

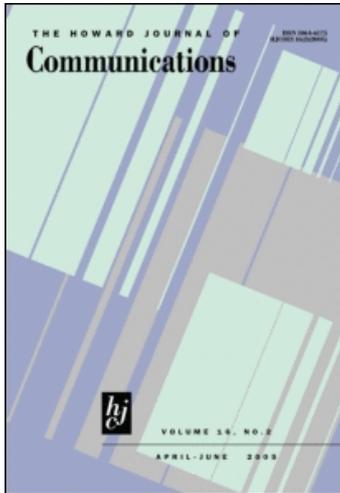
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Alain Locke on Race and Reciprocity: The Necessity of Epideictic Rhetoric for Cultural Pluralism

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In this essay, Alain Locke's work is read as a search for an epideictic rhetoric. Locke, through his philosophy and editorial work, helps rethink the significance of epideictic rhetoric by articulating a pluralist notion of values and accounting for competition between value-systems. He suggested that race can and should be celebrated, and that acts of celebration should use aesthetic sensibilities capable of displaying the value of race. Showing the connections between Locke's philosophy and the rhetorical tradition illustrates the value and potential of a multi-cultural citizenry and the necessity of epideictic rhetoric in producing, maintaining, and negotiating relationships within such a community.

KEYTERMS *aesthetics, Alain Locke, epideictic rhetoric, pluralism, race*

On March 21, 1924, Alain Locke, then Professor of Philosophy at Howard University, presided over a party at New York City's Civic Club. He was master of ceremonies for the celebration of the publication of Jessie Fauset's first novel, "There Is Confusion." This event was an important moment in launching the New Negro Movement, and Locke was literally and symbolically at the center of the celebration. As a result of this party, the literary magazine *Survey Graphic*, which had up to this point ignored Black writers, devoted an issue to "contemporary Negro life" with Locke as guest editor. As party Master of Ceremony and as editor, Locke sought the means to celebrate the value and promise of New Negro art in a society hostile to such attempts.

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These celebrations were intended to announce the transformation of the role of African Americans in American culture. Based on the success of the *Survey Graphic* issue, Locke edited *The New Negro*, which was published in December 1925, and was a central text in what became known as the Harlem Renaissance.

Philosophy, for Locke, was a form of cultural criticism that focused on power, empowerment, and democracy (Washington, 1986). Accordingly, he offered a pragmatic account of race, aesthetics, and value theory. In addition to his writing as a philosophy professor, Locke worked tirelessly as an editor, promoter, and critic of African American art. It was in this capacity that his role in the Harlem Renaissance was felt most deeply. In order to understand the relationship between his philosophy and his work as editor, promoter, and critic, I argue that he practiced a kind of epideictic rhetoric and that he reflected on the importance of epideictic rhetoric for culturally plural democracies. In the rhetorical tradition, “epideictic discourse exemplifies rhetoric as a language of transformation—of old to new” (Too, 2001, p. 251). Locke sought such a language in his art criticism, his editorial work, and his philosophy. Most importantly, he articulated the need for an epideictic rhetoric that could account for and encourage cultural pluralism. By celebrating the value of African American art, Locke crafted an epideictic rhetoric attentive to issues of race, value relativism, and aesthetics. In what follows, I argue that a concern with such issues uses and extends notions of classical epideictic rhetoric.

The key features of Locke’s epideictic rhetoric were not the funeral oration or the speaking competition as in classical Athens. Because life in Athens was marked by a relatively homogeneous culture, competition between ethnic subgroups did not obscure the process of finding a communal identity as much as it did, and still does, in American society. Not only was North American culture marked by an obvious pluralism, but it was also encumbered by a history of racism designed to segregate and oppress specific ethnic groups. In light of this fact, practicing epideictic rhetoric takes on a new significance. The necessity of expressing group identity issues from the need to conduct meaningful cultural exchanges between different ethnic groups. Epideictic rhetoric, therefore, is a way for a community to come to know itself and to come to know the other communities living in the same society. In addition, such exchanges lead to inevitable assimilation, transformation, and change, demonstrating the ongoing process of defining race and determining values. This process, according to Locke, implicates a vast array of cultural practices. The art produced in the Harlem Renaissance is an example of epideictic rhetoric because it was engaged in the process of determining group identity and could serve the function of displaying a group’s values so that others might learn and understand. Locke’s acts of celebration were meant to make that fact clear.

Locke faced three specific challenges, and these acts of celebration were meant to redress those challenges. First, the larger American community did not, and could not, believe that the Negro made significant contributions to the ongoing construction of American culture. Second, the Negro community itself was unsure of its own positive, identifying characteristics. And third, because pluralism, conflict, and exchange were all central features of American life any celebration of a group's values must have been made within the space of a culturally plural democracy in such a way that the diversity of competing value systems was preserved and not destroyed. It was in the light of these three exigencies that Locke implicitly recommends the importance of epideictic rhetoric.

