Race, Rhetoric, and the Contest over Civic Education

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It is one of the more revealing paradoxes in contemporary liberal arts education that recent cutting edge discourses proffered in the service of democratic renewal—discourses frequently excoriated as trendy, postmodern, or ultra-radical by academics and the popular press alike—share many of the assumptions of some of the oldest theoretical justifications for higher education in America. Three such recent contributions—Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, Keith Gilyard’s *Race, Rhetoric, and Composition*, and Gary Olson and Lynn Worsham’s *Race, Rhetoric, and the Postcolonial*—are primarily concerned with reasserting the university’s role in producing a literate and critical civic body in the interest of nurturing and sustaining a vibrant democratic culture of politics. Freire’s collection of essays, published after his death in 1997, speaks to the necessity of an educational discourse steeped in democratic principles at a time when neoliberal agendas redefine public goods (such as schooling) as private interests, and thereby suggest that “we have no choice but to adapt both our hopes and our abilities to the new global market” (Aronowitz, Introduction 7). The contributors to Gilyard’s edited volume theorize race both at the level of classroom practice and in the broader professional conversations and debates that animate the field of rhetoric and composition. Finally, the Olson and Worsham collection consists of six interviews with internationally known scholars—Homi Bhabha, Gloria Anzaldúa, Michael Eric Dyson, Stuart Hall, Ernesto LaClau, and Chantal Mouffe—who address the dynamic interconnections among the practice of democratic citizenship, the politics of race, and the study of rhetoric and composition.

For those unfamiliar with the history of American universities or the social foundations of education, the relationships among terms such as rhetoric, pedagogy, democracy, ethics, and race are not immediately apparent. Nor will this particular combination of topics fall easily on the ears of those in academia who insist that education (even civic education)
can somehow be abstracted from broader questions of politics in a multi­
racial and multi-ethnic society. The scholars represented in these three
volumes share a fundamental commitment to democracy as an ongoing
educational and ethical project. Although their theoretical work offers
new directions for the field of rhetoric and composition—and for liberal
arts education in general—such commitment is not entirely new. Dedica­
tion to education for democracy, for example, can be traced as far back as
the radical educational work of Thomas Jefferson, the Enlightenment
philosopher and statesman who was one of the first to put forth a multi­
tiered plan for free and universal public education as the primary means
for safeguarding a young and fragile democratic nation. Of course, the
Jeffersonian legacy is also central to any understanding of the nation’s
most vexing contradiction: a historical commitment to universal citizen­
ship and to free, public education that simultaneously excludes nonwhite
races and women. I do not mean to suggest that current progressive work
is merely a recuperation of a forgotten rhetorical model of university
education; instead, I want to locate such work within a tradition of thought
about the relationship between higher education and the practice of
citizenship while at the same time demonstrating where that work departs
from tradition to engage its most critical theoretical weaknesses and
exclusions.

Recently, there has been an odd convergence of rhetorics deployed by
academics on the left and on the right in the current contest over the future
of liberal arts education. The language of curricular reform has expanded.
Whereas “culture” (or the more specific “canon”) was the contested
terrain in the academy a decade ago, battlelines are now being drawn
concerning notions of “citizenship” and “civic education” as well. The
broadening of this theater of struggle is not necessarily a negative turn of
events; it may even produce more, rather than less, latitude for negotiation
among generally opposed ideological positions in the humanities. In
contrast to the go-nowhere debates over culture—the Matthew Arnold­
or-bust idiom of the right versus an often essentialized identity politics on
the left—civic education offers a language of the social, of social
responsibility (and social change) often lost in allegiances to the indi­
vidual cultivation of pure taste or to narrowly defined group solidarities.
Certainly, this has been the case at dozens of schools (such as Berkeley,
Wisconsin, Harvard, Cornell, and George Mason) where student and
faculty protests against the growing corporate influence on research and
curricular requirements have recently erupted. As Kevin Avruch, a
professor of anthropology at GMU, notes, such restructuring has “actu­
ally united professors on the left and right" (qtd. in Press 52). Avruch explains that although the faculty at GMU are often characterized as "overly liberal," they discovered that they had at least one thing in common: "we share a nineteenth-century view that our job is to educate well-rounded citizens" (52). Thus, the rhetoric of civic education also provides a shared language informed by democratic—rather than market—traditions to fight the ongoing vocationalization and corporatization of higher education. At the same time, citizenship, like culture, is not a stable referent. As often as appeals are made to the education of future generations of citizens in a variety of academic venues, shockingly little attention is given to the different ways in which citizenship as an ideal and a set of practices is defined and negotiated both currently and historically. As Judith Shklar aptly notes, "there is no concept more central in politics than citizenship, and none more variable in history, or contested in theory" (1).

