify people and as a result that would set up a subject object relationship and it is only until one fully understands how language and religion is used to oppress people and how by using religion and language to such ends, not only affects the oppressed person, but the person who is doing the oppressing. We all suffer. By introducing people like Du Bois into the discussion rather than choosing to forgo difficult conversation for fear of losing control of the classroom, students would have a wider range of material to draw from and perhaps some of their preconceived notions about the other might be reduced:

If language constructs reality, then it follows that we have constructed reality in terms of dialectical grounds. Indeed, if language undergirds our conceptions of theory and practice, then the divisions concomitant with these conceptions are inventions of our own making. We thus create and maintain a polarized, negativistic world, and we do it together: Therein lies the inequality. Our task, then, is not to reject rhetoric as persuasion and argument, but to reconceptualize it in manner which allows for affirmation and acceptance of difference (McPhail 119).

It is true that in order to move forward and find harmony it will be necessary to affirm and accept difference, but the only way that can happen is if those of us who teach rhetoric make more of a concerted effort to introduce people like Du Bois and his rhetoric into the conversation. It cannot be a token representation but an in-depth look at his



theories as a way to really begin to celebrate difference. We need to be able to bring other voices into discussions and hear the critique and listen to the suggestions put forth, as well as implement the ones that show promise. If we are not willing to do that, then we will continue to remain in a place where harmony is only something we think about in relationship to music.

# Standing Tall: Robeson and the Pentad

## Chapter Four

Words are symbols we use to communicate our thoughts and ideas in hopes of creating a willingness for the speaker and listener to find common ground, to work toward harmony, and to induce cooperation (Alkebulan 28) (Burke 42). What Nommo makes clear is the role that the whole body plays in the effort to communicate a message. As noted previously, in order to increase the chances of the audience receiving the message, not only does the word choice make a difference, but how one uses rhythm, styling, story-telling, call and response and the other components of Nommo contribute to the increased possibility of finding common ground. As Gates suggests, language, for individuals consciousness, lies on the

borderlines between oneself and the other. The word language is half someone else's. It becomes one's own only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word adapting to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all out of the dictionary that the speakers gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's context, serving other people's context,

serving other people's intentions: It is from there  
that one must take the word, and make it one's own  
(1).

No one understood this better than Paul Robeson. He took other people's language, whether English, French, German, Russian, or any other language, and made it his own. Into his body he took these languages that were not his own and was unlike any other performer, activist, or intellectual in the twentieth century. He was an all around college athlete, an All-American football player, an actor, performing to acclaimed reviews in Othello, or as a singer of Negro Spirituals and folk songs from many nations, or as a fighter for peace, and socialism, and the liberation of all oppressed people's of the world (Foner1).

His rhetoric, like Douglass and Du Bois was a rhetoric of love grounded in both Kemetics and Christianity. "Robeson's roots were established in a religion that reveals African influences through musical creativity that allows virtually no break between the sacred and the secular; indeed, the sacred music could be said to contain seeds of the blues and jazz that bloomed in the first decade of Robeson's life" (Stuckey ix). Also like the others, Robeson pushed back against the inhumane treatment that people the world over were suffering at the hands of tyrants.

Robeson's father was a preacher and it was thought that Robeson would follow in his father's footsteps and become a preacher. His father was a runaway slave and ended up in Pennsylvania, where he attended Lincoln University and received his degree in theology. Perhaps, because Robeson's father was a runaway slave and preacher, and Robeson often heard tales about slave life and stories about the treatment of Black people

this made him sensitive to issues pertaining to justice at an early age.

When Paul was a child, one of his brothers tried to enroll in Princeton and was rejected because, as Woodrow Wilson the president of Princeton who would later become the president of the United States said, “Princeton did not accept the colored” (Robeson Jr., 5). Because of what Robeson saw and heard, his father “insisted on personal integrity, which included the area maximum human fulfillment. That these values were related to an ethical system that favored what Robeson would come to see as socialist rather than capitalist values. Success was not to be measured in terms of money and personal advancement, but rather the goal must be the richest and highest development of one’s own potential” (Robeson 18). From early on, Robeson understood that the best way to transform oneself, so that they could help transform one’s community and society at large, was through understanding and being able to use language. Like Du Bois, Robeson thought Booker T. Washington’s idea that Negro education be limited essentially to manual training; Robeson firmly believed the heights of knowledge must be scaled by the freedom seeker. So in high school and college Robeson studied Latin and Greek, but his father was his first teacher in public speaking, and long before his days of class orator and college debater there were evenings of recitations at home. It was there that his love for eloquent and meaningful words and his insistence on purity of diction made their impression. Many a person reading this statement could construe what Robeson had to say in regards to speaking well as him trying to be white. In the Black community, it has long been believed that if someone spoke what is considered standard English, that person was trying to be white, when the truth of the matter is that in the Ma’at way of thinking the word is all powerful and perhaps Robeson’s father, a runaway slave,

understood that because of his African connection to his African self made it a point for his children to understand the importance of the word and part of realizing the importance of words is to understand that if they are spoken with clarity and a consciousness about delivery, and was aware that “the spoken word (released through human agency) is not merely an utterance skillfully manipulated, but rather an active force and companion to human activity, which gives life efficacy to what it names or verbally affirms” (Wright 85). Or, as Alkebulans states “where there is harmony, the rhythms and vibrations imparted by the spirit consumes the participants” (30).

In other words, how one uses words, whether one uses a high or low register, the length of syllables, speaking fast or slow, all these things effect how the audience will be affected. Robeson’s father was educated and perhaps had read Quintilian and understood that the goal of education was to train great orators (Kennedy 117). Also, because Robeson’s father was a preacher, he had the opportunity to hear his father preach quite often and admired his father’s voice immensely. He states, “my father was known for his dramatic power and inspiring messages and the reverend filled the sanctuary with his deep, melodious bass voice. He had one of the greatest speaking voices I’d ever heard” (Robeson Jr. 6). To elder Robeson, like the people of the Nile and like the folks in the fifth and fourth century, the influence of the spoken word was strong. Susan Jarratt and Rory Ong suggest that this was true to some degree because the Greeks, following the Egyptians, understood that “human deliberation and action are responsible for human destinies that can be shaped by thought and speech” (Herrick 34). Robeson’s father was still connected to his African roots and understood the power of the word, and because he realized that his son had a strong voice he encouraged him to develop it.

Robeson understood the value of being a good orator and in high school and college he was part of the debating teams where he honed his skills as an orator. In fact, at his graduation from Rutgers he gave the commencement speech and perhaps it was the beginning of Robeson's career as an agitator. In his speech he implored the audience to take advantage of the opportunity that lay before them:

We find an unparalleled opportunity for the reconstructing our entire national life and molding it in accordance with the purpose and ideals of a new age. Customs and traditions which blocked the path of knowledge have been uprooted, and the nation in place of its moral aimlessness has braced itself to the pursuit of a great national end. We can expect a greater openness of mind, a greater willingness to try new lines of advancement, a greater desire to do right things, and to serve social ends.

It will be the purpose of this new spirit to cherish and strengthen the heritage of freedom; to give fuller expression to the principle upon which our nation and our national life is built.

More and more the value of the individual has been brought home to us. The value of each citizen is very closely related to the conception of the nation as a living unit. But unity is impossible without freedom, and freedom presupposes a reverence for the individual and the recognition of the claims of human personality to full development. It is therefore the task of this new spirit to make national unity a reality, at whatever sacrifice, and

to provide full opportunities for the development of everyone, both as a living personality and as a member of a community upon which social responsibilities dissolve (Robeson Jr., 37).

From Rutgers, Robeson went on to Columbia Law School, but at the same time dabbled in the theatre for several years. He worked as an actor in New York and London, played professional football, and went to law school at the same time. Finally, he finished his law degree and passed the New York Bar and took a job at a prestigious law firm. It was at this law firm where a stenographer refused to take notes for him, “declaring that she wouldn’t take dictation from a nigger” (Robeson Jr., 71). Robeson talked with the head of the firm about the situation and his boss informed him that because of the color of his skin, clients would be reluctant for him to represent them, and that judges would probably not look favorably on him in court because of the color of his skin. On the spot Robeson quit and never thought about being a lawyer again. Through some connection he made in New York, he landed a part in two of Eugene O’Neill’s plays, *Emperor Jones* and *All God’s Chillin Got Wings*. Both plays and Robeson were criticized for the portrayal of Blacks but Robeson defended his stance although the Black leadership condemned him. Robeson responded by saying that, “We are too self-conscious, too afraid of showing all phases of life--especially those phases which are of greatest dramatic value. The great mass of our group discourage any member who has the courage to fight these petty prejudices” (Robeson Jr., 78).

Robeson did more theatre when the opportunities arose, but he started directing his attention to becoming a concert singer. In some of the plays that he did, he sang and the response from audiences and critics for the most part were favorable and as a result

Robeson started spending more time on his music. Once Robeson decided that he did not want to be a lawyer and realized how Blacks were perceived, he set out to show the world the many different faces of Black people. He realized too that some Blacks did not like who they were and were ashamed of their African heritage, so he set out to change how Blacks, whites, and the world saw Black people. Robeson was a forerunner in the campaign to educate the American people concerning the truth about Africa. He also stressed the oral tradition of African culture, and noted that his ancestors in Africa considered sound of particular importance (Foner 4). Eventually, he would use his voice as a way to challenge the status quo.

In his early years, Robeson took the opportunity and went to Europe to try his luck at acting and singing abroad. While abroad he met Africans and others who were struggling and began to realize that their struggles were similar to the struggles of Black folk back in the United States. While in Europe, he had the good fortune to travel to Russia and it was there that his desire to become more political began and he starting learning about socialism and communism. Paul was profoundly affected by his experience in the Soviet Union. Everyone he met treated him with grace and respect. Later he would comment to a friend, “Here for the first time in my life I walk as a full human with dignity, you can’t imagine what it means to me as a Negro” (Robeson Jr. 221). He developed such a fondness for Russia and the people that he sent his son to school and took the time to learn the language and sing Russian folk songs as well as Negro spirituals. Robeson understood that hegemony is rhetorical (Villianueva 128), and that one of the ways that you change the rhetoric is by countering the rhetoric being exposed and show the false logic in the argument, and wherever he went he let people



know that the treatment that Blacks were receiving and others who were being oppressed needed to band together and change how business was being done. For the better part of twelve years Robeson lived, traveled and performed in Europe and Russia, and in all of his interactions he let it be known his concerns about the treatment of Black people in the United States and let it be known that he was empathic to all oppressed people.

Robeson's actions would make him a prime example of what Gramsci called the "new intellectual." That is, Robeson involved himself in a dialectical and rhetorical enterprise (Villianueva 129). He took his experiences and the experiences of Black people in general and related to the experiences of others as a way to build community, he mingled with the aristocracy as well as the working poor, and in either setting he treated everyone the same, and carried himself like he mattered. In fact, while living in Europe he would hold two different kinds of concerts, he made a living giving performances for the wealthy but he also gave concerts for the less fortunate for what would be equivalent to a couple of dollars so that the locals could commune with him. Robeson became a permanent persuader, involved in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, an actor in everyday life, which allowed him to be a liaison between the groups seeking revolutionary change and the rest of civil society (Gramsci 10). His father and his learning about Africa taught him that "it is the champion of righteousness that is the true victor in rhetorical traditions speech was not merely a series of codes that fostered communication, rhetoric was spiritual, a human quest for what was good and divine" (Asante 28). It was to these ends that Robeson used his talents and skills.

Robeson believed that a new spirit had to be cultivated. A spirit that understands the importance and the necessity of strengthening the heritage of the freedom for which men

have toiled, suffered and died for a thousand years; to prove that the possibilities of that larger freedom for which the noblest spirits have sacrificed their lives were no idle dreams; to give fuller expression to the principle upon which our national life is built. We realize that freedom is the most precious of our treasures, and it will not be allowed to vanish so long as men survive who offered their lives to keep it (Foner 63). Robeson believed that every person had a right to freedom and that it was everyone's duty and responsibility to take part in efforts to try to create a society that lived in harmony. But he realized also that the suffering that Black people had gone through has left an indelible mark on the Negro's soul, and at the present stage he suffers from an inferiority complex which finds its compensation in a desire to imitate the white man and his ways, but I am convinced that in this direction there is fulfillment nor peace for the negro (Robeson 916-17).