Understanding *The New Negro* as an example of epideictic rhetoric requires a broad sense of the function of rhetoric in building and maintaining community identity. In this particular case, to understand rhetoric only as public address is to miss the manner in which other kinds of art and critical work function rhetorically to shape community life. Few African Americans had the opportunity or the means to engage in acts of public address. This suggested that other forms of rhetoric might hold more potential to create social change. Locke's work allows us to see rhetoric as a *dynamis* or, as Farrell (1993) put it, a "powerful capacity for doing" (p. 66). Farrell articulated this notion of rhetoric as *dynamis* through an interpretation of Aristotle's justification of rhetoric (pp. 67–68). The Aristotelian contention is that rhetoric should be understood as an artful practice that seeks to improve civic life (see also Baird, 1965; Backman, 1991). In Hauser's (2002) words, "rhetorical communication...attempts to coordinate social action" and uses a variety of symbolic means to do so (p. 3). In this case, what matters is the capacity of language and art to promote unity and not fragmentation, and to promote the production and maintenance of communal bonds around sets of shared beliefs, values, and visions. Questions of race and gender have been at the heart of many recent discussions of community (Brummett & Bowers, 1999; Condit, 1987; Hatch, 2003; Hogan, 1998). The particular challenge for rhetorical theory is to understand how the political and cultural significance of differences based on race or gender are established through language, and also to show how those differences can be reconciled through rhetorical action. Locke engaged in the latter task.

THE FUNCTION OF EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC

Aristotle identified *epideictic discourse* as one of the three divisions of oratory (1984, p. 32). Also known as *ceremonial rhetoric*, epideictic praises or blames people, objects, deeds, or ideals. It also appeals to common values that are important for the present, and in so doing engages in acts of display that "uncover what [lies] hidden" through the use of "excess and

exaggeration” (Poulakos & Poulakos, 1999, p. 63). Rosenfield (1980) also explained that the meaning of epideictic can be traced to notions of “display” and “shining forth” (see also Burgess, 1987; Cope, 1867; Kennedy, 1963; Sheard, 1996). Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969), updating Aristotle’s original claims, argued that epideictic plays a “central part in the art of persuasion” (p. 49). They suggested that epideictic rhetoric addresses the “unquestioned values” of an audience, and thus is practiced as a method of education aimed at displaying, amplifying, and enhancing the values that bind an audience together in the present (p. 51). The study and practice of epideictic rhetoric poses enduring questions about values and how they bring and hold communities together.

In classical Greece, “the epideictic genre developed through its connection to a number of civic occasions and societal functions.” Funeral orations, religious festivals, and athletic events “provided an institutionalized mechanism that fostered the development” of epideictic as an “art of display” (Poulakos & Poulakos, 1999, p. 62). Such occasions served at least three functions. First, speaking competitions held during athletic events and festivals required orators to display their skills at improvisation, composition, delivery, and dexterity with language. In other words, epideictic occasions highlighted an orator’s ability to use language in an artful, entertaining and pleasing manner. Second, epideictic rhetoric was designed to uncover “what lay hidden,” or bring “into the open what remained covered” (Poulakos & Poulakos, 1999, p. 63). When serving this function, speeches of display revealed “deep-seated meanings and concealed truths,” and the orator made apparent what had been hidden (Poulakos & Poulakos, 1999, p. 63). Third, funeral orations or religious ceremonies were moments for pointing out forms of excellence. In serving this function, epideictic rhetoric used excess and exaggeration to display the dominant values of a culture and to perpetuate the prevalent system of beliefs.

Recent scholarship has pointed to the potential that epideictic holds for contemporary rhetorical theory. Gerard Hauser (1999), for example, argued that epideictic is the basis for a “vibrant public sphere.” Hauser’s position rests on an interpretation of Aristotle who “assigned epideictic the important duty of teaching public morality” (p. 14). Aristotle, from this perspective, required the epideictic orator to tell “the story of lived virtue” so as to practice a form of “community instruction” (Hauser, 1999, p. 17). Hauser’s goal is to show that “examining epideictic provides insight into how a public sphere may serve as the crucible in which a people constitute and validate their tradition” (Hauser, 1999, p. 18). By “inculcating a common vocabulary of excellence,” epideictic served, and can serve, a valuable function in creating community, making sound public judgments, and crafting a notion of virtue (Hauser, 1999, p. 18).