Hence, my continued reliance on war metaphors is not accidental. I use them to dramatize my effort to shift the debate over liberal arts education, in Chantal Mouffe’s terms, from the realm of antagonism to one of agonism. If, as Mouffe explains, an antagonism defines a “relation between enemies” in which each group wants to destroy the other, then agonism marks a relation among “adversaries” who struggle “in order to establish a different hegemony” (Worsham and Olson, “Rethinking” 182). My goal, correspondingly, is not to wage a polemical war, the point of which is a simple dismissal of concepts of citizenship and civic education other than my own; rather, it is an attempt to bring historical evidence to bear on an evaluation of different articulations of citizenship and corresponding forms of education. The purpose of this essay, then, is threefold. First, it seeks to reaffirm both critical citizenship as a core value and the centrality of civic education to democratic public life at a time when “visionary reform” has led to the corporatization of the university and capitalism becomes synonymous with democracy itself. Second, it maps the history of various definitions of the citizen—liberal, republicanist, and ascriptive Americanist—and the forms of education proper to their development in an effort to establish the centrality of race and rhetoric to current debates over the future of liberal arts education. Third, it examines the necessary and historical linkages between the educational theory and curricular development, the practice of citizenship, and the politics of race. My interest in exploring the various definitions of citizenship and civic education at work in contemporary professional conversations is not to establish the objective equality of all positions.
Although disparate understandings of these key notions demand due consideration, I will nonetheless provide a very specific interpretation of the social values that different theoretical positions represent as I defend my own project, which is part of a broader effort to connect learning to the production of democratic values and to the imperative of emancipatory social change.

Before I examine the current controversy over the role of a liberal arts education in the production of good citizens, it is necessary to first address the various ways in which the concept of the "good citizen" has been defined over time. Hence, in what follows, I will map different conceptions of American civic identity indicating when, historically, each enjoyed a period of relative hegemony. I will then analyze how shifts in the dominant notion of citizenship in the last decades of the nineteenth century articulate with significant changes in college curricula about the same time, changes that dramatically altered the nature and purpose of higher education for the next century. My hope is to establish a relevant historical context for, and therefore a richer assessment of, the contemporary debates over these issues. Of course, it is impossible to render this extensive history in any nuanced or complete way here, and thus I offer only passing apologies for the necessary simplification involved.

**Visions of Citizenship: Liberal, Republicanist, and Ascriptive**

Since Alexis de Tocqueville’s 1840 classic, *Democracy in America*, the tradition of American political philosophy has held that citizenship is not determined by birth or inherited traits, but rather by sworn adherence to a set of political ideals, principles, and hopes that comprise liberal democracy. According to the liberal perspective, to be an American citizen, a person does not have to be any particular national, linguistic, religious, or ethnic background. All one has to do is to pledge allegiance to a political ideology centered on the abstract ideals of liberty, equality, and freedom largely derived from the seventeenth-century philosopher John Locke. Conceived in opposition to the oppressive hierarchies of traditional or feudal societies—societies dominated by a monarchy, an aristocracy, or the Church—liberalism has always maintained, as Stuart Hall explains, “a contractual and competitive rather than ascriptive idea of social order” (39). Rather than accept what Hall calls the rigid “social hierarchies characteristic of conservative social philosophies,” liberalism has always been on the side of “change, dynamism, growth, mobility, accumulation and competition.” Accordingly, liberalism has tended to stand for a commitment to individualism, upholding the moral, political
and legal claims of the individual over and against those of the collective, universal rights applicable to all humans or rational agents, the force of reason (and so rational reform), equality, religious toleration rather than repressive medieval religious and intellectual orthodoxies (and so the defense of pluralism), the division of Church and State, and progress through the promotion of commerce and the sciences. Citizenship in a liberal polity is not a function of birthright or inheritance, but of the right of any energetic individual who has achieved social standing and success through the pursuit of his or her own interests. Thus, as Philip Gleason argues, “the universalist ideological character of American nationality meant that it was open to anyone who willed to become an American” (62). From Tocqueville to Louis Hartz’s 1955 classic, The Liberal Tradition in America, the Lockean liberal foundation of American political thought has enjoyed an uncontested hegemony.