Robeson thought that the problems that Black people faced was twofold, on the one hand, white folks had their feet on Black folks neck and Blacks had to challenge the way that they were being treated. On the other hand, Robeson felt some of the problems that Blacks were facing were because they did not have an appreciation for their Africanness. He set to do away with the ignorance that he felt that Blacks had toward themselves. It has been drummed into the Negro that the white man is the master and lord and as a result many Black people strive to become as nearly like a white man as possible. Blacks believe that he is American, British, or French, but you cannot assume nationality like you do a suit of clothes. In this country of his adoption or the country that ruthlessly adopted his forbearers, he is an alien; but herein lies the tragedy he believes himself to have broken away from his true origins; he has, he argues, nothing whatever in

common with the inhabitant of Africa, and that is where he is wrong. Many Blacks only see Africa through the lens that has been created by white folks and Christianity and through those lenses all they see is savagery, devil worship, witch-doctors' ignorance and squalor, and darkness taught in American schools (Robeson 88). It is through this attitude and behavior, this shackled life caught in a noose of shame and disaster that he rebels, hates himself, struggles, and how, my God, others ask, what can be done about it? (Fanon 96). But it would appear that if one, like Robeson, understands that:

There exists among men, because they are men, solidarity shares responsibility for every injustice and every wrong committed in the world, and especially for crimes that are committed in his presence or of which he cannot be ignorant. If I do not do whatever I can to prevent them, I am an accomplice in them. If I have not risked my life in order to prevent the murder of other men, if I have stood silent, I feel guilty in a sense that cannot in any adequate fashion be understood jurisdictionally, or politically, or morally... That I am still alive after such things have been done weighs on me as guilt that cannot be expiated. Somewhere in the heart of human relations an absolute command imposes itself: In case of criminal attack or of living conditions that threaten physical being, accept life

only for all together, otherwise not at all (qtd. in Fanon 89).

This is what Robeson tried to impress upon Black people, that if they did not come to a place where they realized that by sitting by doing nothing or trying to silence people like Robeson who was only speaking the truth, they were as guilty as the people who were doing things to oppress them. To further illustrate the point, Manning Marble states, “that in order for the racist order to function, any prior claim to an alternative set of human values, customs, and institutions that the oppressed might have had in the pre-racist state must be suppressed. Negative differences which circumscribe racial interaction emerge out of a privileged discursive sensibility which allows whites to judge and determine what Blacks must become based on the their standards (qtd. in McPhail 38-39).

Robeson saw this going on and attempted to change the course. When he first started acting and singing professionally, he took some roles in plays and movies that did not present Black in the most positive light. These roles, some Blacks argued, did nothing but further perpetuate the negative stereotypes of Blacks. William Pickens, the field secretary of the NAACP critiquing Robeson’s performance in Eugene O’Neill’s play *All God’s Chillin’* lamented that “the very nature of the play is to create sentiment against mixed schools of white and Black, especially in the North where common school has even for so long maintained. It would hardly be allowed in the South, but it is in the North that this play will do ‘good’ from the Ku Klux Klan point of view” (Robeson Jr., 78). In the beginning, Robeson admitted that some of the roles in his earlier career did not show Blacks in the best light and vowed not to do anymore shows of any kind that did

not promote the humanity of Blacks. True to his word for the remainder of his career he did not perform in any plays or movies that he felt did not do that. When approached with such proposals his response was: “When he was abroad he looked at the world from an African perspective, but at home his outlook was that of a Black worker from the South. That there was no amount of money could cause him to take a role that did not advance the perceptions of Blacks (Robeson Jr., 332). During his time in Europe, Robeson became a true “new intellectual.” He developed a deep pride in his African heritage and began to understand his role as a world citizen. During the revolution in Spain, Robeson joined the worker’s movement and went around giving concerts to raise money for the cause. Through his music and his speeches, he became somewhat of an icon in Europe and Russia and back in the states his stardom began to rise. It was through his immersion in his Africanness that Robeson found the courage and strength to incorporate the teaching of Ma’at, that no matter what, one must live, making every effort to be committed to: Truth, justice, virtue, reciprocity, balance and righteousness. Robeson came to the realization that “thought and language, which reflect reality in a way different from that of perception, are key to the nature of human consciousness. Words play a central part not only in the development of thought but in the historical growth of consciousness as a whole. A word is the microcosm of human consciousness” (Crawford 118 & Vygotsky 30). Being away from America for almost twelve years prepared Robeson to return from his experiences confident in the transformative effects of words, and ready to speak truth to power (Robeson Jr., 333).

Robeson realized that it was time to come back to the United States and do what he could to help the cause of Black people in America. Just before he departed Europe, he

was interviewed by a magazine writer, and asked why he had decided to come back to the states, he responded by saying, “In my travels in many countries of Europe, I have recognized the essential unity of this international fight for democracy and against fascism. It is my business not only to tell the guy with the whip in hand to go easy on my people, but also to teach my people--all oppressed people--how to prevent that whip hand from being used against them” (Foner127). He headed back to America feeling like he had prepared himself and was now take an active role in helping Black people obtain their rightful place in America.

When Robeson left the United States he was interested in Africa and its art and culture. In his travels he came to understand that Blacks were not the only ones who were oppressed and that Jews and Chinese were treated in the same racist manner that Blacks were. While singing Negro songs, it occurred to him that in the music people were able to find a common ground. That no matter what situation people were in, whether working in the fields, factories, mines, or mills, that being oppressed was the same for everyone no matter the color of their skin. Through songs of struggle people were able to feel the vibrations of their shared plight and find harmony and realize their commonality. It was through the singing of these songs that Robeson realized that the idea of race has been made to be the deciding factor in determining who was human and who was not, and was created as a way for humans to not see their connectedness. Singing Negro spirituals and work songs to white audiences and seeing how they reacted solidified for Robeson that Blacks had something to contribute to the world stage and that there was no reason for Blacks to walk around with their heads down because the way that they have been portrayed by white folks was a lie. Because of the way the Blacks had been portrayed by

whites, the standards for Blacks have been set by whites and if Blacks are going to move to a place where they recognize their full humanity they will have to set their own standards and not let it be known that they are be dictated by others. By embracing their Africanness, Blacks would come to know the many contributions that have been made to humanity that have foundations in Africa, and they would realize that they have every reason to walk with their heads looking straight ahead rather than down at the ground in shame.

Like Paulo Freire, Robeson believed that a new pedagogy needed to be implemented, and like Freire, Robeson believed that in order for the oppressed to become liberated, two things have to happen. First, the oppressed, in this case black people, must unveil the world of oppression and through praxis commit themselves to its transformation. Second, once the reality of this oppression sinks in and the oppressed makes their cause known, no longer does the liberation of the oppressed belongs just to the oppressed but to everyone (54). In other words the oppressed has to realize that they are being oppressed and change how they perceive themselves in relationship to the world. In the case of Blacks that means learning about Africa and through eradicating the myths that prevent the desire to appreciate one's Africanness. It is only through coming to terms with their Africanness that Blacks can become whole human beings. By embracing Africa, Blacks will no longer have a need to make their number one desire to prove their equality with the white man. It is that desire that is killing what is so valuable to the world, the personality that makes them unique (Foner 91).

It is ironic that when Robeson first started out as an actor and singer he got grief for playing parts that did not represent Blacks in the most positive way. After his sojourn

to Europe, he came back and spoke out loudly and boldly against the treatment of Blacks by the establishment. Because of his outspokenness, he caused Blacks to stay away from him and deny that what he had to say had any merit. Although he was met with such opposition from both Blacks and whites, it did not stop Robeson from telling his truth:

All the world knows by now that I have faith in the future of the Negro. I believe that Negro culture merits an honorable place amongst the cultures of the world. I believe that as soon as Negroes appreciate their own culture, and confine their interest in the European to learning his science and mechanics, they will be on the road to becoming one of the dominant races in the world. But the trouble is that Negro has lost faith in himself. Slavery and the white man's machines have been too much for his confidence. He has repudiated the best of himself, tried to find salvation by imitating Europeans. In the nature of his imitation he has made a most serious mistake. Realizing, quite rightly, that a nation is ultimately judged not by its might but by its culture, he has set out to absorb Western arts. What he had not understood is that culture cannot be on from the outside. A certain artificial grace may be achieved by such means, but only at the cost of strangling the



natural creative impulses. That is too big a price to pay, and the race which pays it can never be an influential people (80).

When Robeson first started out in the show business, after his talent began to shine through, offers to make movies and to be in plays started coming his way. Like any person who is just starting out, he took jobs that he should not have taken. He told a story of when he was arriving back to the United States after making a movie. He was walking down the street and a Black man started giving him grief for allowing himself and Black people to be portrayed in a way that promoted the stereotypes that were already prevalent. He realized at that moment that it was the people on the streets that mattered, not the folks who run the movie business because like most businesses, they are concerned with making money and not with the images that get shown, particularly positive images of Black people. He came to understand it was more important to inspire the masses rather than entertaining a few, and that what he did had an impact on the Black community. While in Europe, Robeson saw how unions worked and believed the only way that Blacks would be fully integrated into the work force was by joining unions, and by his close ties to the unionists it brought him closer and closer to communists and others who had left thinking ideas.

In 1943, Robeson starred in the Broadway production of *Othello* and his performance solidified his as an international star. And as his star got brighter so did his protesting. He began to argue that militant, multiethnic coalitions were needed in order to fight for civil and labor rights: "I deeply believe that the whole future of America stands or falls with the complete unity of the American people including the minorities of Black,

Mexican and Chinese (Balaji 131).

Somehow, Robeson was a transformed man when he came back from his living in Europe. He was more confident and believed without a doubt that he had a duty and a responsibility to speak out against the oppression of all peoples of color. He realized that the government was worried about all the communist propaganda floating around and started keeping records on activities of those they thought had communist leanings.

Robeson learned from his father that it in order:

to live in freedom one must be willing to prepared  
to die to achieve it, and while few if any of us are  
called upon to make that supreme sacrifice, no one  
can ignore the fact that in a difficult struggle those  
who are in the forefront may suffer cruel blows. He  
who is not prepared to face the trails of battle will  
never lead to a triumph. The spirit of dedication, as  
I have indicated, is abundantly present in the ranks  
of our people but progress will be slow until it is  
much more manifest in the character of leadership  
(Robeson 102-03).

Robeson complained that many Blacks, when things got tough, ran in the other direction. When he was speaking out and singing songs trying to get the world to understand the plight of Black America, they honored him, but when the heat started coming down on Robeson, most Black leaders distanced themselves from him. As much as Robeson was displeased with the white establishment for their treatment of Blacks, he

was more frustrated with Blacks for their seemingly unwillingness to speak up when he felt that their voice in support of other Blacks who were trying to move things forward was necessary. He felt that the only way that Blacks could live a life that they could feel good about was by having the willingness to speak up when things were happening that were unjust:

To achieve the right of full citizenship which is our just demand, we must ever speak and act like free men. When we criticize the treatment of Negroes in America and tell our fellow citizens at home and the people's abroad what is wrong with our country, each of us can say with Frederick Douglass: In doing this, I shall feel myself discharging the duty of a true patriot; for he is a lover of his country who rebukes and does not excuse its sins (Robeson 73).

It appears that Robeson totally understood his African roots and the concepts of Ma'at. He realized that he had a duty to seek truth and when truth is not being lived he understood that harmony could not be reached if untruths were the order of the day. Robeson was aware that liberation begins with the intellect in the form of critical consciousness, with a "knowing that," which essentially means that discourse, as an inherently ideological and epistemic system, serves to locate people into prescribed (and of prescribed) places in the world (Wright 91). In other words, Robeson realized that language was the tool used to keep Blacks on the margin and it was through his language, what I call having a will to push back, that he tried to get Blacks to see and understand the necessity of becoming educated as a way to understand how language has been used to keep them marginalized, and how the language of resistance can help move those on

the margins closer to the center. In order for people to gain power, it is indeed the class consciousness of the proletariat is its most powerful advantage in its struggle for power” (Freire 21).