Takis Poulakos (1988) developed a similar line of thought by attending to Isocrates’s notion of epideictic. He argued that epideictic can “shape the

social sphere,” and disclose “the capacity that participants of a society have to become social agents by articulating their own versions of the social order” (p. 148). Poulakos also considered the possibility of disagreement between or among competing values. “Conceived as a site of critique,” epideictic rhetoric “provides an occasion for inquiry into conflicts and struggles over the contestation of specific values in specific societies.” In other words, “the opposition between actual and possible valuations” can potentially frame “the question of epideictic rhetoric’s relation to society,” and did frame that relation in classical Athens (Poulakos, 1988, p. 161).

Both Hauser (1999) and Poulakos (1988) linked the practice of epideictic to social, cultural, and public well being, and see epideictic rhetoric as essential for the maintenance of community life. This implies the need for “democratically secure space[s] for conflict and debate among participants regarding values, aims, and aspirations each proposes for our own society” (p. 161). These spaces, and the debates that happen within them, would produce an intangible sense of public judgment about questions of virtue, not specific policies or laws. But what is missing in such discussions is an account of how a society could foster such spaces in a plural and multicultural manner. In other words, how can epideictic practices manage to foster public cooperation without explicit agreement over shared values? This is just the predicament faced by large-scale contemporary democracies like the United States, India, and Canada. The goal is not for some epideictic practice to overcome the differences between competing cultures and value systems, but to respect, acknowledge, and accept different cultures and value systems. In the kind of conflict described by Poulakos (1988), there are winners and losers, and life in the public sphere is enhanced by the competition. But material inequalities will always favor one set of participants over others—this is quite evident throughout American history. Given such circumstances, it is important to find a set of epideictic practices for multicultural democracies that avoid the desire to eliminate difference and to theorize how such practices would influence public life. I argue that it is just this task that Alain Locke takes up.

There are limitations to this conception of epideictic rhetoric. By building from the classical tradition, Hauser (1999), Poulakos (1988), and others used an idealized notion of the public sphere. This idealized notion of rhetoric in the public sphere has been critiqued from Marxist (Aune, 1990), feminist (Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 1999), post-colonial (Shome, 1996), and Afrocentric (Asante, 1986) perspectives. Each of these perspectives suggests the limitations of the notion of the subject embedded in such a conception of rhetoric and the public sphere, and the importance of material inequalities in arranging and limiting access to public deliberation. Locke is uniquely attuned to both of these issues. Thus, from Watts’ (2002) perspective, Locke’s major preoccupation is with ethos and the cultivation of a “black public voice.” According to Watts, the Harlem Renaissance was a site for

the invention of “an interpretive discourse that could draw from the conflicting perspectives on black culture from the period to constitute an African American collective identity” (p. 20). Locke’s *The New Negro* is a major contribution to this project because it “orchestrates the transformation of the “Old Negro” into the “New Negro” through a series of evocative reinterpretations of U.S. cultural beliefs” (p. 20). In addition, W.E.B. Du Bois attempted to cultivate an “authentic” African American “public voice,” according to Watts (2001), by calling the features of a “Negro art” into existence and by suggesting that such art could foster public dialogue about race and mediate between the opposing constraints of “pure art” and “propaganda.” These are forms of what Watts called “hermeneutical rhetoric” in that they develop “appropriate topics to shape understanding” (2002, p. 20). It is through the concept of “hermeneutical rhetoric” that Watts was able to articulate the importance of communal values and aesthetic practices for public understanding and public deliberation.

In what follows, I extend Watts’s work on Locke and the Harlem Renaissance by arguing that *The New Negro*, given its hermeneutical practices, is engaged in a special form of epideictic rhetoric that must precede acts of deliberation if the public sphere is to adequately address African American issues and concerns and adequately incorporate African American voices. In other words, I suggest that in the end the hermeneutical rhetoric that Watts describes serves an epideictic function before it serves a deliberative function. Because, from Locke’s perspective, persistent racism undermines the emancipatory potential of public discourse, rhetoric’s role in facilitating ideological change must be thought through in ways that extend beyond classical conceptions of rhetoric. One of those changes involves elevating the importance of the epideictic as a form of rhetoric. This does not involve the articulation of alternative, subaltern, or counterpublic spheres, as some scholars have argued (e.g., Squires, 2002). Instead the challenge is to understand the role of epideictic as a kind of reconciliation in the attempt to weave together one broader, multicultural public sphere.

