

From Service to Solidarity: Engaged Education and Democratic Globalization

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Abstract

In this essay, I argue that the market-model university undermines the engaged education movement by supporting a mode of global organization that rewards values and practices opposed to those of social justice, human rights, ecological sustainability, and global community. On the basis of this argument, I propose that we may achieve the goals of the engaged education movement by working to construct a relational economy or economic democracy. Borrowing from Suzanne C. Toton, I also propose that we move from conceptualizing educational engagement as service to conceptualizing it as solidarity. Finally, I propose that our work be oriented less toward educating individuals to be good citizens and more toward educating them to be what Martin Luther King, Jr., describes as transformed non-conformists, persons committed to and capable of building a society that affirms the dignity of all persons by ensuring that every individual is able to enjoy a dignified life.

In *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, the late Ernest L. Boyer and his colleagues provided a succinct history of higher education and made a persuasive argument for recovering and building on models of academic teaching and research that emphasize community engagement, public service, and civic responsibility.

Now is the time to build bridges across disciplines, and connect the campus to the larger world. . . . We need scholars who not only skillfully explore the frontiers of knowledge, but also integrate ideas, connect thought to action, and inspire students. . . . If the nation's colleges and universities cannot help students see beyond themselves and better understand the interdependent nature of our world, each new generation's capacity to live responsibly will be dangerously diminished. (*Boyer 1990, 77*)

Since the publication of *Scholarship Reconsidered* in 1990 universities across the nation have taken up Boyer's provocative challenge to advance academia's democratic mission. Many institutions now invest as much time, energy, and resources in service-learning and community partnerships as they do multicultural curriculum and diversity recruitment. Numerous professional associations, including the Association for General and Liberal Studies and the American Association of Higher Education, now hold regular conferences concerned with developing curriculum that fosters community involvement, participatory democracy, and civic responsibility. A host of new journals concerned with addressing the pedagogical and institutional problems related to achieving these goals, including the *Journal of Public Outreach and Service* and the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, have emerged over the past decade. In fact, the movement Boyer inspired grew so much during the 1990s that in 1999 presidents of fifty-one universities expressed their commitment to this movement in their *Presidents' Fourth of July Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education*.¹ Emphasizing the link between education and citizenship, the presidents affirmed, "We must teach the skills and values of democracy, creating innumerable opportunities for our students to practice and reap the results of the real, hard work of citizenship. . . ." (Ehrlich 1999).

With all these positive gains, however, the engaged education movement has been slowed by a variety of factors, not the least of which have been insufficient funding and inadequate recognition of the value of public teaching and scholarship for the purposes of promotion and tenure (Peters et al. 2003, 85). Drawing from the research of William Sullivan, a scholar at the Carnegie Foundation, Scott J. Peters notes that in addition to these factors, higher education operates "on a default program of 'instrumental individualism' that ignores explicit consideration of larger questions of social, political, and moral purpose" (Peters 2004, 24). By its nature this program impedes progress toward the university's teaching "the skills and values of democracy" and becoming, as Boyer contended that it should, "a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems" (*ibid*; cited in Hill 2001/2002, 11). To become such a partner in the grand democratic experiment requires, says Peters, that we continue to develop "a robust understanding of [higher education's] civic identity and mission" and, he adds, that we be careful "to infuse public service and outreach work with a civic rather than a market spirit." (27).

Public Service and the Market Spirit

Infusing public service and outreach work with a civic rather than a market spirit has indeed become a serious challenge to faculty across the country as market forces exercise increasing influence over the development of higher education. The business-trained administrators who increasingly manage educational institutions—what might more accurately be called education maintenance organizations²—are under growing pressure from state legislators, who are in turn under growing pressure from their corporate sponsors, to support curriculum and research that, as James Engell and Anthony Dangerfield write in “The Market-Model University,” (1998) advances corporate agendas. In “The Kept University,” Eyal Press and Jennifer Washburn note that “universities are behaving more and more like for-profit businesses,”

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forming partnerships with corporations and investors, selling patents on technological and intellectual properties, marketing lectures and courses, and conceiving the mission of education as, on the one hand, fostering the growth of the capitalist relations of production and consumption and, on the other, providing students with the skills they need to secure employment (2000, 39).