Critical consciousness means that there is recognition that society contains social, political, and economic conditions which are at odds with the individual will to freedom (Villianueva 54). The problem with having critical consciousness is that when one becomes critically conscious, one has a duty to do or say something. Robeson understood as Burke says, “rhetorical language is inducement to action (or to attitude, attitude being an incipient act” (42). What one has to understand is that by the nature of language, it requires one to act. It appears that the reason people do not want to use rhetoric as a way of trying to build real community is because in order to do that it requires action, and in Robeson’s case people were afraid of being ostracized, so when the government came after him most Black people ran in the other direction.

Perhaps, if Blacks were familiar with their Kemetic roots they would not have treated Robeson the way they did. If Black people had an understanding of Ma’at they would have genuflected at the feet of Robeson because he truly possessed the magic that is called Nommo, or the understanding of the power of the word. Along with Douglass and Du Bois, Robeson was a human being whose contributions and the way he fought for the liberation of all people especially Black people is something that truly should be studied.

Robeson more than any other person understood Burke’s theory consubstantially, that is, Robeson understood that substance in the old philosophies, and in current ones as well, was an act, and a way of life is in acting together, and in acting together, men have

common sensations, concepts, images ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial (Burke 21). But in order to act, according to Burke it helps to know what the pentad is and know how to use it. In order for one to gain agency, one has to be willing to take action, to do something. Although there were a lot of Blacks that did contribute to the freedom of the people, there were also a lot who took what was being done to them and did not do much about it. But according to Burke, by understanding his idea of agent, agency, act, purpose, and scene this allows one to be transformed. For Robeson, he was the agent, and to obtain agency he used the most powerful tool: His voice. The act for Robeson was to be treated like a human being. The scene was the United States, then the world and how he and others were treated. By using symbols and acting together with others, Robeson was able to develop relationships that made clear that despite differences that most people want the same thing, to be treated with dignity. Robeson, because of his training in rhetoric and oratory and his knowledge of Ma'at, had been afforded the knowledge that it is through the vibratory element of the word that allows for connection with self and the other. That it is through this understanding that creates the kind of energy necessary to take action.

Although, in the end Robeson was alienated by the establishment. He lost all income and the people who were once his friends abandoned him. I cannot help but think despite all that happened to him, he was a successful person. Not in terms of how much money he made, but rather, what he did to make the lives of all of us better. Not only did he leave us with music that sings the praises of a people who have been despised, but he showed us firsthand what the power of words can do. If one has ever heard him sing *O! Man River*, one will really hear the power of words in action. When listening to that song,

one can feel all the emotions that the character is going through. I listened to the song the other night, and watched and studied, looking for Nommo. To my amazement he incorporated all the elements and as a result I, and I'm sure those who were on the movie set with him, felt the same way. He was styling, rhyming, calling and responding, storytelling, improvising, image making, sounding, and of course making music. Sure enough it was through his incorporation of the above elements that I was moved to believe everything he said.

In teaching rhetoric and composition, it amazes me that at our disposal we have one of the greatest performers that this country has produced, yet we do not include him in the material that is used to teach the subject. In trying to teach rhetoric, like any other subject, it helps in the comprehension of the material if students can see how the concepts and theories that the professor is trying to teach look like when practiced well. Robeson on many fronts would be useful in talking about the above as well as the issues that still confront our society. For example, one of the theories that is talked about a lot is Mary Louise Pratt's idea of the contact zone. In theory it sounds like it might work, but then the question becomes how do you incorporate the idea of the classroom being a contact zone and using it as such, and getting students who come from different backgrounds with different ideologies, to feel comfortable to share their ideas? A place we might start is by exploring how Robeson did it. After all he is what Gramsci called the "new intellectual." Robeson knew his own history and through learning about his own history, he was able to see the connections to others and tried to build on those connections through song. Also, in the age of visual rhetoric, Robeson would be a great subject to study from a visual rhetoric standpoint to see how he incorporates the elements

of Nommo into his rhetoric as well as analyzing how he uses the components of traditional rhetoric.

Also, by using Robeson as a way to talk about some other theories, students of color would be delighted to see someone who looks like them talking about issues that affect their lives in a real way. For instance, Marx talks about the alienated worker. Looking at the work of Robeson may help us understand how alienation works and perhaps create an environment where in-depth discussions could take place in class. It would also make room to talk about Burke's theories as well as Gramsci, to name a few.

As educators we have a responsibility to create an environment where all voices get heard, and by looking at Robeson there would be many topics that could be discussed that would help students understand history, politics, race, class and gender, and rhetoric too. As for students of color, they lament that not enough of the material that is used in education today is representative of who they are as people. Again, as a way to help people understand that it has been a collective effort that has allowed the country to move to this place, and as we try and map out our next move in assuring that all voices get heard and that all people understand that if we are going to become the country we can be, it is going to be necessary for us to learn about others that have not been given much space in academia. If we are to teach students to become world citizens it is going to be necessary that they get grounding in works by people such as Robeson who made a critical impact to society in America as well as in Europe. Also, by studying Robeson, we can begin to introduce students to African American rhetoric along with traditional rhetoric. In studying rhetoric, it helps to be able to explain the different components of it, but at the same time, there is a history about rhetoric that gets glossed over and because

of that students are not given the full picture and we are not providing them with as much information as we can. “We must do what we can to help students come to a place where they are not ‘receiving’ the world as passive entities” (Freire 76). As it stands, for the most part students are just that – passive entities. Especially students of color. Students generally sit quietly, listening to someone talk at them, and often times do not get a chance to share their ideas, and the ideas that get shared are more often than not issues that do not relate to the lives of the students of color. As the number of students continue to increase, it will become more important that their collective experiences be brought into the conversation. By bringing their experiences into the conversation, and studying people like Robeson, this would help immensely in getting students to talk. His experiences, ideas, and the methods he used to get his message out would foster many opportunities to bring other theorists into the conversation and by using Robeson as a model, we could discuss how those theories apply or not to what he tried to do. As educators, we have, as Friere says:

an ethical responsibility to not be afraid to condemn  
the exploitation of labor and the manipulation that  
makes a rumor into truth and truth into mere rumor.  
To condemn the fabrication of illusions, in which  
the unprepared become hopelessly trapped and the  
weak and the defenseless are destroyed. To  
condemn making promises when one has no  
intention of keeping one’s word, which causes lying  
to become almost necessary way of life. (23)



In other words, by not bring American rhetoric into the conversation when teaching rhetoric, we are doing all of the above. It is common knowledge amongst those who do rhetoric that the Egyptians played a major role in the development of rhetoric as we know it today. Yet, not many classes go into any real detail about the role the Egyptians played in the creation of rhetoric. There is some discussion about the sophists that do take place but even in the discussions about them, there really is no in-depth look at how the Egyptians influenced the sophists. As a Black student studying rhetoric, it would have made my experience as a student quite a different had my professors had included texts about Robeson, looking at how he used rhetoric to convey his message.

As Freire says, “Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes a myth. It is rather indispensable condition for the quest for human completion” (47). For a student of color the above statement could have a lot of meaning, but for the majority the idea may have little or no significance because of their background, which is understandable. But what is not understandable is why, when trying to help students understand the struggle that is inherent in trying to be a full human being, Robeson or others like him are not studied. He would be a beneficial person to study so that students could learn about a person’s experiences in trying to obtain freedom and what is required in trying to gain it.

Also, students would get a firsthand account of what it takes to put oneself out there for the betterment of the whole. Robeson’s story is the story of America and her relationship to Black people and students need to understand how the system works in

regards to silencing anyone who is willing to openly discuss their frustration with a system that does not honor their humanity. If race is as Howard Winant suggests:

Since the rise of Europe and the dawn of the capital era, there has been a continuous tendency, arguably a necessity, to organize and signify domination without resistance, across half a millennium race has become a trope for unfinished agendas of egalitarianism, democratization, and cultural pluralism. Not only was the concept of race born with modernity, not only was the meaning of race a preoccupation of the Enlightenment, but the racial practices of the modern age--slavery and imperial conquest, as well as abolitionism and anti-colonialism--shaped all social structures we take for granted today. The accumulation of capital, the organization of the labor process, the construction of the modern nation state, the rise in movements for popular sovereignty, and our understanding of cultural and personal identity were all fashioned in the global racial workshop that is modern history (ix).

then it would make sense that time be spent studying the likes of Robeson, as he understood the role racism played in how business is conducted in this country and

around the world. If our objective is to teach student about how rhetoric works and is used, then it would be wise to share with students the work of Robeson as a way to help them understand how racism has affected how we interact with one another and by looking at the rhetoric of Robeson, discussions could happen about how he used his voice as a performer to fight racism. Furthermore, by looking at Robeson, students could begin to see how Ma'at is used in his rhetoric, and as a result, conversations could begin to take place that seriously looks at the role that the Egyptians played in how we do rhetoric today. Students would also get a chance to see what role religion has played in the oppression of Black people.

Finally, by looking at the rhetoric of love displayed by Robeson, students would really understand that to make the world a better place:

That obscurity is not an absolute bar to distinction,  
and that the way is open to welfare and happiness to  
all who will follow the way with resolution and  
wisdom; that neither the old time slavery, nor  
continued prejudice need extinguish self-respect,  
crush manly ambition or paralyze effort; that no  
power outside of himself can prevent man from  
sustaining an honorable character and a useful  
relation to his day and generation. We know that  
neither institutions nor friends can make race stand  
unless it has strength in its own foundation; that  
races like individuals must stand or fall by their

own merit; that to fully succeed they must practice their virtues of self-reliance, self-respect, industry, perseverance and economy (Foner 68).

Some would argue that the above sounds like Enlightenment rhetoric, and I would have to agree, however, I would remind them that it is for this very reason that African American rhetoric based in the Ma'at tradition needs to be studied because as Karenga clearly explains, "To engage in rhetoric as an African is to enter an ancient and ongoing tradition of communicative practice that reaffirms not only the creative power of the word but also rootedness in a world historical community and culture, which provides the foundation and framework for self-understanding and self-assertion in a world. It is a tradition that from its inception has been concerned with building community, reaffirming human dignity, and enhancing the life of the people (5).

It would appear that the Enlightenment and the basis of Ma'at have some similarities and because of that, as we attempt to be the kind of people that are described above it would seem that it would be helpful in our quest to learn how to live in harmony, and that it would be advantageous to students and professors alike, if more time was given to African American rhetoric and its Nile River Valley roots.

# To Live the Dream: The Rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr. Rhetoric

## Chapter Five

What determines a good rhetorician or orator? The answer is a subjective one. However, according to Aristotle, a good rhetorician is the one who persuades the audience. In the Ma'at tradition what makes a good rhetorician is the person who can create harmony between the speaker and audience. Whichever definition one chooses to align oneself with, Martin Luther King Jr. would be at the top of the list of greatest rhetoricians in the last century. His *I have a Dream* speech is probably the most listened to speech. In teaching Western rhetoric, King's *Letter from the Birmingham Jail* is anthologized as much or more than any other essay, letter, or article that has been written in the last fifty years. Yet, his other writings are not studied nearly as much nor is his work looked at from an African American rhetorical perspective. It is common knowledge that King's rhetoric was a rhetoric of love grounded in Christianity. But what is not talked about in regards to King is that although his rhetoric was grounded in Christianity, I will argue that along with his grounding in the traditions of Western rhetoric, he also displayed the qualities that would make it apparent that he was connected to his African roots when it comes to his understanding and using rhetoric.

Again, by African American rhetoric I mean a rhetoric that is the rhetoric of the people of the Nile Valley who practiced Kemeticism and honored the teachings of Ma'at and who understood Nommo, the transforming power of the word. That is, Nommo is

concentrating on the elements of Afro centric rhetoric as opposed to the Western persuasive technique:

The public discourse convinces not through the power to fascinate. Yet this does not preclude the materials of composition or the arrangement and structure of those materials; it simply presses a belief that when images are arranged according to their power and chosen because of their power, the speaker's ability to convince is greater than if he attempted to employ syllogisms. The syllogism is a Western concept; Nommo is an African concept. (Smith 371-72).