The New Negro was an attempt to celebrate the value and promise of African American art. Locke (1925) claimed that hope for the present “rests in the revaluation by white and black alike of the Negro in terms of his artistic endowments and cultural contributions, past and prospective” (p. 15). By *revaluation*, he meant an improved understanding and better evaluation of the worth of the Negro for American culture. To conduct this revaluation, Locke identified both a tradition of excellence in artistic ability and a transformation in the role of the Negro in larger social affairs brought about by new instances of artistic excellence in Harlem. In classical Athens epideictic rhetoric was closely tied to poetry, and the artistic skill of the orator was used in the service of beauty. Rhetoric was conceptualized as an art form, not lower than painting, poetry, sculpture, theater, or architecture, but equally valid as a mechanism for expression and aesthetic contemplation. *The New*

Negro did not include a single orator or public speaker. The purpose of the work, however, aligned it with rhetorical practice. In presenting art from Harlem to the larger American public, Locke sought to uncover what was hidden to many Americans—namely the artistic talent of Negro artists as well as the value of the Negro community for American society. In pursuing these goals, *The New Negro* amplified particular artworks and the role of art in general in developing and maintaining community life. In addition, such acts of celebration served a pedagogical function, educating those that did not know or did not have access to the vibrant and promising art produced in Harlem, and attempting to teach others about the potential of African Americans to make valuable contributions to the larger community:

He [the New Negro] now becomes a conscious contributor and lays aside the status of a beneficiary and ward for that of a collaborator and participant in American civilization. The great social gain in this is the releasing of our talented group from the arid fields of controversy and debate to the productive fields of creative expression. The especially cultural recognition they win should in turn prove the key to the revaluation of the Negro which must precede or accompany any considerable further betterment of race relationships. (pp. 15–16)

Here the combination of art and the act of celebration hold the potential of inciting material changes.

In and through the practice of art Locke saw the process of displaying visions of a social order, the constitution and validation of tradition, an engagement in community-centered education, the development of a useful group identity based on common values, and the creation of a more vibrant public sphere that accepted the contributions of competing value systems as necessary rhetorical processes. In Harlem, Locke saw a democratic space for conflict and debate among eclectic and competing value systems and a diverse set of participants able to generate a well-informed and valuable identity that was subject to revision, persuasion, and further elaboration. Harlem was not a place where voices or artists were silenced, but where the conversation among a variety of artists could produce community standards of excellence without political oppression based on biological racism. In *The New Negro* Locke attempted to make race an object of celebration capable of validating a tradition, contributing to public notions of virtue, and acting as a tool in securing material progress. Given such a position, the community itself can be seen aesthetically, as an artwork still in progress. In order to accomplish this, Locke had to develop a theory of values that could account for revision, persuasion, and competition between diverse value systems. Such a theory would demonstrate an intellectual commitment to epideictic rhetoric because it would show the importance of displaying competing value systems and bringing those value systems into conversation.

CULTURAL PLURALISM AND LOCKE'S PHILOSOPHY OF VALUE

Throughout many of his philosophical essays, Locke argued that interethnic violence stems from the fact that people are motivated by conflicting, universal value imperatives. In response to this, he challenged value absolutism by focusing on the philosophical mistake of categorizing values as products of universal reason (the Kantian position) instead of group-influenced personal feelings. His challenge is supported by the belief that cultural uniformity about values is undesirable and impossible. Leonard Harris (1999) claimed that in Locke's view "cultural diversity was inherently desirable" and a "multitude of ways of valuing is characteristic of our being" (p. 17). Locke's contention is that our ways of valuing are "feeling-modes" that reflect both personal beliefs and the influence of group norms. People can revise these value feelings on the basis of reasoned judgments or available experience, but oftentimes people regard their values as universal categorical imperatives, which is the grounds for inevitable conflict. This presents the "gravest problem of contemporary philosophy." How is it possible "to ground some normative principle or criterion of objective validity for values without resort to dogmatism and absolutism on the intellectual plane, and without falling into their corollaries, on the plane of social behavior and action, of intolerance and mass coercion" (Locke, 1989, p. 36)? In answering this question, Locke "calls for a functional analysis of value norms and a search for normative principles in the immediate context of valuation" (p. 37). This is one of the tasks of epideictic rhetoric—to understand which values are important to the larger community at a particular moment and to provide a description of the reasons for holding those values.

Locke believed that a cross-disciplinary "anthropology in the broadest sense" would demonstrate the specific value changes that diverse people have made in their own environmental, historical, and political context (p. 72). In addition, Locke argued that the functional character of values makes it possible to evaluate, pragmatically, the relative insightfulness and usefulness of specific cultural values and to make progress in our understanding of humane values like human dignity, democracy, freedom, equality, and self-respect. The keys to overcoming the interethnic violence rooted in disagreements between value-systems are the cross-cultural norms of tolerance and reciprocity based on a pluralistic understanding of the historical and functional character of varying group values.