The impact of the market-driven reorganization of higher education affects scholarship in a variety of ways. For example, when universities form partnerships with private investors, the latter frequently impose contractual obligations that, for example, restrict the freedom of scientists to share their findings (the life blood of scientific and technological development) and in some cases to publish their results. As Steven Rosenberg of the National Cancer Institute indicates, “the ethics of business and the ethics of science do not mix well” (cited in Press and Washburn 2000, 42). In addition to imposing restrictions on the exchange of information, corporations tend to fund research that is likely to result in the production of profitable commodities, even while research into non-profitable areas may address social and environmental problems that need to be

addressed to ensure the universal well being of the human community (see Silverstein 1999).

Corporate forces and market ideologies also influence curriculum development. Departments that do not prepare students for employment or support the expansion of capitalist relations of production and consumption have seen their funding reduced and/or been pressured to reform their curriculum to serve departments and programs that support these goals. The market-driven allocation of university resources is evident in the upsizing of programs with close ties to profit-making industries (e.g., marketing, engineering, and business), and downsizing of programs that do not hold the same promise (e.g., the humanities and social sciences). Between 1970 and 1994, note James Engell and

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Anthony Dangerfield, the number of students graduating with B.A.s in English, foreign languages, philosophy, and religious studies declined overall, even as the total number of B.A.s awarded to students increased. “Test what you will,” write Engell and Dangerfield, “the humanities’ vital signs are poor” (1998).

Downsizing the humanities means that students graduate with at best a rudimentary knowledge of philosophy, religion, art, architecture, literature, and history. Moreover, to the extent that humanities courses offer students resources to develop their abilities to think critically (and thereby to investigate, analyze, and judge the validity of claims to truth), to make ethical judgments (and thereby to determine what is good, right, and just), to investigate the world and present their findings to others (and thereby to comprehend and educate fellow citizens), to appreciate beauty (and thereby to create environments that allow human beings to flourish), and to imagine alternative realities (and thereby to envision more humane ways of living), and to the extent that developing these capacities is essential to living as responsible citizens, then downsizing the humanities means that our capacity for such a mode of living is being “diminished” (Boyer 1990, 77).

Even as educational resources that enable students to investigate the world and imagine alternative possibilities for arranging our relations with each other and the earth are being downsized, students are being increasingly engineered to embrace capitalism's vision of the "good life." The presence of corporate retailers, vending machines, and human vendors selling their products on university campuses is now commonplace. Crossing campus recently I found myself weaving around Verizon trucks, tables, and employees hawking products in the student commons.

Overhearing one student say, "What does Verizon have to do with higher education?" I found myself thinking, "Quite a lot," and imagined that the day we are required to wear corporate logos may not be far away. While it is true that higher education in the United States has regularly adjusted itself to satisfy the labor needs

of business, academia increasingly supports the growth of capitalist production and consumption by educating students to be compliant workers and insatiable consumers.

In these ways, the market-model university compromises the democratic project of educating students to "see beyond themselves and better understand the interdependent nature of our world" and to live wisely as responsible global citizens (*Boyer 1990, 77; see Giroux 1998*). Thus, precisely at a time when faculty are working to build an educational model that is "more sympathetically and productively involved with community concerns and needs," higher education is being dramatically restructured to advance the interests of corporate investors and the development of corporate-controlled globalization (*Ramaley 2003, 15*).

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Market-Model Education for a Market-Model World

The market model of education is problematic, however, not merely because it directs funding toward research that promises profits, downsizes courses that empower students to act as responsible citizens, and encourages obedience to the status quo. It is also because the market model supports a mode of social organization that daily proves unable to satisfy humanity's basic

needs (e.g., food, water, housing, health care, education, and work), let alone ensure universal access to the resources individuals need to develop their abilities in a manner that is responsible to our shared conditions of social and natural existence.