In both types of rhetoric there are traces of the other, but for the sake of my argument I will focus on King's use of the concepts of Ma'at and Nommo. I will show that King's success was due in part because of his connectedness to his African roots. When one looks closely at King's rhetorical style, both orally and in written form, and his message, it becomes apparent that his embodiment of the rhetoric of the people of the Nile Valley is what fuels his Christian rhetoric of love and is the inspiration behind his movement for peace.

Unlike Douglass and Du Bois, although it could be argued that they too were preachers, King was the only one who was an ordained minister. In fact, both of King's degrees were in theology. Because of his schooling and his family background, the church and Christianity were a big part of King's life while growing up. His grandfather

and father both were preachers. There is a pretty good likelihood that his grandfather had been a slave, and if that is the case the chances of King being familiar with some of the traditions brought from Africa were also likely. For instance, King spent many an hour sitting around hearing stories about the way life had been during slavery, what life was like at present, and the hope for a better future for Black people. Obviously, what he heard, saw, and felt, had an impact on him because he spent his life as a preacher and social activist.

Although King received his PhD in theology and was steeped in the traditional Western thinking, it is his connectedness to Africanness and Nommo that propelled him into becoming a man who strove for love, peace, and harmony amongst all peoples.

Before he ever stepped foot on the campuses of Morehouse College, Crozer Theological Seminary, and Boston University, he was exposed to the power of words, a strong sense of community, and to social justice; all traits of Ma'at. At an early age, King understood the power of the word. In fact, when he was about twelve or thirteen, after hearing a sermon, he said to his mother, "Someday I'm going to have me some big words like that" (Frady 13).

King grew up in a middle class neighborhood and had developed middle class sensibilities. At first, King had no desire to become a preacher, he thought that perhaps he would become a doctor. Understanding that his great grandfather, grandfather, father, and uncles were all preachers, one would think that naturally King would follow in the footsteps of all the other Kings; furthermore, by becoming a preacher his career path would already be taken care of. Also, his father was the pastor at one of the more prestigious churches in Atlanta, and once King became ordained he could walk right into

a position that would give him notoriety. One has to wonder how and why he was reluctant to follow in the footsteps of the other men in his family. Upon investigation, it appears that King was reluctant to become a preacher for the following reason:

Because of the influence of my mother and father, I guess I always had a deep urge to serve humanity, but I didn't start out with an interest to enter the ministry. My college training, especially the first two years, brought many doubts into my mind. It was then that the shackles of fundamentalism were removed from my body. More and more I could see the gap between what I had learned in Sunday school and what I was learning in college. My studies had made me skeptical, and I could not see how the many facts of science could be squared with religion. I revolted, too, against the emotionalism of much Negro religion, the shouting and stamping. I didn't understand it, and it embarrassed me. I often say that if we, as a people, had as much religion in our hearts and souls as we have in our legs and feet, we could change the world (58).

One gets the impression that King was not fond of the demonstrative way Black folk express themselves, but although he did not like the way Blacks expressed



themselves emotionally, it would later prove to be the thing that would force him to come to terms with his own Blackness.

While in Boston, King met a woman named Coretta who would later become his wife. They only courted a short while before they were married. They stayed in Boston for a while then moved back to Atlanta where King was to become the associate pastor at his father's church. He remained there for a time until the opportunity arose to become the head pastor in a church in Montgomery, Alabama. It was while serving as pastor at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church that King got thrust into the national spotlight. Shortly after he arrived in Montgomery, a woman by the name of Rosa Parks decided not to give up her seat on a bus to a white person and was arrested. As a result, the many years of being treated in ways that diminished their humanity, Blacks finally had reached a point where they had to do something about the way that they had been treated. In the spirit of Marx, people boycotted the bus system and it was only to last for a couple of days, but things worked so well that the bus strike lasted for more than a year. King moved to Montgomery in 1954, and as C. Eric Lincoln says in his collection of essays on King, "The negro population in 1954 was slumbering fitfully in an uneasy placidity" (8). In other words people had been beaten down so much that they seemed to wilt under the heat of Jim Crow. People for so long had believed in Christianity and the attitude that things would be better in heaven; "Suffer little children come unto me" (KJB, Matt, 5:3). Rather than things getting better, however, they seemed to be getting progressively worse. But in the end when history judges King's contribution, it may be that his greatest contribution was helping Black people in Montgomery free themselves from self-doubt and self-abasement, which gave them the fortitude to push back (Lincoln xiii).

Although King believed the system had major flaws and needed to be overhauled, he was also cognizant of the need for Blacks to see themselves differently. Perhaps that was the biggest change that King brought about. He stated, “There are many things wrong in the white world. But there are many things wrong in the Black world, too. We can’t keep on blaming the white man. There are many things we must do for ourselves” (Baldwin 97). At first read this statement appears to echo the Enlightenment mentality of pulling yourself up by the bootstraps, but instead I suggest that King understood that through rhetoric and the treatment of Blacks, many believed the torment they received on a daily basis was their lot in life, and as natural consequence, many spirits had been broken and people lost self respect. As a way to rally the troops, King first had to get them to believe and the best way to do that is through words. It is through words that action follows. King understood, “those groups who have suffered the most from conditions of marginalization and disempowerment have the most to teach about the role of language as ideology, as energy, as force, as weapon in the ongoing and unrelenting struggle for liberation” (Wright 95). That is to say, if words are used a way of keeping people down, then it makes sense that words also have the power to transform. In order to make the sweeping changes King thought the country needed to make in regards to Black people, he realized that he had to get Blacks to believe that they deserved these rights, and be willing to give up their lives in order to see the changes come to fruition. Like Villanueva says in relationship to Gramsci, without consent hegemony fails. And consent is granted ideologically. Blacks, because of the way they have been treated, accept commonly held negative views about them as truths, thus consenting. That is, civil society being family, church, education, police, military, and media endorsed attitudes,

norms, and beliefs that promote the hegemony (125).

Not only was King talking to other Blacks, but he was also talking to himself. In order for him to take on the role he did, he had to be transformed himself. I argue that it was not until King began to appreciate his own Blackness, his own African roots, that the movement really starting coming together:

Under the impact of the Old Negro spirituals, of hand clapping, shouting, testifying and amending, personality shells dissolved and reintegrated themselves around a larger, more inclusive self. The effect of these meetings on Martin Luther King was no less immediate and obvious. King had tended to look down on the “emotionalism” of the Negro Church, but now he began to see that the Negro religious tradition contained enormous reservoirs of psychic and social strength which had never been adequately tapped. And more: King to accept himself and the Negro people as history made them, never on that account relaxing the inner demand that he and they should be better. In some such manner, in a church of fire, the re-education, the metamorphosis, of Martin Luther King, Jr. began. (Bennet Jr. 18)

It would appear that although King was Christian and preached the gospel, it was not until he connected to his African roots that his full spiritual self serviced. In other words, it was only when King allowed himself to go to the depths of his soul and experience the pain, suffering, hope, and shared in the oneness of everyone else that his full humanity came into being. King was from a middle class family of Atlanta, Georgia; the heart of the Black Bourssie and never had to suffer the hardships other Blacks had to and developed disdain for poor Blacks who clung to their African spiritual roots of hope. It is through the singing and lamenting that King realized his thinking was wrong, that truth would set men free, that Aristotelian logic and the law of the excluded middle would be of some service in the struggle for human justice. Now he saw, with a sinking feeling, that he was wrong, that the issue was not logic but power, that “no one gives up his privileges without strong resistance,” the underlying purpose of segregation was to oppress and exploit the segregated, not simply to keep people apart. (Bennett Jr. 19). Once King realized the above, then he could really begin the process of getting himself and the people to understand the necessity of pushing back.

Once King made this realization it allowed him to really begin to implement his rhetoric of love. While in college he heard a lecture on the ideas of Gandhi and decided to incorporate Gandhi’s ideas into his own philosophy:

Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above the mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. Love for Gandhi was a potent instrument for social and

collective transformation. It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking. The intellectual and moral satisfaction that I failed to gain from the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill, the revolutionary methods of Marx and Lenin, the social contracts theory of Hobbs, the 'back to nature' optimism of Rousseau, the superman philosophy of Nietzsche, I found in the non violent resistance philosophy of Gandhi (Carson 24).

But in order for him to put Gandhi's philosophy into practice, King had to come to terms with his own Blackness, which allowed him to love himself and as a result to allow himself to feel the emotions that the singers were able to conjure up through their singing, shouting, and testifying. What he was attempting to do was get people to buy into his nonviolent philosophy, but in order to do that he had to show some love, and as long as he had issue with their emotionality, his love for them would be suspect and as long as it was suspect, the chances of them being willing to go along with his ideas would not have been possible.

Furthermore, if King could not get to the place where he could accept their emotionality, then he would have lost all credibility, and as Aristotle made clear, without credibility there is little chance of moving the audience. And according to Ma'at, Nommo gains power and effectiveness in direct proportion with the moral character, strength of

commitment and vision of the individual, as well as the skill he or she exhibits. The speaker must direct his or her creative powers toward a higher level of consciousness by activating spiritual and psychic powers. African's traditionally view humanity as a spiritual force and the speaker is seen as having the ability to tap cosmic forces for the higher truth by merging his or her vibratory forces with the rhythmic vibrations of the universal cosmic energy. It was the vibratory force of the singing that caused King to be moved. It would appear that he had heard singing like he heard that night plenty of times before in church, but it was this time that moved him to feel differently about their emotionality. Their expression of their emotion was so authentic that it fortified the trust that was needed in order to move forward with his nonviolent agenda.

King's non-violent stance and his rhetoric of love was adopted from Gandhi. Gandhi says in regards to non-violence, "Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute and he knows no law but physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law-to the strength of the spirit" (Prabhu & Rao 3). That is to say, the man who is connected to nature and the cosmos understands that violence robs the spirit of the potential for harmony, and without harmony peace can never happen. Gandhi goes on further in regards to non-violence:

Non-violence affords the fullest protection to one's self respect an sense of honor, but not always to the possession of land or movable property, though its habitual practice does prove a better bulwark than the possession of armed men to defend them. Non-

violence, in the very nature of things, is of no assistance in the defense of ill-gotten gains and immoral acts. Individuals or nations who would practice non-violence must be prepared to sacrifice (nations to last man) there all except honor (Prabhu & Rao 236).

This is what King thought in regards to non-violence, and in this respect he came to the notion that non-violence is the best way to make the changes. After reading Marx, he desperately felt that this needed to happen in America. King says, “Marx had revealed the danger of the profit motive as the sole basis of an economic system: capitalism is always in danger of inspiring men to be more concerned about making a life. We are prone to judge success by the index of our salaries or the size of our automobiles, rather than by the quality of our service and relationship to humanity. Thus capitalism can lead to a practical materialism that is pernicious as the materialism taught by communism” (Carson 21). Understanding that capital forces men to be more concerned about making a life than they are about their fellow man, and when you are locked out of the workforce, it creates a sense of being a nobody, and if a person feels like a nobody, then the chances of that person learning to love him or herself or anyone else becomes virtually impossible. As Marx says in regards to this subject:

As labor becomes more unsatisfying, more repulsive, competition increases and wages decrease. The worker tries to keep up with the amount of his wages by working more, whether by

working longer hours or by producing more in one hour. Driven by want, therefore, he still further increases the evil effects of the division of labor. The result is that the more he works the less wages he receives, and for the simple reason that he compares to that extent with his fellow workers, hence makes them into so many competitors who offer themselves on just the same basic terms as he does himself, and that, therefore, in the last resort he competes with himself as a member of the working class. (qtd. in Mclellan 291)

Because man's worth is determined by white people, and because many whites are socialized to believe that Blacks are inferior, it makes it difficult for many Black people to reach their destiny.

Therefore, Marx feels like he is less of a person. Marx was right when he said that man starts competing against himself and if he has nothing to compete against, then self loathing becomes the end result. Although King agreed with Marx, he felt that communism was not the answer. King states:

Reading Marxism also convinced me that the truth is found neither in Marxism nor in capitalism. There is truth both, but neither seems to deal with the totality of the situation, merging the individual with the collective. Historically capitalism failed to see the truth in collective enterprise and Marxism fails to see



the truth the life is individual and personal. The Kingdom of God for is neither the thesis for individual enterprise nor antithesis of collective enterprise, but a synthesis which reconciles the truth of both (Carson 22).