This position implies that the norms of tolerance and reciprocity are useful in connecting competing value systems around concepts that lack rigid dogmatism and instead point to the fluid process of transvaluation:

What is achieved through relativistic rapprochement is, of course, somewhat different than the goal of the absolutists. It is fluid and functional unity rather than a fixed and irrevocable one, and its vital norms are

equivalence and reciprocity rather than identity or complete agreement. But when we consider the odds against a complete community of culture for mankind, and the unlikelihood of any all-inclusive orthodoxy of human values, one is prepared to accept or even prefer an attainable concord of understanding and cooperation over against an unattainable unanimity of institutional beliefs. (Locke, 1989, p. 71)

Thus a realistic understanding of values offers clues for “a more practical and consistent way” of holding them in a fluid manner. Thus value dogmatism is disregarded: “Value assertion would thus be a tolerant assertion of preference, not an intolerant insistence on agreement or finality. Value disciplines would take on [a] tentative and revisionist procedure” (Locke, 1989, p. 57). The concept of *transvaluation* implies a reframing or shifting of the criteria we use to make evaluation of worth. In a democratic, plural society, transvaluations are a common process resulting from exposure to competing criteria of evaluation.

Based on his theory of values and his cultural pluralism, Locke claimed that his perspective gave rise to “three working principles” that underscore the flexible norms of tolerance and reciprocity. First, the principle of “cultural equivalence” demands that we search for “functional similarities in our analysis and comparisons of human cultures” and not differences. Second, the principle of “cultural reciprocity” demands that we recognize the “reciprocal character of all contacts between cultures” (p. 73). In other words, exchanges between value systems are an integral part of a plural democracy like the one in the U.S., and those acts of exchange shape value systems. And third, the principle of “limited cultural convertability” suggests that there are limits to the scope of cross-cultural exchange that we must respect to avoid domination. These “working principles” point to the process of negotiation implicated in cross-cultural exchanges, and the recognition of both value commonalities and valued diversity as twin aspects of democratic decision-making and collaborative action. Locke suggested that we develop our practical capacity to engage in cross-cultural conversation, collaboration, and negotiation so as to make a pluralist democracy possible.

Locke understood values as feelings, as imperatives to action, and as demonstrative of a deep-seated cultural pluralism. He also considered the process of transvaluation as critical to his pluralism and as the grounds for his notion of cosmopolitanism. These concepts are useful on their own, but they become more useful in the light of the earlier discussion of epideictic rhetoric. To explain this, I want to draw on some general themes from classical rhetoric. The sophists often engaged in the practice of epideictic rhetoric to demonstrate their expertise as orators and to recruit students. In delivering epideictic speeches the sophists also revealed a perspective on the function of rhetoric in Athens. For example, Prodicus’ speech *The Choice of Heracles* recounts a standard Greek myth and in so doing demonstrates the

importance of rhetoric. The myth that Prodicus recounts concerns Heracles coming of age and trying to choose between the path of virtue or the path of vice. While Heracles stands at the crossroads deliberating, two women appear, each urging Heracles to follow her particular path to happiness. The two women are Virtue and Vice. Vice directs Heracles to the path promising pleasure, ease, leisure, and enjoyment. In contrast, Virtue directs him to the path whose rewards include love, honor, and admiration, but that requires service to community, country, and friends, as well as hard work and dedication. In Prodicus' version of the story, Virtue and Vice debate the relative merits of each path, and the story ends with no clear choice.

This example of classical epideictic rhetoric highlights several useful themes that parallel Locke's value theory. First, the competition between Virtue and Vice points to a diversity of values in a plural society. No obvious, singular path presents itself to Heracles or any member of the audience. A plurality of paths is always asking that we choose, just as for Locke a plurality of values is always causing conflict and seeking to guide our imperatives to action in different ways. Second, such competition is worked out through the persuasive claims of each woman in Prodicus' story. This illustrates the importance of debate, argument, and rhetoric in reaching decisions. The dialogue between Virtue and Vice is designed to place the audience in a better position regarding their own choices. In Locke's case, conflict and debate between competing value claims is a significant part of the process of determining value-systems. Although Locke does not explicitly attend to the persuasive use of language in such conflicts, the processes he points to obviously highlight the role of persuasion. Third, because Prodicus' story ends with no clear decision, he is able to mark the uncertainty that attends our value choices and suggests that such choices are always subject to revision. Both Locke and Prodicus demonstrated that valuations are not the result of fixed standards already in place, but the outcome of democratic practices of deliberation and debate (practices constantly revising traditional notions of the good). Both Prodicus's speech and Locke's philosophy can actually be read as instances of a celebration of the commitment to deliberation regarding questions of value.