In fact, the expansion of capitalist relations of production and the “liberalization” of these relations—that is, the expansion of what is often referred to as the freemarket and the weakening, if not outright abolition, of laws protecting workers and the environment³—have, according to the United Nations, UNICEF, and the World Bank, significantly widened the overall gap between the have-a-lots and have-too-littles and accelerated the pace of worldwide environmental despoliation.⁴ An “analysis of long-term trends in world income distribution (between countries) shows that the distance between the richest and poorest countries was about 3 to 1 in 1820, 11 to 1 in 1913, 35 to 1 in 1950, 44 to 1 in 1973 and 72 to 1 in 1992” (*United Nations 1999, 14*). A recent study of global inequality and child poverty prepared for the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) by the Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research at the University of Bristol contends that “the World Bank, IMF, World Trade Organisation and national governments—particularly of the G8 nations—have not only failed to reduce poverty but have exacerbated the problem” (*Frith 2003*). Five hundred years of global capitalist development has, according to World Bank president James Wolfenson, resulted

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in a world in which “1.3 billion people live on less than one dollar a day; 3 billion live on under two dollars a day; 1.3 billion have no access to clean water; 3 billion have no access to sanitation; 2 billion have no access to electricity,” conditions that could quite easily be improved if economic investment and human development were guided by the principles of human rights, social justice,

and ecological sustainability (*cited in Randel, German, and Ewing 2000, 10*).

Unfortunately they are not. Rather, and as is well known, investment and development under capitalism are guided primarily

by the goals of profitmaximization and capital accumulation. Unencumbered by religious values, moral imperatives, and humanitarian principles, corporations let millions of tons of grain rot in silos while tens of thousands of children die every day from starvation, (*Bread for the World Institute 2004*) invest billions of dollars into the production of horrifying weapons while billions of human beings live without education, health care, and housing (*see Udin 1996, Callari 2002, Fishman 2002, and Agence France-Press 2003*), lobby against the production of generic AIDS medicines while AIDS engulfs the world in horror and suffering, and dump toxic waste into water supply systems while access to clean water is becoming as problematic as access to healthy food. In short, as long as profits are up, all is well in the kingdom of capital.⁵

It should also be noted that what is described as establishing “favorable business climates” often means supporting repressive governments and military interventions. Or, as Thomas Friedman (1999) wrote, “The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist—McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the F-15.” As people around the world struggle to improve their conditions of life (e.g., by forming unions, demanding a larger slice of the pie they produce, and pressing for legislation to protect the environment and human rights), military and paramilitary forces frequently intervene to “secure the peace” and “establish democracy,” that is, to make the world safe for multinational corporate investment and corporate-controlled development.⁶ It is for this reason that Buddhist ethicist David R. Loy contends that “our global economy is institutionalized greed” and “our military-industrial complex is institutionalized aggression,” and, following Friedman, we should note that the global economy and military-industrial complex generously support each other (1999, 86).

Raising Questions, Recovering Humanity

Lamentably, adds Loy, and as I’ve noted above, “our universities promote institutionalized ignorance of what is actually happening” (1999, 86). Most students learn little if anything about the history of colonialism, imperialism, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, international debt, or for that matter, the nature of life for hundreds of millions of persons around the world, even as every aspect of their lives depends on these persons. They have never heard of, let alone studied, the United Nations Declaration on Human

Rights or any of the other major international human rights documents and conventions. While a few have heard of the I.M.F., World Bank, and World Trade Organization, fewer have studied how these transnational institutions operate, even as these same nondemocratic institutions exercise growing influence over virtually every aspect of our lives. They frequently do not know the names of their elected representatives, let alone how to express their views to them. They are, at the most fundamental level, frequently ill-prepared “to practice [let alone] . . . reap the results of the real, hard work of citizenship . . .” (Ehrlich 1999).

Following a recent presentation I gave in a senior-level international business course, a majority of students reported that none of the courses they had taken during their four or more years of college study had asked them to consider their ethical obligations with regard to such issues as poverty, health care, human rights, and the environment. Their ethical horizon had been reduced to their role as multinational corporate managers, or, more accurately, as several students forthrightly explained, to fostering the “bottom-line.” Interestingly, many of these same students also expressed a feeling of being “ripped off.” They wished they had been given the opportunity to reflect on what it means to be a human being, to analyze the potential social and environmental consequences of their actions as managers—in short, to “see beyond themselves” and to act as informed global citizens (Boyer 1990, 77).⁷