Beginning in the late 1960s, however, the received understanding of American political culture as overwhelmingly liberal democratic has been significantly challenged in at least three ways. Following the lead of Bernard Bailyn and his groundbreaking 1967 publication, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, a number of historians such as Gordon Wood, John Pocock, and Lance Banning have claimed that American political philosophy has been shaped by traditions of republicanism that are different from, and in significant ways opposed to, the liberalism of Locke. According to Pocock, the origins of civic republicanism extend back to the works of Aristotle and Cicero, but it is in Machiavelli’s fifteenth-century Florence that such traditions find their apotheosis and go on to influence American political thought. In contrast to liberalism’s conception of liberty as freedom from state interference in individual private pursuits, the common feature of diverse strains of republican thought is, according to Rogers Smith, “an emphasis on achieving institutions and practices that make collective self-governance in pursuit of a common good possible for the community as a whole” (“American” 231).

Against the liberal concern for the individual’s universal rights and freedoms, the second critique parallels the first. Communitarian political theorists like Michael Sandel and Alasdair MacIntyre acknowledge the dominance of liberal philosophy in American thought, but they also argue that the liberal conception of the individual is an entirely atomistic one, leaving no room for a theory of political community or a notion of public good. In other words, because liberalism holds that the individual is “naturally” driven by power, competition, self-interest, and security, it
follows that the liberal concept of the good society is one in which individuals can pursue their private affairs with the least interference. The few constraints that society imposes are necessary to ensure the equal protection of all in the common pursuit of their self-interests, to prevent individuals from destroying one another in a Hobbesian “war of all against all.” Hence, liberalism has no way to engage the desire for, or necessity of, meaningful collective political life or pride in origin; neither can it accommodate such notions as public-mindedness, civic duty, or active political participation in a community of equals.

In contrast to the liberal tension between the individual and the state, republicanist thought favors free popular government, requiring citizens to actively participate in their own self-rule. Although liberalism has contributed the notion of “universal citizenship” to American political thought, it has also reduced citizenship to “a mere legal status” (Mouffe 62). Conversely, civic republicanism holds citizenship to be an ongoing activity or a practice. Moreover, as Adrian Oldfield argues, “civic republicanism recognizes that, unsupported, individuals cannot be expected to engage in the practice [of citizenship]. This means more than that individuals need empowering and need to be afforded with opportunities to perform the duties of the practice: it means, further, that they have to be provided with a sufficiency of motivation” (79). In Oldfield’s view, the motivations for active political citizenship include the capacity to attain “a degree of moral and political autonomy” that a liberal rights-based citizenship cannot vouchsafe; it also maintains that direct participation in the political life of the nation creates the conditions for the highest form of moral and intellectual growth. In addition to full political participation, republicanism also requires that citizens acknowledge the goals of the political community and the needs of individuals as one and the same—hence, Montesquieu’s argument that citizens in a classical republic must be raised “like a single family” (37). Identification with one’s political community, Smith argues, is achieved through “a pervasive civic education in patriotism reinforced by frequent public rites and ceremonies, censorship of dissenting ideas, preservation of a single religion if possible, limits on divisive and privatizing economic pursuits, and strict restraints on the addition of aliens to the citizenry” (“American” 231). Thus, a successful republic is characterized by considerable social homogeneity and must be composed of a relatively small number of citizens. According to Smith, such demands have no small role to play in justifying a wide range of political exclusions and inequalities. “The demand for homogeneity,” Smith concludes, “could be used to defend
numerous ethnocentric impulses, including citizenship laws that discriminated on the basis of race, sex, religion, and national origins. The second requirement helped generate and maintain America's commitment to federalism, to state and local autonomy—a commitment often used to justify national acquiescence in local inequalities" ("American" 231).