In Prodicus's case, rhetoric has the capacity to influence people's choices and ultimately shape community values. Locke was less clear as to the actual mechanism that negotiates value conflicts or the process of transvaluation. He did not consider speech acts or language in general as the primary mechanism for negotiating those projects. But reading Locke from the perspective of figures like Prodicus demonstrates the necessity of rhetoric in negotiating such situations. Language shapes our value systems and offers the possibility of reshaping such value systems in the future.

Developing this line of thinking further, Aristotle argued that epideictic rhetoric urges a specific course of action (1984, p. 61). Embedded in the praise of an individual and the expression of a person's good qualities is

the suggestion that the speaker would urge the audience to do as the person being praised has done. In fact, one motivation for epideictic speech is to suggest ways for the audience to act in the future. Such an argument aligns values with imperatives to action just as Locke did. In Aristotle's case, however, the act of linguistic display must employ the exaggeration of past excellence so as to inspire future action of the same kind. The social function of *The New Negro* is designed with exactly the same intention—to inspire future excellence based on past performance. More generally, however, Aristotle's position highlights the necessity of testing rhetoric by its consequences. Just as political rhetoric urges a course of action, so too does epideictic if it expects the audience to perpetuate the value being praised. Locke does not look to rhetoric or oratory for this function. Instead he looks for the mechanisms that transmit value systems from one person to another without relying on dogmatic claims and while staying open to the possibility of revising value-feelings. Locke's theory of values, by attending to feelings and actions, points to a similar way of understanding acts of praise.

By virtue of his attention to pluralism, conflict, transvaluation, and exchange, Locke outlined the intellectual conditions for seeing epideictic rhetoric as a necessary instrument in maintaining a culturally plural democracy. His suggestion that cosmopolitanism should be a broad-based cultural goal given such diversity indicates the role epideictic rhetorics can play in presenting and understanding competing value systems, and helping people to adapt and change in the light of new value imperatives. By celebrating the value of African American art in *The New Negro* and by attempting to display the value of race, Locke proceeded to engage in the practice of epideictic rhetoric outlined by his value theory. His cultural pluralism had, in fact, established the need for finding practical mechanisms for guiding the construction of value systems in a culture shot through with contingency, plurality, change, and competition regarding our imperatives to action.

THE NEW NEGRO, RACE, AND RECIPROCITY

The New Negro and the Harlem Renaissance both highlight the complicated and dangerous attempt to forge a new sense of group-identity while refuting and destroying old stereotypes. Locke understood such a task as necessary for the full and equal participation of Negroes in American society. Race pride would replace exclusive and oppressive racist policies by offering alternative grounds on which to conduct cultural exchanges between groups. Without race pride and the subsequent exchanges between different groups, political and economic equality cannot be achieved. But *The New Negro* and the idea of race pride strike at a profound problem for a pragmatist like Locke: How does one reconcile a philosophy that refuses the primacy of identity with the politics of racial group advocacy? In other words, how does

one avoid the dangers that attend the original stereotypical characterizations of Negro life while inventing counter-stereotypes?

Locke answered this dilemma in two ways. First, he turned all questions of race into questions of culture, and not blood or biology: "If you have the same manners and customs and have allegiance to the same social system you belong to the same race...even though ethnically you may not" (1983b, p. 79). Even when he referenced links to African culture by virtue of "forefathers" and "blood descendants," this blood link functions not on the biological level but instead as a social symbol of connection that provides special "cultural inspiration" through a "sense of direct cultural kinship" (1925, p. 256). Second, rendering questions of race into questions of culture points to the process of negotiating group identity, not the stereotypes that result from the process. Locke's larger point is that "if a 'New Negro' is not born and reborn every half generation or so, something is radically wrong" (1989, pp. 231–232). Any stagnation of the continual process of developing new and better group identities would mean that the Negro has been arrested again in stereotype and remains "more formula than human being" (1925, p. 3). These two arguments provide the warrant for Locke's strategic essentialism. He believed that if some forms of essentialism are the products of cultural production (and not biological or political racism) then they can serve a useful function in animating and correcting the process of achieving cosmopolitanism through reciprocity and exchange.

Locke consistently used verb tenses hovering between the present and the future (between "it is" and "it promises to be") to emphasize Negro life in transition. For example, Locke argued, "in the very process of being transplanted, the Negro is becoming transformed" (1925, p. 6). Because of such formulations it is difficult to decide whether the New Negro, as a form of group identity, already exists or is being created. This is not a logical weakness. Locke's emphasis is always on the transformation, not the foundation of a concept. Accordingly, the New Negro is a project and a projection, not a fixed image. Locke believed that it is only the acknowledged social contingency of any proclaimed collective identity that can save the new type from the rigidity and harmfulness of the old stereotypes. Similarly, the "new aesthetic" and "philosophy of life" constructed by Negro artists and underlying new representations of Negroes in literature and art cannot proclaim fixed principles (p. 49). Instead, such a "new aesthetic" can serve primarily to "break through the stereotypes to a new style, a distinctive fresh technique, and some sort of characteristic idiom" (p. 267). This, according to Watts (2002), requires that Locke establish a mode of invention that makes a specific ethos possible. I would add that those acts of invention also serve an epideictic function that must precede any effective attempts at public deliberation.