For all the rhetoric of accountability as a measure educational outcomes, given the current state of the world and continuing environmental and social trends, an educational model that does not prepare students to participate in the work of building a society that ensures more equitable conditions of development for all persons is not only unaccountable, it is irresponsible. In *Solidarity and Suffering*, Douglas Sturm writes:

Education, at its best, poses the most fundamental questions we can ask: Who are we? What have we been? What might we become? How shall we construct our lives, individually and collectively? What should be the shape of our tomorrow? . . . At first blush, these questions appear—in some sense, they are—highly personal. . . . But they are not merely personal. . . . They are questions whose character compels us to consider the whole world in all its diversity and our place in it. Consciousness of *World* is a necessary correlate to consciousness of *Self*. (1998, 221–22)

Developing greater consciousness regarding the nature of the world and the self and the knowledge required to answer the questions posed above, begins with the recognition that, as described, the institutions that currently regulate our relations with each other and with nature are “unmoved by concern for the well-being of the earth’s inhabitants and are driven by desire for their own profit and growth” (*Loy 2003, 100*). That individual politicians, stockholders, corporate executive officers, and employees may care about poverty, the environment, and workers’ rights does not alter in the least that the structure of corporate decision making and the obligations imposed by global competition for market share make it virtually impossible for CEOs or, for that matter, government administrations, to “be responsible in the ways that we need them to be” (*100*). In practical terms this means “we cannot solve the [social and environmental] problems they keep creating by addressing the conduct of this or that particular corporation [or CEO], because the institution itself is the problem” (*101*).

Toward a Relational Economy

Sturm suggests that solving our social and environmental problems is best accomplished by constructing institutions that are based on and supportive of a “relational vision” of human beings as “companions, each having a more or less direct influence on all others for better or for worse as we appropriate the resources of this world while shaping and directing the future” (*1998, 152*). Achieving this goal most fundamentally requires subordinating productive property, what Marx referred to as the means of production, to “control by the community whose principal end is neither profit nor efficiency, but ‘how to promote a better communal life’” (*88*). Sturm adds, rightly in my opinion, that questions regarding how best to organize control and use of social and natural resources are simultaneously moral and spiritual questions, that is, questions regarding the nature and purpose of our individual and shared existence as human beings.

From a broader, more theological perspective, the question of property takes on an appreciably different tone. In the final analysis, whose world is it anyway? Who properly controls the direction and disposition of the world? Who should benefit from the world’s resources and how they are employed? Who should bear the burdens when all

cannot benefit? Should not all those whose destiny is at stake in the shaping of the future be enabled to participate in that shaping? (153)

Constructing economic institutions that are subordinated to the will and responsible to the needs of the demos means constructing institutions that recognize and respect the dignity of human beings. It means creating an economy that does not reward behaviors that conflict with “the values of community, responsibility, virtue, stewardship, and a mutual concern for each other,” as the current economic system does, but rather reinforces these values (*Fear and Sandmann 2001/2002, 31*). At the same time, democratic ownership and control of the means of production “does not (necessarily) mean state possession, but it does mean public accountability (a question of control) and it entails concern for the public good (a question of use)” (*Sturm 1998, 153*). The key aim of such institutions would be to “empower all those who have a stake in a productive process (workers, consumers, neighborhoods, and others, including, if only through surrogates, nonhuman creatures) to participate in the formulation of policies governing that process—what is produced, how it is produced, where it is produced, by whom it is produced” and, I might add, how what is produced is distributed (153–154; see *Smith 2002*).

In light of the preceding analysis, I propose that our work as socially concerned scholars be oriented by the goals of democratizing the distribution of wealth and control of productive resources. Achieving these goals means constructing what Sturm calls “a relational economy” (1998, 154). Such an economy would be organized explicitly to provide every individual with the resources he or she needs to develop his or her abilities in a manner that at the least does not undermine and at the most empowers other individuals to do the same. Such an economy would make it possible to realize what Sturm calls the elementary maxim of social justice: “So act that the life of the entire community and each of its participants might flourish” (217). Working to construct a relational economy would empower our efforts to challenge conventional ways of doing business, advance critiques of the status quo, and take an ethical stand based on the shared conviction that humanity is best served by institutions that affirm the dignity of persons (*Fear and Sandmann 2001/2002, 36–37*). Working to build a relational economy means working to build institutions that are guided by and reward the values of community, equality, and democracy we strive to promote.