King realized in order for things to get better, not only did society have to change its policies toward Black people, but individuals had to take an active role in the process of changing their conditions and neither capitalism nor communism seemed bring these two ideals together. With Gandhi and his philosophy of love and non-violence, King found a kindred soul. Not only did he find in Gandhi's non-violence stance a philosophy that merited some serious consideration, but he also found Gandhi's philosophy of love appealing and combined Gandhi's philosophies with Christianity. Combined, they became the foundation of his movement to get America to fulfill its promise of full citizenship to every person. For Gandhi:

The force of love is the same as the force of the soul and truth. But we have to learn to use that force among all that lives, and in the use of it consists of our knowledge of God. Where there is love there is life; hatred leads to destruction. And the only way to show love to self and one's enemies is through non-violence. The first step is to cultivate in our lives a sense of truthfulness, humility, tolerance, loving kindness (Rabhu & Rao 3-4).

Upon close examination of Gandhi's theories of love and non-violence, and the ideas of Kemeticism, it is clear that these philosophies, or ways of life, share common characteristics. For instance, the Kemetic way of thinking stresses the inherent worthiness and possibilities in each individual being and emphasizes the ancient Egyptian concept of rhetoric as essentially an ethical practice defined not only by truth and truthfulness, but also by its respect for the masses of people who are the hearers and participants in the rhetorical and political project of creating and sustaining a just and good society, that is, a Ma'atian society. For those who do good for others are actually doing well for themselves (Karenga 229). The lifelong quest for every individual should be to find balance and harmony within oneself and within society, which is the essence of the spiritual being. Both King and Gandhi lived their lives trying to practice these ideas.

Investigating these ideas, it would appear that both Gandhi's and King's philosophies have their roots in Africa. India has a close relationship with Egypt, and it is likely that the philosophy of the Nile Valley people made it into the culture of the peoples of India. Recently, evidence has been found that suggests there was intimate contact between the Egyptians and the Indians. For instance the Atarracotta mummy from Lothel resembles an Egyptian mummy (Karenga 319). Also, it is said that the Egyptian mummy is wrapped in Indian muslin. Another example that would further suggest a relationship between Africa and India is the lotus flower in both cultures is more evidence that affirms the idea that these cultures shared ideas. The lotus flower has become a leitmotiv a symbol most apt since it links the waters with the sun, the earth to sky-signifying fertility and regeneration in both Egypt and India. It is the seed of the plant which spells out the circle of birth-decay-death-rebirth that forms the essential pattern of belief in these

riverine and agricultural societies.

Moreover, it seems only natural that King would find Gandhi's philosophies striking a chord with him. Evidence would support that they both were in tune with their Kemetic roots. One could argue that because King was inspired by Gandhi and the fact that their philosophies seemed to parallel some of the ideas of Ma'at and Kemeticism that this is merely coincidental, but if we look at King's rhetorical style, the relationship his rhetoric has to the rhetoric of the people of the Nile cannot be refuted.

In studying the rhetoric of King it is interesting how theorists focus on his roots in the Black Church and his mentors at Morehouse, Cozner, and Boston University, as well as his reading of Marx, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Niebuhr. However, theorists do not go back far enough to really discover the roots of King's rhetoric. Although, I would agree that all of the above stated played a part in developing his theory and method that afforded him the opportunity to have the impact that he did. I will go out on a limb and say that it was because of his African roots and his being able to live out Nommo, whether he realized it or not. In analyzing his rhetoric, there is ample evidence that in his rhetoric that elements of Nommo were present and as a result it allowed him to have the impact that he did.

First, it must be understood that King came from a long line of preachers. In fact, preaching was so deep in the King family that the tradition to preach the word went back three generations prior to Martin Luther King Jr. King's father was born on a sharecropping farm, and based on that, it is safe to assume that King's grandfather was born into slavery. If we agree that there is a great likelihood that his grandfather was a slave, then it is safe to assume that his grandfather was directly influenced by the cultural

norms that were brought from Africa. And what we know from history, a concerted effort was made to get the slaves to forget their African roots. And socially, the hegemony was successful in getting slaves to relinquish many of the cultural ways. Religion was one of the areas where they were successful in getting Blacks to adopt western ways of thinking. However, one way that Blacks have been able to hold on to their African roots is through the way they communicate. It is through this unique ability that many Blacks possess that is the reason many of the major social movements have been spearheaded by Blacks. In the case of King, I suggest that having been steeped into the oral tradition of the Black church, which gets its orality from Nommo, that whether King was able to label what he was doing as Nommo or not, nonetheless, his rhetoric was steeped in the traditions of the Nile people. As has been mentioned earlier, Nommo, or what is referred to as African American rhetoric, is the understanding of the magical, transformative, and life giving power of the word (Gilyard 12). And it is self-consciously committing to the reaffirmation of the status of the African people as bearers of dignity and divinity, of the right to a free, full, and meaningful life, and of their right and responsibility to speak their own cultural truth to the world and make their own unique contribution to the forward flow of human history (Karenga 6).

For the sake of argument, we will agree that the above definitions are an accurate definition of Nommo, and that King's rhetoric is full of the elements that make up Nommo. To illustrate the presence of Nommo in King's rhetoric, let's look at his *Letter from the Birmingham Jail* and how he uses elements of Nommo to convey his message. Again the principles that make up Nommo are as follows: Rhythm, sounding, styling, improvisation, storytelling, lyrical code, image making, and call and response. First

rhythm, right from the salutation King employs rhythm as a way to gently get his audience to pay attention to what he's about to say. King says, "My Dear Fellow Clergymen"; and as Gilyard states: Rhythm is similar to polyrhythm in that it suggests the energy of the rhetorician must be one with the audience. Not only does King utilize rhythm as a help create a sense of oneness, but he uses the words, 'my fellow clergymen,' which helps create the oneness he wants. Sounding is telling the truth and sparing no details, as King does in the first paragraph. He starts by saying "While confined in the Birmingham city jail." By stating his location in the letter, it gives immediacy to the situation and it lets the clergy know how important he thinks they are, and it establishes the scene. Styling: Every orator or rhetorician has a style that is unique to them. In regards to King's style in this letter, it is one that is concerned with establishing a common ground. Rather than come out and tell the clergy that their reaction is one that reeks of racism, he instead, appeals to their Christian sensibilities, and it is through establishing common ground that affords King the opportunity to state his case and have them be active listeners. Improvisation: According to Nommo, improvisation is another necessary tool in helping to create Nommo. However, this is a letter and not much improvisation would appear to have taken place. Improvisation is usually associated with the spoken word. However, it is fair to say that in his speeches King more than likely used improvisation. In an article by Keith Miller called *Martin Luther King Jr. Borrows a Revolution: Argument, Audience, and the Implications of a Secondhand Universe*, it is argued that King was a rhetorician rather than a philosopher. For my purpose, I am interested in how Miller points out how King was very good at using familiar lines from other speeches in his own speeches as a way to appeal to his audience. Miller states, "One

of King's foremost rhetorical strategies was to locate his appeal within the context of cherished religious, cultural and patriotic traditions. To this end, he frequently quoted the Old Testament and John Donne, Paul and Socrates, Aquinas and Emerson, Shakespeare and Jefferson, hymn-writers and Paul Tillich," (18). Miller's observation is a good one, but I would add that King uses lines from other writers as a strategy to let his audience know that the things he is asking for are things that they could relate to because these other writers whose work they are familiar with strove to obtain the same thing he is after: Freedom. Also, it would appear that in many cases when King referred to another writer's work he was improvising. By bringing in lines from another writer, it would add importance and truth to the point that he was making. Also, in relationship to Nommo, one of the functions of the speaker is, the message and messenger's motivation, in terms of their intent, must reflect the values and best interest of the community as well (Alkebulan 35). As the speaker gets going in his or her speech and as the energy of the audience and speakers start to merge, sometimes the speaker, much like a jazz musician, will improvise as a way to move the energy to a higher level to further promote harmony between speaker and audience. Storytelling, another function of Nommo, plays an important part in the process of trying to get one's point across. In fact, King's letter is a story. It starts with King talking about where he is, and as mentioned earlier by stating where he is, he is setting the scene. Next he talks about his purpose for writing the letter, "Seldom do I pause to answer criticism" (p. 183). This statement establishes the reason for writing the letter. In the next paragraph he establishes himself as the actor or agent by saying, "I should indicate why I'm here in Birmingham" (183). The entire letter is written in a way that tells a story and as he tells the story he is establishing, as Burke

suggests, himself as an agent; agency, act, scene, and purpose (Burke XX). King, in telling his story through this letter, incorporates the elements that Burke mentions, and in so doing a relationship between him and his audience is solidified because he takes them on a journey. Next, King uses lyric code as a way to preserve the word through a system of highly codified system of lexicality (Gilyard 17). In his letter King uses language that is the language of the profession that these men are a part of and by doing this he is establishing common ground between him, them, and their profession. Image making: King uses images of heroes, legends, and myths as a way to help the audience understand that what he is doing is no different than what others have done. For instance he states, “And just as the Apostle Paul left his village” (184). By comparing himself to Paul, King establishes himself as a religious leader and gives credibility to his actions. Finally, call and response. Although the letter is a written document, one can still see how call and response is utilized. King asks questions and by doing so, while reading the letter the other clergy would find themselves responding to the questions as they read. King asks, “You well may ask: ‘Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches and so forth? Isn’t negotiation better?’” (185). By using the Socratic Method, he engages the clergy in conversation even though it is through a letter that he is addressing them. Also, call and response is the final element which is a culmination of all the elements and when all the elements are working together, they illicit some kind of response from the audience, whether it be clapping, a nodding of the head, or shouting amen (Gilyard 17).

King had all the elements of Nommo working for him and yet, most scholars see him purely in terms of a Black Christian activist. It is as if scholars are not going deep enough to uncover the roots of Kings activism. I would agree that King had a solid

understanding of principles of Christianity, but I contend that there was something underneath his Christianity that propelled him to take the stand he did. There were and are plenty of preachers of the gospel, but there are not many who took up the mantle the way that King did. In all forms of Christianity, one of the tenets is to practice justice, and understanding that the call is to try and promote a more just life, and with all the preachers in the U.S and world, one would think that there would be more justice in the world. In fact, as we see in King's letter, he chastises the other clergy for their lack of concern about the welfare of the Blacks in Montgomery. The entire letter is a condemnation of the church and its role in the unjust treatment of Blacks. Frederick Douglass and Du Bois challenged the church to practice the principle of justice as well.

Again, there are millions of Christians in the world, yet, the injustice does not seem to have declined on any real level. Racism is still alive and well, and lack of education is still a big issue in the Black community, as well as unemployment. These are issues that King tried to get the country to address. If King's rhetoric was purely grounded in Christianity and like it has been mentioned there are plenty of preachers out there, based on the number alone, it would seem that there would be more peace in the world. Consider the fact that the issues that have been facing Black people since slavery are still issues that Blacks have to contend with everyday. It is interesting that most scholars seem to think of King as a Christian that is steeped in the Black church. As Robert Michael Franklin states in his article, "The social thought of Martin Luther King Jr., creatively joins the particularity of the African-American freedom struggle, with its roots deep in the Black religious experience. [King] came to be a man for all seasons and people, creatively combining the particularity of the African-American freedom struggle



(sacred music, theology of hope, inspirational preaching (57-58). It appears that the church pretends to care for the souls of people but is not interested in the slums that damn them, the city government that corrupts them, the economic order that cripples them...would hear again the Master's withering words: 'Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites' (Miller 74). This seems to be the general consensus when it comes to the church and the lack of action it has taken against the injustices that have marred Black people's existence in America.

King was bold enough to take on the church and society and it is clear that there was a force working in his life that goes deeper than his Christian roots. Based on my understanding of Christianity and Ma'at, I believe that it was his connection to his African roots that motivated him to take the stance he did.