Recently, scholars such as Shklar and Smith have recently extended the liberal critique by taking up the question of American civic identity from the singular perspective of historically excluded groups—namely, women and minorities of color. Shklar has demonstrated how institutionalized forms of servitude were not anomalous to but absolutely constitutive of a modern popular representative republic dedicated to liberty and freedom. Shklar writes, "The equality of political rights, which is the first mark of American citizenship, was proclaimed in the accepted presence of its absolute denial. Its second mark, the overt rejection of hereditary privileges, was no easier to achieve in practice, and for the same reason" (1). Similarly, Smith sets out to assess the critique of civic republicanism through an investigation of American citizenship laws that both defined what citizenship was and who was capable of achieving it. His Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History offers a fundamental redefinition of American political culture. Smith contends that though many liberal and republican elements were visible, much of the history of American citizenship laws did not fit the liberalism of Montesquieu and Hartz or the republicanism of Pocock and MacIntyre. Smith argues,

Rather than stressing protection of individual rights for all in liberal fashion, or participation in common civic institutions in republican fashion, American law had long been shot through with forms of second-class citizenship, denying personal liberties and opportunities for political participation to most of the adult population on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, and even religion. . . . [M]any of the restrictions on immigration, naturalization, and equal citizenship seemed to express views of American civic identity that did not feature either individual rights or membership in a republic. They manifested passionate beliefs that America was by rights a white nation, a Protestant nation, a nation in which true Americans were native-born men with Anglo-Saxon ancestors. (Civic 2-3)

Accordingly, Smith identifies yet another tradition in American political thought in addition to liberalism and civic republicanism—namely, the
tradition of "ascriptive Americanism." From the dawn of the republic, Smith explains, many Americans defined citizenship not in terms of personal liberties or popular self-governance but in terms of "a whole array of particular cultural origins and customs—with northern European, if not English, ancestry; with Christianity, especially dissenting Protestantism, and its message for the world; with the white race; with patriarchal familial leadership and female domesticity; and with all the economic and social arrangements that came to be seen as the true, traditional 'American way of life'" ("American" 234). According to Smith, ascriptive Americanism—or the identification of American nationality with a particular ethnocultural identity—became a full-fledged civic ideology by the late nineteenth century, spurred by such events as the growth of racial science, the alarm over mass European immigration, and desires to dismantle those social policies associated with Reconstruction.

It is important to note that Smith's thesis about multiple traditions is not an attempt to shift responsibility for the vast inequalities of American life onto its ascriptive traditions, exonerating liberal and republican values and institutions. To be sure, Matthew Frye Jacobson and David Theo Goldberg have also demonstrated how republican and liberal traditions have been complicitous with racialized ideologies and exclusions. For example, Jacobson argues that citizenship was a racially inscribed concept from the start of the new nation. "Political identity," he explains, was rendered through "racial identity," establishing, at least implicitly, a "European political order in the New World" (23). Although most scholars have argued that attempts to build a democracy on both gender and racial exclusion are a profound hypocrisy and a betrayal of democracy's most sacred principles, Jacobson observes that racial and gendered exclusions cannot be understood as mere inconsistencies in an otherwise liberal political philosophy; on the contrary, racialism is inseparable from—and is, in fact, constitutive of—the ideology of republicanism. Both the tenets of classical republicanism and the racist practices that normalized the equation of whiteness with citizenship have deep roots in Enlightenment thought. According to Jacobson, the Enlightenment experiment in democratic forms of government "seemed to call for a polity that was disciplined, virtuous, self-sacrificing, productive, far-seeing, and wise—traits that were all racially inscribed in eighteenth-century Euro-American thought" (26). The shift from monarchic power to democratic power, Jacobson explains, "demanded of its participants a remarkable degree of self-possession—a condition already denied literally to Africans in slavery and figuratively to all 'nonwhite' or 'heathen'
peoples” as well as women who were found lacking in prevailing conceptions of reason, dispassionate judgment, and overall “fitness for self-government” (26). And republicanism, with its emphasis on the common good, community, and self-sacrifice also demanded from “the people” an extraordinary moral character. At a time when the Anglo-Saxon was hailed as a paragon of political genius, reflection and restraint, Jacobson wryly notes that a definition of the word *Negro* in the 1795 Philadelphia *Encyclopedia* included “idleness,” “treachery,” “revenge,” “debauchery,” “nastiness,” and “intemperance” (27).