From Service to Solidarity

Like so many teachers inspired by Boyer's vision, I have sought to involve students not only in the classroom study of "our most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems" but also in the resolution of these problems through involvement with community organizations and projects (*cited in Hill 2001/2002, 11*). I want to suggest, however, that advancing the goal of constructing a relational economy requires that we augment the ideas of service and good citizenship.

Outreach education frequently involves students serving the community by, for example, feeding homeless persons without necessarily challenging the institutions and social relations that divide society into those who own many mansions and those who lack a place to sleep at night. It means extending recycling programs without necessarily challenging the use of unsustainable forms of energy and an economic system that can exist only by promoting endless consumption. It means working to alleviate the suffering of HIV/AIDS patients without necessarily challenging the limits that insurance and pharmaceutical companies impose on access to health care and medicine.

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This is not to say that feeding the homeless, extending recycling, and caring for HIV/AIDS patients are not valuable and vital projects. We can, however, and should augment the work of addressing existing needs and problems by engaging our students with projects that challenge the distribution and control of life-promoting resources. Borrowing from Suzanne C. Toton, we may think about this as a shift from education engagement as *service* to education engagement as *solidarity* (2002). Whereas the concept of service typically involves helping to heal the wounded (e.g., the homeless, hungry, and poor), the concept of solidarity involves working to address the conditions that wound individuals, communities, and nations in the first place. Whereas service maintains the distance between the server and the served, solidarity seeks to

overcome this distance by creating generous conditions of life for all persons. Whereas service assumes the continuing existence of the present social order and on the basis of this assumption seeks to ameliorate human suffering, solidarity assumes the possibility of transforming the present social order and on the basis of this assumption seeks to build institutions that make it possible for all persons to flourish.

From Good Citizens to Transformed Non-Conformists

Moving from service to solidarity has implications for what it means to be a “good citizen.” Teaching students how to act as good citizen’s often means helping students develop the knowledge and skills they need to function within existing social, political, and economic institutions and relations. It assumes the existing system as natural and beyond need of serious challenge. Borrowing from Martin Luther King Jr.’s ideas concerning democratic citizenship, I propose that rather than help our students to become “good citizens,” as this concept is most frequently understood, we ought to help our students become ethically, intellectually, and practically *maladjusted* to the forces of racism, sexism, militarism, environmental destruction, and class divisions that prevent

human beings from enjoying dignified lives and keep the human community locked in perpetual battle (1981). We ought to educate our students to become what King describes as “transformed non-conformists.” Doing so means helping our students to develop the intellectual, ethical, and creative capacities to participate

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in the work of building a society that enhances, rather than degrades, the dignity of human beings.

We can foster the development of transformed non-conformists through classroom readings, lectures, and discussions that provide students with inspiring examples of persons who were, to borrow from Cornel West (2000), freedom fighters for democracy, justice, and human rights, such as Sarah Grimke, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Helen Keller, Dorothy Day, and Martin Luther King, Jr. And we can foster the development of transformed non-conformists by involving our students with community projects

that seek to achieve a more democratic distribution of life-promoting resources.

Over the past three years many of my students have attended meetings and organized events in support of the Richmond Coalition for a Living Wage. This coalition of labor, religious, student,

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community, and neighborhood associations seeks to persuade the city council to pass a living wage ordinance that would require the city to pay a living wage to contracted and subcontracted employees. Raising awareness and obtaining community support are crucial to its passage. To this end students have organized campus rallies, voter registration campaigns, and benefit concerts, produced a documentary video on temp labor in the city, and developed a Web site (<http://www.rclw.org/>) for the coalition to make it easier to

learn about and support living wage campaigns both here in Richmond and around the world. Combined with readings about Catholic, Buddhist, and Jewish perspectives on economic justice, some of which raised serious questions about the existing system of property relations, students not only learned about how the uneven distribution of money warps the practice of democracy (see Plast 2003), they began to raise questions about a system that allows a few to make tens of millions while tens of millions live on poverty-level wages.