Locke's pragmatist aesthetics, therefore, ties art closely to epideictic rhetoric. His essays in *The New Negro* understand art as a purposive activity

with a social function. By focusing on art's use for "self-expression" and "self-determination," Locke argued, "the social promise of our recent art is as great as the artistic" (p. 52). In other words, along with the "old and still unfinished task of making material headway," he advocated for the contributions of Negro artists as the privileged means for the Negro's full acceptance in American society: "The especially cultural recognition they win should in turn prove the key to the reevaluation of the Negro which must precede or accompany any further betterment of race relationships" (p. 15). The artwork celebrated in *The New Negro* is designed to promote the cultural recognition of African Americans and to advance "a new democracy in American culture," because democracy cannot tolerate cultural disrespect toward ethnic groups (p. 9). Locke's pragmatist aesthetics recognized that democracy, like art and culture, is best served by open exchange between different ways of thought and diverse ethnic voices. Negro expression, therefore, must be treated as a well-respected, interactive part of American culture:

Democracy itself is obstructed and stagnated to the extent that any of its channels are closed. Indeed they cannot be selectively closed. So the choice is not between one way for the Negro and another for the rest, but between American institutions frustrated on the one hand and American ideals progressively fulfilled and realized on the other. (p. 12)

In short, Locke's focus on race pride and its expression through art and culture issues from a belief that if American democracy is to fulfill its promise, all voices must find mechanisms for participation and for outlining the collective identity and values that an American civilization might live by. By focusing on art, value theory, and group identity, Locke has suggested that the practice of epideictic rhetoric is a necessary means for the creation of such a democracy and for the ongoing process of negotiating group identity.

Locke suggested the New Negro as a conception of what African Americans might stand for and leaves this representation open to modifications. In other words, by voicing dissent from current forms of representation, he instigated the quest for new representations as a continuous search for a new consensus. I would add that Locke's position makes the production of a group identity a rhetorical process. It is a process guided by what classical scholars would have called epideictic rhetoric because it praises or blames and in so doing highlights the use of values in the construction of community standards of excellence. Thus Locke pointed to the connections between art and epideictic rhetoric, and the significance of those connections for creating a vibrant social space that conditions the possibility of democratic politics. But he departed from classical lines of thought by emphasizing the culturally plural realities of American society, and thus extended the significance of epideictic rhetoric by focusing on the importance of exchanges between different subgroups. Epideictic rhetoric,

therefore, becomes a mechanism for exchange, assimilation, and transformation. Locke suggested reciprocity and exchange as a mechanism for overcoming violence, oppression, and segregation. I suggest that such exchanges are fundamentally rhetorical processes, processes in which persuasive voices have the capacity to regulate and influence the changes taking place. Eloquence in the form of a speech, story, painting, or play shapes the perceptions of the artist and audience and results in the articulation of new forms of identity, better value systems, and new forms of pragmatically grounded, epideictic rhetoric—a lesson that Locke makes clear.

CULTURAL PLURALISM, AESTHETICS, AND EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC

Although Locke could not and did not posit a relationship between rhetoric and aesthetics, his work does suggest that such a relationship exists and ought to be cultivated. Like Dewey's (1934) pragmatist take on art, Locke's work eradicated the traditional preoccupation with being that has marked much philosophical work on aesthetics. As Shusterman (1999) suggested (regarding both Locke and Dewey), "art's highest and most general use is the improvement of life" (p.102). This indicates that art has the potential "to express and change attitudes" (p. 103). From the perspective of both Dewey and Locke's pragmatism, art plays a vital and deeply practical and productive role in socio-cultural affairs and as a mode of living. Such a perspective suggests a deep affinity between rhetoric and aesthetics. Locke's work, therefore, can contribute to ongoing conversations in contemporary rhetorical theory concerning the relationship between aesthetics and rhetoric (Poulakos & Whitson, 1995; Vivian, 2000). Locke's unique contribution to this discussion lies in his commitment to pluralism and his belief that cultural pluralism could be fostered through aesthetic practice. This is accomplished, as I argue throughout this essay, through the cultivation of a broad and effective epideictic rhetoric. Thus, Locke's Black aesthetic breaks down traditional distinctions between rhetoric and aesthetics through such practical commitments, and in some ways such a move anticipates some of the arguments raised by contemporary proponents of the "Black Aesthetic" (see Gayle, 1972).