Similarly, Goldberg has eloquently unveiled liberalism as the pre-eminent modern—and modernizing—ideology and its central paradox: as modernity commits itself to the idealized principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, as it increasingly insists upon the moral irrelevance of race, there is a proliferation of racial identities and sets of exclusions that these principles rationalize and sustain. “The more abstract modernity’s universal identity,” he explains, “the more it has to be insisted upon, the more it needs to be imposed. The more ideologically hegemonic liberal values seem and the more open to difference liberal modernity declares itself, the more dismissive of difference it becomes and the more closed it seeks to make the circle of acceptability” (6-7). Accordingly, Goldberg traces the liberal impulse from Locke, Hume, Kant, and Mill, to contemporary theorists of rights, demonstrating where and how race is conceptually able to insinuate itself into the terms of each discursive shift.

Smith’s argument assumes that American civic identity has always drawn from these three interrelated but analytically distinguishable ideologies. In this way, Smith is able to address not only where these traditions mutually inform each other in the promotion of racist exclusions, but also where these traditions are in tension. For example, Smith acknowledges the ways in which a republicanist ideology, with its insistence on social homogeneity and small political communities, feeds racist exclusions. At the same time, however, he also points to the crucial tension between liberalism’s commitment to free-wheeling individualism and the socially repressive elements of republicanist and ascriptive Americanist ideologies; and the tension between republicanism’s emphasis on civic participation and duty to the polity and an ascriptive tradition that theorizes citizenship not in terms of one’s capacities for “doing” but rather in terms of one’s innate “being.”

Of course, numerous scholars and critics have and will continue to protest that such ascriptive American impulses, like racisms in general, are more psychological than ideological—a mix of primal tribal loyalties
and the fears and anxieties that accompany an encounter with the Other. What such theories of racism leave unexamined is the degree to which occurrences of racialized exclusion are in fact quite "rationally" instituted for the purpose of gaining political and economic power. Smith's insistence that ascriptive Americanism proved to be not only intellectually respectable but also politically and legally authoritative has been supported by historical evidence recently brought to light by Jacobson and Goldberg as well as by John Higham, Reginald Horsman, George Fredrickson, and Ivan Hannaford, among others.6

As these scholars make clear, the discourse of race has been in circulation since the seventeenth century, but its ascendancy in the nineteenth century to a form of legitimate science posed dramatic challenges to the central tenets of classical republicanist and liberal political traditions, effecting changes in both American and European political thought. In his impressive Race: The History of an Idea in the West, Hannaford explains how the centuries-long intellectual history of race—a discourse that increasingly came to identify itself with natural history, science, and thus modernity's interest in scientific forms of social amelioration (or social engineering)—challenged traditional notions of citizenship and political community, derived from antiquity, that laid the foundation for modern political thought. According to Hannaford,

The emergence of political life and law (polis and nomos) [in antiquity] was the outcome of a heated and controversial debate about words and letters (logomachy) in a public place (agora), which might lead to interesting solutions to the puzzles (logograph) of human existence. One important suggestion arising from this discourse was that secular human beings might be persuaded to try a novel form of governance that provided options and alternatives to the prevailing forms of rule then surrounding them. It was not a matter of Nature, but a difficult and original choice. (10-11; emphasis added)7