Much credit has been given to Christianity and the Black Church that produced Martin Luther King Jr., and although I would agree that the church played a role in helping to create the man he became, I would suggest that connecting to his African roots and Gandhi had as big an impact on him as Christianity. King states:

Nowhere is the tragic tendency to conform more evident than in the church, an institution which has often served to crystallize, conserve, and even bless the patterns of majority opinion. The erstwhile sanction by the church of slavery, racial segregation, war, and economic exploitation is testimony to the fact that the church has hearkened

more to the authority of the world than to the authority of God (11).

The fact that King was openly willing to criticize the church speaks to the fact that he understood something that transcended Christianity as we know it. When one looks at the totality of the man and the contributions he made, it becomes clear that something else was working for and within King. I suggest that it was the connection that King developed to his African roots is what forged the foundation that gave rise to the force he became. By African roots, I mean, King embodied *Nommo*, the power of the word. King developed the ability to use words to transform himself, other people, and society.

Whether it is reading his *Letter from the Birmingham Jail* or listening to his *I Have a Dream* speech, one would be hard pressed to disagree that King had the verbal dexterity of the sophists, and as we have learned the sophists learned from the Egyptians. With the power of the word King moved a group of people from a place of walking with slumped shoulders to a place where they walked tall even though dogs and fire hoses were trying to break them. “Only geography separates Africans in the Americas from Africans at home. At no point in Africans’ history in the Americas did Africans stop being Africans (whether we know it or not)” (Alkebulan 34).

Although King as a young man had disdain for the way that Black people expressed themselves emotionally from his experience in the church, he became aware that it was how the preacher used the word that was responsible for people emotionally charged and becoming one with the preacher:

It is crucial in understanding the aesthetics for African Americans the role that spirit, rhythm, and

creativity play. Indeed, these are all crucial for our understanding of African American rhetoric. We must grasp the concept of epic memory to understand the nature of rhetoric African Americans in the United States. The poetry and the power of African American rhetoric speak to the spirit, rhythm, and creativity of African people. Since I consider African rhetoric on general and the rhetoricians of Africans in the United States in particular an art form. Language is an important instrument in conveying complex ideas and transmitting the values of society. Language is the expression of African culture and values.

Furthermore, Africans, being the product of an oral tradition, attach music, poetry; and other verbal art forms to language because they are all means of creating, recreating, and maintaining African culture (Alkebulan 30).

Once King understood this, he could incorporate what he learned about Aristotle, Plato, Marx, Nuibher, and the different ways to do traditional rhetoric and argument, and fuse those ideas with the idea of Nommo. When we consider the number of people who witnessed King give his *I Have A Dream*, there were some 300,000 people on-hand to witness that historic event. Now, if we agree that rhetoric is the art of

persuasion, then we would have to agree that the fact that King was successful at persuading 300,000 people to gather in protest is a testament to his remarkable rhetorical skills. Although he was well versed in the theories of the founders of the West's idea of rhetoric, he definitely had something else working for him. I contend that the other thing he had working for him was his recognition that in order to move people harmony must be created. "In order to do that the speaker must have the power to access cosmic forces for the higher truth by merging her/his vibratory forces with the rhythmic vibrations of the universal cosmic energy" (Knowles-Borishade 494). King understood that Blacks needed to be liberated, that they needed to be set free from the paralyzing self-hypnosis induced by accepting at face value the white man's stereotyped projection of the meaning of being Black. Black people had forgotten how to believe strongly in themselves, or in each other, or in their leaders (Lincoln, xiii). The minister was particularly vulnerable to pressure from local white business and civic leaders, however, because they also recognized his central role in the daily life of his community. Through covert payments or through intimidation, the demands of white authorities were often incorporated into the political and even religious practices of many Black ministers (Marable 137).

In order to maintain a sense of self and become an active member of society, it will be necessary for Black people to embrace their Kemetic roots with as much fervor as they have embraced Christianity. In order to maintain their power, white people had to convince Blacks that their lot in life was to serve their emotional and financial needs. And because white folks possessed the power to perpetuate this myth, it has, for many, become fact. In order to counter this, Blacks must, rather than run away from their African roots, embrace them. By embracing their Africanness, Blacks will develop a

sense of self and at the same time understand that part of their cultural responsibility is to use words to live and create a life that is morally good, a life that benefits all human beings; doing what is decent for man, that is, what brings dignity, respect, contentment, prosperity, and joy to men and their communities (Knowles-Borishae 494). And by embracing the concepts of Ma'at Blacks will understand that:

If you are a man who leads, a man who controls the affairs of many, then seek the most perfect way of performing your responsibility so that your conduct will be blameless. Great is Ma'at (truth, justice and righteousness). It is everlasting. Ma'at has been unchanged since the time of Asar. To create obstacles to the following of the laws of nature is to open a way to a condition of violence. The transgressor of laws is punished, although the greedy person overlooks this. Baseness may obtain riches, yet crime never lands its wares on the shore. In the end only Ma'at lasts. Ma'at is my father's ground (Hillard, Williams, & Damali, 18-19).

If Blacks knew more about their African roots, several things would happen. First, they would understand that they are special and that under no circumstances do they have to tolerate the attitude that says that they have to wait for their human rights, "to assert their human dignity by refusing further cooperation with the devil" (Bennett Jr. 37). They would know that it is their civil and moral duty to stand up. They would understand that

Ma'at is all about harmony in the universe, and that means that by not standing up, they are not doing their part in trying to create harmony. By having a solid grounding of their African roots, Blacks would come to know that "Nommo, the life force, is...a unity of spiritual fluidity, giving life to everything, penetrating everything, causing everything...And since man has power over the word, it is he who directs the life force. Through the word he receives it, shares it with other beings, and so fulfills the meaning of life. By understanding that man has power over the word, one understands that one can be transformed by the word" (Crawford 119). In other words, even though white folks use words along with violence to keep Black people oppressed, by understanding Nommo, Blacks will understand the power of words and use them to counter the negative language that is used in relationship to Black people.

In regards to teaching King more in academia, it would do a lot in helping students understand that rhetoric happened in Egypt as well and not just in Rome and Greece. Also, by really spending time reading and discussing King, students would see how the theories of Marx, Gramsci, Niebuhr, Gandhi, and Rauschenbusch worked in relationship to what King wanted to do and why he thought one theory was better than another one. King took the theories of the people he admired and really tried to implement them. It is one thing to talk about a theory, but it is another to see a theory being put into practice. King took Niebuhr philosophy of the individual and mixed it with Marx's idea of the social, put them together and came up with Gandhi's non-violence and love.

If more time was given to the work of King, not only would students have an opportunity to see how King analyzed the theories of the above theorists and tried to put

their theories into practice, but they would also see the role religion played in King's life, the movement, and American life. But most importantly, race, class and gender issues that would be brought out by reading his work, and create opportunity to discuss the issues. Perhaps most importantly, students, both Black and white, would see how words and symbols are used to transform people.

In short, the benefits gained by giving some serious time and attention to King and his work and philosophies would be advantageous to the teaching and learning of rhetoric. By studying King, students would learn that although claims, warrants, proof, and the other elements are important, voice, tone, facial expressions, word choice, and rhythm all have a part to play in rhetoric. Most importantly, students would begin to understand that rhetoric is not only about persuasion, but in learning about King, they would become familiar with Nommo and begin to understand that another function of rhetoric is to help create harmony amongst all peoples and to move the world forward.

# To be Transformed: The Lessons of Malcolm X

## Chapter 6

Malcolm Little, aka Malcolm X, was one of the most feared men in America in the last fifty years. Feared by both Black and white America, Malcolm's rhetoric set the hairs on the back of people's neck to stand straight up. Bayard Rustin, who worked closely with Martin Luther King Jr. in the days following Malcolm's death, made the comment, "Now that he is dead we should resist the temptation to idealise Malcolm X, to elevate charisma to greatness. Malcolm is not the hero of the movement, he is a tragic victim of the ghetto" (Ovenden 8). The day after Malcolm's death the New York Times ran an editorial stating that:

Malcolm X had all the ingredients for leadership, but his ruthless and fanatical belief in violence not only set him apart from the responsible leaders of the civil rights movement and the overwhelming majority of Negroes, it also marked him out for notoriety and a violent end...

Malcolm X's life was strangely and pitifully twisted. But this was because he did not seek to fit into the society or into the life of his own people...

The life he saw through those horn-rimmed glasses of his was distorted and dark. But he made it darker still with his exultation of fanaticism. Yesterday someone came out of the darkness that spawned and killed him (qtd. in Overton 7).

Although there were many who felt that Malcolm was a menace to society, there were some Blacks who felt that with his death Blacks lost their most able, articulate, and compelling spokesman (Overton 8). Malcolm X was the most controversial African-American orator in history, he was perhaps reviled and revered in equal measure during his public life. Exalted to the status of icon decades after his death, Malcolm



stands as one of the most virtuosic, significant, and influential speakers in the African-American rhetorical tradition (White 1).

In order to understand the man that Malcolm became it is necessary to get an understanding of where he came from and some of the things he experienced as a kid, and how those experiences impacted the decisions he would make later in life. Malcolm was born in Nebraska, one of eight kids. Malcolm's father was an outspoken Baptist preacher and follower of Marcus Garvey and his back to Africa movement. Because of his father's militancy, their home was fire bombed. At the time of the incident Malcolm was four years old, and one can only imagine the impact the fire had on his life. The family picked up and moved to Lansing, Michigan, where their house was fire bombed again and within two years his father would be found dead. Although no one was ever convicted of the murder, the family believed the white supremacist group called the Black Legion was responsible. After the death of his father, his mother suffered a nervous breakdown and would remain hospitalized until her death. Malcolm moved around from foster home to foster home until eventually he ended up living in Boston with his sister.

Malcolm enjoyed school and loved to learn, until a teacher told him that being a lawyer was not something he should consider being, as it was not in his destiny. Soon after Malcolm quit school he took odd jobs and eventually got involved in drugs, number running, and prostitution. For several years, Malcolm spent his time living a life that would eventually land him in jail. It was his time in jail that Malcolm transformed himself and became one of the greatest rhetoricians and orators that this country has ever produced. It was spending time in such a dark and dank place that Malcolm took the time to go inward and connect to his self and his history and once he made that connection, as they say, the rest was history.

I contend that it was because of the time spent in jail that Malcolm was afforded the time and energy to connect to his African self, and as a result was able to transform himself and upon his release from prison made it his mission to try and help others transform themselves. Malcolm's story is a familiar one in the Black community. Growing up, one is exposed to situations and attitudes that say, because you are Black

there is little or no chance of you living a life that one can be proud of. Yes, there is the Puritan work ethic that says that if you work hard you can obtain a life that one can feel good about, and in theory it all sounds good, but when one is constantly met with unfriendly, rejecting eyes, one retreats to a place inside of oneself where one makes a promise to oneself, 'I will not put myself in such a place again, the feeling of rejection is too painful. Because of the pain one experiences every time he or she is met with rejection, one begins to think the way that Black people are portrayed is true. As a result, behaviors that are detrimental to the self become a way of life. Also, in America, it is all about the money. The attitude is that making money makes you human, so people forget about their humanity and the humanity of others and do whatever they feel they need to so that they can obtain money and feel human.

It is no wonder that Malcolm's first transformation occurred soon after arriving in Boston due to the experiences he had as a kid; his father being killed by racists and his mother becoming unstable and ending up in an institution until she died because she was unable to care for their eight children alone, as well as having a teacher squelch his dream of becoming a lawyer. All of these events took place because of the color of his skin. Malcolm became Detroit Red and it was in Boston that he met his partner in crime, Malcolm "Shorty" Jarvis. The two became best friends. At some point they began hanging out with a couple of white women and started robbing houses in the affluent parts of Boston. Eventually, they got caught and were sentenced eight to ten years in prison. It was in prison that Malcolm went through his second transformation.

While in prison Malcolm began getting in touch with his humanity and realized that without an understanding of who he was, his humanity would always be determined by someone else. He realized that the first step in gaining understanding about the self is to become educated. Although, on the street Malcolm, or Detroit Red as he was called, practiced what Freire called self-deprecation. According to Freire:

Self-deprecation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they

are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything--that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive--that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness (63).