The combination of studying global problems and participating in the living wage coalition has made it possible for students to appreciate the connections between poverty in Richmond and around the world, to build communities of solidarity, and to strengthen their ethical commitments. Students have created many resources, including a Web site, posters, and pamphlets, that community members now use to educate, organize, and demonstrate. Through their involvement with the movement students have been able to develop their organizational, pedagogical, and leadership skills and, just as important, they have discovered that getting involved provides a profound sense of meaning and

purpose. Moreover, as students have shared their stories about the living wage movement with other students, roommates, and friends, many more have become involved. They begin to see how they can, given the interrelated nature of life, work in their own communities to change the world and that, as VCU student Charlie Schmidt explained, the world will improve just as soon as they “get busy” improving it. Getting busy is catching, it seems; so much so, in fact, that this past semester students brought the living wage campaign home to VCU. In this way, student involvement with the Richmond Coalition for a Living Wage has resulted in a vibrant “community of practice” (Fear et. al. 2003, 59).

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Conclusion

We can help students develop the theoretical and practical capacities to challenge all the conditions that prevent human beings from developing their particular abilities as individuals and that prevent them from participating fully in the creation of civilization. The consequences of helping our students develop these capacities are twofold. First, their efforts help to improve our shared conditions of planetary life. Second, their efforts enable each of them to live as a transformed non-conformist. As VCU student Archana Metha wrote, a “transformed non-conformist is a type of person who we should all strive to be like,” adding that doing so not only helps to “improve the lifestyle of the people around us,” it also enables students to “become better people. That is,” she concludes, “the greatest lesson to teach a student” (Metha 2003). In this way, changing the self and changing the world creatively empower each other. As a result of participating in the wide-ranging work of building a humane global economy, students become hopeful that change is possible. They see through their own experience that we can achieve great things when we put our heads, hearts, and hands together. And this, after all, bodes well for us all.

Endnotes

1. By 2002, the number of presidential endorsers had grown to 459.

2. I borrow this idea from John O'Brien, art history professor at the University of British Columbia.

3. Among hundreds of trade disputes adjudicated by the World Trade Organization, not one judgment has favored workers, consumers, or nature. See <http://www.globalexchange.org>.

4. For information on global inequality see Global Issues at <http://www.globalissues.org>. For information on the state of the world's ecology see the Union of Concerned Scientists at <http://www.ucsusa.org> and the Environmental Defense fund at <http://www.edf.org>.

5. In addition to the almost \$400 thousand million spent annually on the military, the U.S. approved almost \$80 billion as a "down payment" for the war in Iraq. For the same amount of money, according to the National Priorities Project, the following could have been provided: 12,195,349 housing vouchers, 1,541,037 elementary school teachers, 361,253 fire trucks, 11,757,966 Head Start places for children, 34,830,861 children receiving health care, or some combination of these. See <http://www.nationalpriorities.org> for more on national spending.

6. Many religious organizations, including the Maryknoll Brothers and Sisters and the Buddhist monks of Nipponzan Myohoji, and secular organizations, including Amnesty International and Global Exchange, accuse the U.S. Army School of the Americas, at Fort Benning, Georgia, of training thousands of soldiers who, following their training, went on to participate in gross human rights violations, including disappearances, torture, and murder of unarmed men, women, and children, throughout Latin American nations. For more on the SOA see <http://www.soaw.org>.

7. It should be noted that several Business School professors at VCU are working to make ethical considerations a more central dimension of the Business School curriculum.

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About the Author

Professor Mark D. Wood is jointly appointed in religious studies and African American studies. He teaches courses in the history of religions in the Americas and courses that explore the relationships between diverse world religious traditions and the processes of globalization. His research work on race, class, religion, and philosophy includes his book *Cornel West and the Politics of Prophetic Pragmatism* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2000). He has also written on the ethics of education and the importance of education for democratic globalization. Professor Wood has been actively involved in promoting a mode of pedagogy that combines classroom study with engagement in local and global movements for environmental protection, social justice, and human rights. He has led students on study abroad programs to Cuba, where students participated in the North American and Cuban philosophers and social scientists conference, and to Perugia, Italy, where students studied Italian and religious history. He is presently working with faculty in the School for World Studies on the creation of two interdisciplinary degree programs in international social justice studies and health care.