In contrast, from the end of the seventeenth century to the dawn of the twentieth, as Hannaford observes, natural history increasingly became the basis for inquiry into legitimate forms of government. That is, emphasis was placed on the temperament and character of races and the discovery of their true origins rather than on political histories and the vices and virtues of actual states. Writers like Montesquieu, Hume, Blumenbach, Kant, Herder, and Burke contributed to the emergence of a self-conscious idea of race. With the work of Niebuhr in the early nineteenth century, history was not, as Hannaford puts it, "the history of
historical political communities of the Greco-Roman kind," but "transmogrifications of peoples into ‘races’ on a universal scale" (14). After Charles Darwin, Hannaford argues, "it was generally agreed that classical political theory had little or nothing to offer Western industrial society. Notions of state drew support from the new literatures of nation and race. The tests of true belonging were no longer decided on action as a citizen but upon the purity of language, color, and shape. And since none of these tests could ever be fully satisfied, all that was left in place of political settlement were ideas of assimilation, naturalization, evacuation, exclusion, expulsion, and finally liquidation" (14-15; emphasis added). Hannaford thus urges us, following Michael Oakeshott’s provocative suggestion, to understand race as "an antonym for politics" (13).

Similarly, capturing the rise of mid-nineteenth-century faith in race-thinking and the simultaneous decline in the modern liberal commitments, Horsman observes that it had become “unusual by the late 1840s to profess a belief in innate human equality and to challenge the idea that a superior race was about to shape the fates of other races for the future good of the world. To assert this meant challenging not only popular opinion, but also the opinion of most American intellectuals” (250). More recently, Jacobson addresses the ways in which racial science reformed common sense understandings of the governing capacities of both non-white and white races. According to Jacobson, the massive influx of European immigrants whose entrance was permitted solely on the grounds of their whiteness (in accordance with the Naturalization Act of 1790) now caused concern that the immigration policy was entirely too liberal and too inclusive. “Fitness for self-government,” an attribute accorded exclusively to white people prior to the nineteenth century, now "generated a new perception of some Europeans’ unfitness for self-government, now rendered racially in a series of subcategorical white groupings—Celt, Slav, Hebrew, Iberic, Mediterranean, and so on—white Others of a supreme Anglo-Saxon dom” (42). Jacobson explains,

It was the racial appellation “white persons” in the nation’s naturalization law that allowed the migrations from Europe in the first place; the problem this immigration posed to the polity was increasingly cast in terms of racial difference and assimilability; the most significant revision of immigration policy, the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, was founded upon a racial logic borrowed from biology and eugenics. . . . (8)

Thus, Jacobson further complicates the history of ascriptive Americanism as a civic ideology by reconceiving it as a response to the political crisis
created as a result of the over-inclusivity of the category "free white persons" in the Naturalization Act of 1790, and hence a "history of a fundamental revision of whiteness itself" (68).

In short, democratic, republican, and ascriptive ideologies, Smith argues, have always appeared on the historical stage in various combinations, rather than any one appearing in a "pure" or "ideal" form. Furthermore, as the above allusion to the impact of racial science on late nineteenth-century American political thought would indicate, Smith contends that various combinations of "liberal republicanism" dominated political agendas up to the 1870s, after which a "republican nativist" agenda became more prominent. The hegemony of "republican nativism" only increased through the 1920s and persisted until the 1950s, when contemporary liberal ideas gained greater authority ("American" 229, n5).