Malcolm knew that if he was going to be transformed himself, the first thing he needed to do was become educated. In other words, Malcolm needed to learn about himself and where he came from in order not to be duped like he had been up until the time he was sentenced to prison. Like Washington, but unlike Du Bois, Robeson, and King, Malcolm lost his parents at an early age and was not afforded the good fortune of having family and community to give him a sense of his history. Also, Malcolm was presented with conflicting messages from his parents. On the one hand, his father showed favoritism toward Malcolm because he was light-skinned. Conversely, his mother, who was light-skinned herself but did not like her skin color because she knew that her mother had been raped by a white man, treated Malcolm with disdain because Malcolm was light-skinned as well. As Malcolm says in his autobiography, “Just as my father favored me for being lighter than the other children, my mother gave me more hell for the same reason” (Haley 40). Malcolm realized while incarcerated that the real prison was in his mind (Jarvis & Nichols 98). During his time in prison, Malcolm spent his time learning about who he was with the help of an inmate named Bambi. According to Malcolm, Bambi was the first person he had ever met who commanded respect with words (Haley 154). Through his relationship with Bambi, Malcolm started making use of the prison library. He was so determined to free his mind that he became obsessive about learning. In fact, Malcolm is said to have spent his time, when he was not reading, copying words and definitions from the dictionary.

It was during this time that Malcolm was introduced to Islam and the teachings of Elijah Muhammad who preached that Black people were the original people. Elijah said things that Malcolm needed to hear at that time in his life and because of Elijah Malcolm became inspired and began reading everything he could to prepare himself for what was in store. “Book after book showed me how the white man has brought upon the world’s black, brown, red, and yellow people every variety of the sufferings of exploitation”

(Haley 176). He understood that in order to become the person he wanted to become he had to obtain an education. The more he learned, the more confident he became and the more his sense of self grew. Malcolm was always fascinated with rhetoric and argument, which was why he had a desire to become a lawyer, and as his understanding of the power of the word, *Nommo*, grew, his desire to learn became more intense. Malcolm said that neither the guards nor the warden could have torn him out of those books. Not even Elijah Muhammad could have been more eloquent than those books were in providing indisputable evidence that the collective white man had acted like the devil in virtually every contact he had with people of color the world over (Haley 177).

In prison the inmates started a debating club of sorts and Malcolm participated in the debates. Before long it became clear that he had talent as a debater and rhetorician. The fact that his father was a preacher and exhorter, and the fact that he was born into a culture that values mastery and artistic use of language and rhetorical power, Malcolm enjoyed debating as an adolescent, and prepared self-consciously for rhetorical combat while still a prisoner (White 414). While in prison and reading as much as he did, Malcolm realized that the most important thing one can do is speak his or her truth.

When Malcolm was released from prison in 1952, he immediately went and got involved with the Moslems. Malcolm's popularity grew exponentially. Malcolm's star did not really begin to shine until 1959 when they televised the documentary *The Hate That Hate Produced*. In this documentary, Malcolm and other Muslims proclaimed using strong rhetoric that white people were devils and accused them of being responsible for the ills in the world. After this documentary aired, Malcolm became a star, one of the most popular orators in America.

Although Malcolm's star began to shine, it did not sit well with other Muslims, including the honorable Elijah Muhammad, and rumors began to circulate that Malcolm was trying to take over the organization. Then word had gotten out that Elijah Muhammad had fathered several children with young women who worked for him. After confirming the rumors, Malcolm was faced with a moral dilemma: The man he revered had behaved in a way that was inconsistent with the teachings of Islam. What a tough

place to be in; the person you love and admire does something that goes against the values they taught you. Do you turn a blind eye, or do you confront the situation? For Malcolm, this question would appear to a very hard one to answer, but I believe that because Malcolm had begun to get in touch with his Kemetic roots and his understanding of the philosophies of the East, that he knew that truth is essential if one is going to try and live a harmonious life:

When I discovered philosophy, I tried to touch all the landmarks of philosophical development. Gradually, I read most of the old philosophers, Occidental, and Oriental. The Oriental philosophers were the ones I came to prefer; finally, my impression was that most Occidental philosophy had been borrowed from the Oriental thinkers. Socrates for instance, traveled in Egypt. Some sources even say that Socrates was initiated into some of the Egyptian mysteries. Obviously Socrates got some wisdom among the East's wise (Haley 179).

Although Malcolm does not name his sources in regards to his statements about Socrates, his statement makes clear that he preferred the philosophies of the East as opposed to the West, and the chances are that somewhere in his reading, he came across the Kemetic idea about truth. That is, it is the champion of righteousness that is the true victor in rhetorical traditions. Rhetoric was spiritual, a human quest for what was good and divine" (Alkebulan, 28). Or to quote Clinton Crawford again, "Nile Valley rhetoric is based on the fundamental concept of Ma'at: Truth, justice, virtue, reciprocity, balance and righteousness, among other tenants" (118).

It would appear that Malcolm was aware of Ma'at and his awareness perhaps played a part in his decision to risk his relationship with Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam who he credited with changing his life. Malcolm decided that he would challenge Elijah Muhammad and his behavior, and from the moment he did his life changed. Things started to unravel with the Nation of Islam when Malcolm commented

after the assassination of Kennedy that the “Chickens have come home to roost.” By that he meant that the behaviors that America was doling out to others had come to rest on the front door of America’s consciousness. As a result of his comment, Malcolm was suspended for ninety days, and he soon realized that there were no intentions to place him back in his former position as leader.

It was during his suspension that Malcolm participated in the “Hajj,” the Islamic tradition that requires that Muslims make the pilgrimage to Mecca, the holy city. It was on his journey that he became an orthodox Muslim, but he was transformed in another way. For twelve years he had preached that the white man was the devil, but during his pilgrimage he met Muslims of all colors, and they treated him and others the same no matter the color of their skin, like they were all valuable human beings. This knowledge caused him to reassess his attitude; he came to realize that not all white people are racists who are out to destroy the humanity of Black people.

This attitude went against the rhetoric the Muslims were expounding, and one has to wonder, if Malcolm was a Muslim and came to the conclusion that not all white people are the devil, then I suggest that he was involved with something that went deeper than Islam. Furthermore, that his understanding of his African roots is something different. He states:

And today the white man is faced head on with what is happening on the Black Continent, Africa. Look at the artifacts being discovered there, that are proving over and over again, how the Black man had great, fine, sensitive civilization before the white man was out of his cave. Below the Sahara, in the places where most America’s Negroes’ foreparents were kidnapped, there is being unearthed some of the finest craftsmanship, sculpture and other objects, that has ever been seen by modern man. Ancient objects produced by Black hands...refined by Black hands with results that no

human hand today can equal (Haley 180-181).

It would appear that Malcolm had studied Africa and the contributions that she has made to the world and because of his knowledge about Africa, it seems that Malcolm became familiar with the teachings of Ma'at, that harmony and truth are the keys to living a life that one could feel good about. It has been said that Malcolm was a charlatan. That because he was a hustler, drug dealer, and pimp, that the tactics he used while peddling drugs are the same tactics that he used to gather the following that he was able to obtain. As Thomas Benson states in his article, "Coupled with his opportunism in debate, his inconsistencies, his earlier career as a hustler, and pimp and his ministry of millennial anti-white black nationalism, Malcolm's confession of the urge to market Islam with the tools of American public relations may seem the final proof in branding him a charlatan" (4). It appears that because Malcolm went through several transformations in his life, he was not serious about the message he was trying to deliver because he changed as many times as he did. What those who accuse him of being a charlatan fail to realize, is that Malcolm's mission was to transform himself and Black people to a place where they could feel good about themselves, and any time his message needed to change in order for people to grasp the full impact of the necessity to transform, it did. By transforming himself, he showed his audience that in order to be the person one wants to be, when a part of one's philosophy does not work, one needs to have enough resolve to change his or her stance in order to insure the greatest possibility that the changes one hopes for are changes that one must be willing to make in one's own life if his or her message is going to be taken seriously.

Perhaps the greatest quality Malcolm possessed was his ability and willingness to change his stance as he became more mature in his thinking. It would appear that Malcolm had a clear understanding of African American rhetoric, in that he had an understanding that for "Africans, public discourse is about far more than communicating thoughts or ideas. Rather, the objective is the elevation of the community or society the attainment of spiritual harmony and balance" (Alkebulan 38). To Malcolm's credit, he had the willingness to change his message when he realized that in order to create

harmony he had to be willing to admit when his thinking was wrong, even when to do so would make one seem like a charlatan. Also, I would suggest that his transformations were do in part because of his understanding that the Kemetic way of life is about harmony, and if one is going to be a part of creating a world where harmony is the order of the day, then racism and hatred should be elevated form one's thinking. Malcolm recognized this, and at the risk of being ostracized he made the changes he needed to make and publically was willing to let it be known that his thinking was wrong in regards to the former position he held. As we have seen in Western rhetoric, the objective of the speaker is to persuade his or her audience:

Rhetoric traditionally has been closely concerned with the techniques for gaining compliance. Rhetoric, in fact, has at times been understood simply as the study of persuasion.

The close association with persuasion has always been at the heart of the conflict over whether rhetoric is a neutral tool for bringing about agreements, or an immoral activity that ends in manipulation and deception (Herrick 3).

It would appear that Malcolm was aware of this problem and rather than saying what he thought the audience wanted to hear, he said what was true in his heart and people took issue with him when what he said differed from what they wanted to hear. Nonetheless, rather than appease people by telling them exactly what they were hoping for, Malcolm spoke his truth and was willing to deal with the consequences of saying what he thought was true. His attitude is a clear indication that he began to embody the characteristics of someone who understood the Kemetic concepts and made an attempt to incorporate them into his life. Malcolm understood what Freire said when talking about teaching, and one would have to agree that Malcolm was a teacher. According to Freire, "In criticizing any political or other institution the one thing one cannot do is lie to his audience. The education of the teacher should be so ethically grounded that any gap between professional and ethical formation is to be deplored," (24). As Malcolm stated in his autobiography, "The whole stream of Western philosophy



has now wound up in a cul-de-sac. The white man has perpetuated upon himself, as well as upon the Black man, so gigantic a fraud that he has put himself into a crack. He did it through his elaborate, neurotic necessity to hide the Black man's history," (Haley 180). Malcolm saw it has his duty to speak to the lies he felt had been perpetuated by a society that did not want to acknowledge the contributions that Blacks made to the advancement of society. He goes on to say:

It's a crime, the lie that has been told to generations of Black men and white men both. Little innocent Black children, born to parents who believed their race had no history. Little Black children seeing, before they could talk, that there parents considered themselves inferior. Innocent Black children growing up, living out their lives, dying of old age--and all of their lives ashamed of being Black. But the truth is pouring out of the bag now (Haley 180).

Malcolm believed that Blacks had been fed lies and in order to make things right, Blacks had to do two things; one, learn to love themselves, and two, learn about their history so that when they heard the lies they could speak the truth to them. Although it would appear that Malcolm's rhetoric was anything but a rhetoric of love, I would suggest that by seeing Malcolm's rhetoric of love and having a will to push back would be a more accurate assessment of the rhetoric that Malcolm employed. In other words, Malcolm understood and practiced some of the ideas that Friere said were necessary in order to get oppressed people to take an active role in their freedom:

It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. The discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must be carried on with the oppressed at whatever stage of their struggle for liberation (65).

In the tradition of Ma'at, Malcolm understood that if things were going to

change, they would only change if Black people came together and developed a stronger sense of community, they could work together and try and make the changes that needed to be made so that Blacks could become full members of society. As Victoria Cliet states in her essay, *The Rhetoric of Democracy*, “The journey of self-knowledge on part of African Americans is a journey into the systematic process of reading history and structure. The self knowledge of African Americans was a self knowledge of an “operation” of slavery and its ideological foundations, (Cliett 180). Malcolm had done his work and learned history and knew that the truth was not being told and took it upon himself to teach Black people and the world about the contributions of Black people. In other words, Malcolm felt that a major problem with the Black community was that they had no idea about their history, and until they had a sense of their history, they would always be told who they were by others. Malcolm believed that before Blacks could hold positions of power Blacks had to know themselves, so that they can, among many other necessary things, identify the enemy. In other words, Malcolm beleived that there could be no Black and white unity until there was Black unity; that there could be no workers’ solidarity until there was racial solidarity, (Clarke xxiv).