The Harlem Renaissance program of using art to advance freedom and equality for African Americans derived from a belief in the central role of aesthetic experience in the achievement of new forms of solidarity and understanding, and thus in the transformation and integration of cultures. In this way, the Harlem Renaissance was a striking experiment in cultural pluralism. Locke's role in this experiment was that of a mediator, or cross-cultural interpreter. He sought to further human solidarity through specific acts of recognition, identification, and exchange with diverse groups. Many writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance believed that realistic fiction, poetry,

and drama would bring greater interracial understanding. But the Harlem Renaissance did not succeed. Compared with the overt political activism of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, the kind of equality and reciprocity that Locke and others sought through aesthetics remained (and remains) largely out of reach. How can we revise Locke's ideas so that, in the crucible of experience, they are better able to produce the results sought?

Locke faced a double challenge: First, he needed to articulate the intellectual conditions for understanding the role of art in generating useful notions of group identity, and second, he needed to open spaces for the possibility of displaying that art and engaging in cross-cultural exchanges. Two problems arise from this position. Locke was missing both a robust account of exactly how to manage the interactions between subgroups as well as a clear indication of where those interactions are supposed to take place. By virtue of the recent interest in his scholarship, Locke's ideas are clearly still a vital and useful resource for our own moment. But if we expect those ideas to have a larger impact on American life, we must extend them to offer a clear account of the mechanisms for negotiating cross-cultural exchanges and an argument for the creation of physical spaces to make such exchanges possible. According to my interpretation, the tradition of epideictic rhetoric offers an important resource for addressing those problems.

Locke pointed to the need for finding an appropriate epideictic rhetoric for the health and maintenance of American democracy. Such a rhetoric must find spaces for the articulation of community standards of excellence. The classical emphasis on the funeral oration, speaking competition, or festival must be extended or revised to account for contemporary cultural spaces in which art is used for the display of values, the development of community identity, and education. In addition, an epideictic rhetoric should demonstrate how art and language can display competing values, forge identities for larger communities, and regulate the interactions between different communities and different value systems. Locke's position suggests that rhetorics of celebration, transformation, and aesthetic performance are critical to the health and maintenance of culturally plural democracies because they can regulate and manage interactions between subgroups. If multiple value systems are inevitable, then such rhetorics are a necessary means of creating productive dialogues between different value systems.

Locke can be understood as part of the epideictic tradition for several reasons. First, he celebrated the value and promise of African American art. Second, such celebrations are meant to help forge and display a notion of community or group identity, which he saw as a necessary means of combating racism. Third, he engaged in acts of display that point out specific instances of artistic excellence to encourage the continued development of a tradition of excellence. Fourth, he tried to uncover what remains hidden to other communities in American society, and in so doing tried to teach people about the virtue of African American art and culture. And fifth, he

described the role of values in determining human actions and sought ways of revising those values in the face of competition and disagreement.

However, Locke also extended the tradition of classical epideictic rhetoric. From his perspective epideictic plays a necessary role in regulating relationships and exchanges between competing value systems and subgroups. In other words, epideictic is a necessary art to master if we are to live in a plural democracy and tolerate other values and reshape our own values through reciprocal exchanges. Mastering epideictic rhetoric requires one to become a cosmopolitan willing to be transformed through interactions with others. In addition, race is a necessary *topos* for epideictic rhetoric to negotiate because it is an integral part of group identity and value systems. From this perspective many different kinds of art are implicated in epideictic rhetorical processes and seek to have an impact on social relations by offering representations of a group's identity. Accordingly, beauty, artistic expression, and aesthetics are useful for the maintenance of community life in democratic societies.

We need epideictic rhetoric in American democracy because it helps us understand one another while maintaining an open-ended tolerance for change, plurality, and revision. But Locke did not mention rhetoric in his writings. Instead, he focused on methods for creating community and solidarity in plural democracies. From his perspective, solidarity is tied closely to art and to reciprocity. Artistic expression can represent and define a community, and cross-cultural exchanges can bring diverse communities closer together. Locke's deepest concern was with creating a vibrant *polis* that can accommodate competing value systems, and in turn condition the possibility for the practice of politics without racism. He is interested in using the arts as a method for grounding democracy on legitimate claims to equality. For Locke, culture and community exist in tension with plurality and change. Reconciling that tension without violence requires attention to epideictic rhetoric. In such a case, epideictic rhetoric becomes a necessary mechanism for using aesthetics to regulate plurality in a democracy. Unfortunately, American society lacks the institutional opportunities for, the intellectual commitment to, and a theoretical understanding of the practice of epideictic rhetoric. Locke offered us the possibility to rethink such issues.

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