Malcolm, like Freire, understood that things will not get better unless those who are oppressed learn about who they are and understand that they deserve a better life. As Freire says, “The insistence that the oppressed engage in reflection on their concrete situation is not a call to armchair revolution. On the contrary, reflection--true reflection--leads to action. On the other hand, when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection” (66). Both Freire and Malcom realized:

that in order to get people to take a stand against their oppression they had to understand that as a social-political construct, race was used throughout American history as an extension of Western eighteenth-and nineteenth-century academics who sought to study, describe, and rank the various peoples of the world, with the European always being at the apex of any rank-

ing. With the support of science and its essentialist epistemology, the word race was used to refer to a biological community with essentially innate characteristics, dispositions, and abilities. The presumed scientific underpinnings regarding the different races function not so much to advance knowledge about human diversity, but as a needed rationale for the imperialist politics of categorization, isolation, subjugation, exploitation, humiliation, and decimation (Wright 96).

Malcolm believed that if Black people understood the above, they would see the unfairness of the way that things were being done and take an active part in demanding the changes that needed to be made in order for everyone to feel like they were a valuable human being. Also, by having an understanding of history and how things have been set up by design, Blacks would no longer have to feel bad about who they are. They would have the knowledge that in order for the imperialist ideologies to take root, Black people had to believe what was being said about them. In other words, by learning about history and the contributions made by Africans, Blacks would know the truth and could counter whatever arguments made that said Blacks were inferior. As Malcolm so eloquently put it:

The same man that was colonizing our people in Kenya was colonizing our people in the Congo. The same one in the Congo was colonizing our people in South Africa, and in Southern Rhodesia, and in Burma, and in India, and in Afghanistan, and in Pakistan. They realized all over the world where the dark man was being oppressed, he was being oppressed by the white man; where the dark man was being exploited by the white man (qtd. in Breitmann 6).

Malcolm believed that part of the problem with Black people was the fact that they seemed to walk around as if the things that white people said about them and the way that they were treated by whites, was somehow a treatment that they deserved and by

understanding history, Blacks would see that the problem was not with them but with white folks and their imperialist attitudes. And having the knowledge about what white folks did to Black people around the world would make Blacks feel good about themselves because they would have a solid understanding that they have been victims of crimes rather than the perpetrators of them. Having the knowledge that others have been treated the way that Blacks in America have would help in getting Blacks in America to understand that they are not alone in their struggle and it would also give Blacks a sense of purpose. By having this knowledge, Blacks would feel good about themselves.

Many people thought that Malcolm was a fanatic, but upon closer exploration of his life and his message, it is evident that Malcolm understood during his short life what most of us fail to grasp in our entire lifetime. That is, as Black people, if we study history and Africa in particular, we will come to understand that there is no reason for Blacks to walk around with heads bowed, believing that they have been cursed because of their Blackness.

Malcolm rose from the depths of darkness and through his willingness to become transformed, he was able to challenge America's racism although many did not like him because they thought his rhetoric was as evil as the actions of white people. Although I agree that his rhetoric was strong and to some degree brought more hostility to an already hostile situation, one must understand:

Malcolm's legacy, Malcolm's purpose and direction, Malcolm's impact on the Black Revolution the world over, nationalism, Pan-African unity--these and many more of the practical manifestations of Malcolm's spirit. Malcolm, like Nkrumah, Toure, Felix Moumie, (the Cameroonian brother whom the French poisoned with thallium) Nyerere, Fanon, Ho Chi Minh, to name a few among our many heroes who have earned our respect, taught us to get rid of our fear and cowardice and wage an uncompromising, total struggle like our Vietnamese brothers (Kgositsile 46-47).

Although Malcolm's rhetoric was strong and rubbed many people, both Black and white, the wrong way, if we look deeper into his message it can be seen that what he understood was that before Blacks could demand that white people treat them differently, Blacks had to treat themselves differently, and by doing so that would make it clear to the white establishment that Black people were not about violence, and they were no longer going to stand by and allow white society to continue to treat Blacks in ways that do not honor their humanity. In order to get Blacks to see how and what was happening to them, Malcolm used rhetoric that was harsh. Even now, as one reads his words, the tone still makes one's hair stand on edge. But Malcolm knew that "Before Jesus, there were religious beliefs which were being practiced and upheld in Egypt, the Cradle of Civilization...The Nile Valley, the Fertile Crescent...a part of the African continent," (Jarvis & Nichols 118).

That the classical period in the Nile Valley reflects the African commitment to knowledge, ethical, and spiritual grounding and excellence, introducing and developing some basic disciplines of human knowledge and contributing to the forward flow of human history. It is here that the oldest texts on rhetoric as well as other disciplines are found (Karenga 7).

It was this knowledge that Malcolm had gained and so desperately wanted other Blacks to have. He believed that if Blacks knew the truth about their roots and how far back they go in world history, that they would feel better about themselves as a whole. He also understood why it was important for America to keep this information away from Blacks. Imagine what kind of world it would be if this Black folks knew this knowledge. It would appear that Malcolm was so sure of this that there seems to be a tone of desperation in his rhetoric. Also, Malcolm realized that there was something that went deeper than even Islam could go. It seems as though it was when he left the Nation of Islam that his spiritual self really started to emerge.

It was after he left the Nation of Islam that he took his trip to Africa and it was there that he made what would be the next to final transformation of his life. It was there

that he experienced people of different colors and backgrounds, living like and treating each other as brothers and sisters. Also, it would appear that the knowledge he gained from reading and the conversations that he had while on the continent, Malcolm learned more about the significance of Africa in relationship to the contributions made to the world. It would appear that it was during his trip that his rhetoric began to change. Although it was still fiery, it had a more harmonious tone to it. Although, he still spoke passionately about the hardships that Blacks in America and the world faced. He now realized that our purpose on earth is to live harmoniously and move society forward in attempts to get to the place where the world recognizes the value of every human being. By him proclaiming that all white people were the devil, this was not in accordance with the idea that humans are to live in harmony. It did not stop him from calling out America as a whole for the treatment of her Black, brown, red and yellow children. His rhetoric went from being a rhetoric of separation to one of integration, but integration did not mean that one should forgo their Blackness in order to be recognized as a human being. Rather, Malcolm believed that Blacks could and should sit at the table and be served like everyone else, rather than being the ones that were always doing the serving. He knew that what Blacks had to contribute to the conversation was valuable, and that no one had the right to tell Blacks that what they had to say or contribute is of no value. In fact, part of Malcolm's strategy was to say things that forced people to listen. As we recall, it was after the airing of a documentary called, *Hate that Hate Produced* in which Malcolm publically called white people the devil incarnate that propelled him into the national spotlight. Malcolm taught Black people that they had to love themselves and that it was all right to do so. He also challenged Black people to push back against the forces that would deny them rights as human beings. Malcolm tried to teach Black people that:

It is essential for the oppressed to realize that when they accept the struggle for humanization they also accept, from that moment, their total responsibility for the struggle. They must realize that they are fighting not merely for freedom from hunger, but for the freedom to create and to construct,

to wonder and to venture. Such freedom requires that the individual be active and responsible, not a slave or a well fed cog in the machine...It is not enough that men are not slaves; if social conditions further the existence of automations, the result will not be a love of life, but love of death (Freire 68).

Like Freire, Malcolm realized that in order to make changes in one's life and in society, that it takes a willingness to love oneself and one's community. Despite whatever one thinks of Malcolm X's rhetoric, one could never deny that "Malcolm not only meant what he said but also genuinely meant well. Further, he aimed to enlighten and elevate his audience by helping them discover truth" (White 417).

In studying Malcolm one will have the opportunity to witness what it meant by the statement that:

African American rhetoric is a *rhetoric of possibility*. It seeks not simply to persuade, but to share, to inform, to question, and to search for and explore possibilities in the social and human condition. And it is in this regard that it is an active call to counsel and collaboration in the ongoing quest for effective ways to solve human problems, elevate the human spirit, reaffirm the right, create expanding space for maximum human freedom and human flourishing, and constantly bring good into the world (Karenga 6).

Malcolm tried to do just this, he tried to get Black people to understand that they have forsaken their roots, in many cases, to adopt customs and rituals not germane to their own geo-centric cosmology (or, their localized world view) in many cases leaving a large gap between their spiritual and physical realities (Jarvis & Nichols 121). In other words, by practicing Christianity, this has in some circumstances destroyed the foundation of traditional African beliefs. More than that, by involving themselves in Christianity, Blacks have lost their connection to their African roots and as a result, do

not truly understand the power of the word and their relationship to the people of the Nile Valley.

By using Malcolm X in classes whose focus is on rhetoric, students would have a great model to study see how one develops the love for self, and then, how one transfers that love to greater society. Malcolm started at the bottom of the social ladder in America, spent time in jail, sold drugs, and women, and through the process of being incarcerated transformed himself to become one of the greatest rhetoricians this country has ever produced. By reading and studying Malcolm, students would further understand the role that Nommo plays in rhetoric no matter who is doing it and would begin to understand how the elements of Nommo must be present in order to increase the chance of harmony taking place. Moreover, students would be afforded the opportunity to discuss what it means to live one's truth, and understand the willingness of some people to give their lives all in the hopes of promoting harmony. More importantly, students would begin to understand the role that the rhetoric of the people of the Nile has played in influencing how we do rhetoric today.



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, if we are going to move to a place where everyone's humanity is honored, then I believe that it will be necessary for educators, in particularly those of us who teach Composition and Rhetoric to start to introduce the ideas from the people of the Nile Valley. Most of the teaching that is done in regards is done mostly from an European perspective, and there is a lot that the old masters can teach us about rhetoric and how to do it. On the other hand, it has been determined that ancient Egypt played a major role in creating rhetoric as we know it today. Although this is the case, as mentioned above, rhetoric is mainly taught from a Eurocentric place. That is to say, for the most part, the contributions made to the field by the ancient Egyptians goes unnoticed. As a result of this omission, students are not being taught the truth about rhetoric and as a result do not get a full understanding of how it is done.

My dissertation, through looking at Kemectism, Ma'at, and Nommo, as well as the rhetorics of Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, offer another lens which to look at these great rhetoricians, all in the hopes of identifying Kemectism, Ma'at, and Nommo. By looking at these figures and the how they incorporated the rhetorical components of the peoples of the Nile, students will become knowledgeable about the contributions Africa has made to the world of rhetoric. Having an understanding of the contributions that were made to the world of rhetoric by ancient Egypt, students will not only become aware of the contributions that others have made to rhetoric, but they will also have more tools to use as they construct their written and spoken selves.

Black people who historically originate from Africa and brought to the shores of the Americas as slaves. Because they were subjects, they were not allowed to learn to read and write. As a result of this, Blacks operate from an emotional place. Conversely, because for the most part, from a very early age white people are taught how to read, write, and think in a way that is very cerebral. For example, most people are taught that it

is a bad thing to be emotional. “Do not be so emotional,” “do not wear your emotions on your sleeve,” these are just a couple of examples that speak to our attitude about being emotional.

In the European idea of rhetoric, the job of the rhetorician is to persuade the audience. To do this all kinds of methods are incorporated, and some of them create more harm than good. On the other hand in Ancient Egyptian rhetoric the object is to try and create harmony. To persuade, there are tools such as claims, warrants, and proofs, etc. that help in trying to be persuasive. In ancient Egyptian there are tools to assist in creating harmony that are not used in the European way of doing rhetoric. For instance, in Egyptian rhetoric, *Nommo* plays a big role. That is, style, rhyme, call and response, etc., are used in trying to create harmony.

I suggest that by incorporating the ideas of Ancient Egyptian rhetoric, students will have more tools to assist in being persuasive and creating harmony at the same time. Generally, we do not talk about the contributions that Blacks have made to the world of rhetoric and intellectual inquiry. By incorporating the rhetoric of the figures I use in my dissertation, I believe that students, teachers, and society would benefit from having such knowledge. Furthermore, by incorporating such figures into the classroom could help change some of the ignorance that we have about the contributions made to the world of rhetoric by those who are not European. I believe that if more effort were put into acknowledging the contributions of others, perhaps the negative attitudes we have about each other will dissipate. As a result, the idea of creating harmony just might become a reality opposed to some lofty ideal.

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