I want to extend the implications of this important body of work on American civic identity by arguing that the reproduction of alternative conceptions of citizenship mandates various forms of institutional pressure, particularly in educational apparatuses where the onus of responsibility for molding a competent and productive citizenry largely falls. If Smith is correct in his assessment of the general rearticulation of citizenship in the last decades of the nineteenth century, one would reasonably expect to see an equally profound curricular shift in higher education commensurate with the dramatic changes in the political thought that marked the era, especially given the university's historic role in the production of political and moral leadership. And, in fact, we do see such a shift. Coinciding with the transformation of the notion of citizenship and of political life more generally, American universities experienced a transition in the humanities first from classical rhetoric to philology and then to literary studies. The transition from rhetoric to English studies is significant, particularly when one considers how uniform and unchanging the college curriculum was until the late nineteenth century. In the promotion of civic responsibility and political leadership, undergraduate education typically centered on three to four years of required rhetoric courses in which students produced written essays and public addresses. Yet, by the turn of the century the classical curriculum had all but disappeared, and English emerged as a new disciplinary formation. Overwhelmingly literary in orientation, the goals of the new curriculum were twofold: to produce an organic awareness of national cultural traditions that link Americanness with a specific version of whiteness and to cultivate "discrimination," good taste, and moral sensibility—the latter objective as racially coded as the former. As curricular emphases shifted
from the production of texts to their consumption, the arrival of literature as an object of formal study inaugurated not only the end of the classical university, but also a dramatic decline in public discourse and the practice of citizenship as an educational imperative.

Thus, the task at hand is to demonstrate in a clear and concise way the differences between the classical curriculum and its modern counterpart in terms of how each negotiates the demands of a broader culture of politics and participates in a politics of culture, particularly with respect to race. To do this, I want to contrast briefly the educational thought of Thomas Jefferson and Calvin Coolidge, both of whom wrote on the civic function of higher education and, more particularly, on the role of language and literature in the production of specific models of civic identity and national cultural tradition. My hope is to make clear how the transition from rhetoric to literary studies is in part a function of changing definitions of citizenship, politics, race, and national identity. Specifically, I will contrast Jefferson's plans for university education, as representative of the "liberal republicanist" ideological interests prior to the late nineteenth century, and Coolidge's program for higher education, as representative of the "nativist republican" agenda that marked the era from the 1870s to the 1950s. In spite of my characterization of the rise of literary education as a "fall" from public grace, my interest is not to argue for a simple "return" to rhetoric, but to demonstrate how forms of race consciousness informed both the classical curriculum and its literary counterpart. Not only is race a central determinant in the history of liberal arts education, it is also central to its future. Race, as I argue later, cannot be addressed as a discourse removed from mainstream educational theory, or as a burden imposed from the outside by the forces of multiculturalism or political correctness. First, in order to grasp the significance of the rise of literary studies in the liberal arts curriculum, it is important to understand the rhetorical tradition that was in place before its eventual decline.

From Rhetorical to Literary Education
Progressive scholars such as Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, James Berlin, and Sharon Crowley have tended to explain the simultaneous decline of classical rhetoric and the rise of literary education in terms of emergent bourgeois class interests. Accordingly, the turn to literature is understood as a major affirmative response—in the name of human creativity and imagination—to the socially repressive and mechanistic nature of the new capitalist order. I want to complicate and rework this
critical tradition by suggesting that to understand this profound curricular shift in the nineteenth-century college, scholars must address the advance of capitalism and the impact of mass immigration, the influence of quasi-scientific discourses (such as evolution, efficiency, and eugenics) and the nation’s commitment to racial segregation. These events, as I’ve already indicated, induced dramatic reconceptualizations of liberal political philosophy, national identity, citizenship, and race—all of which affected educational thought and practice. In other words, to the degree that the political order gets rearticulated in terms of a natural order, citizenship is understood as less contingent on one’s performance in public life than it is on an innate capacity determined by blood and heredity. I do not mean to suggest that civic education is altogether abandoned; rather, I would argue that university curricula have attempted to radically reconfigure the concept of citizen. If the goal of classical rhetorical education was to enhance the practice of citizenship as a performance of duties and responsibilities to the political community in exchange for rights and entitlements in keeping with liberal and republicanist ideologies, the new educational mandate privileging literary study is, at least in part, an attempt to put into place an ascriptive notion of citizenship in which citizenship is not a function of “doing” but a function of “being.” Thus, it becomes the “duty” of students endowed with the appropriate class and racial inheritance simply to receive, appreciate, and protect their distinctive ethnocultural heritage.¹⁰

According to historians of rhetorical and literary education—such as James Berlin, Michael Halloran, and Gerald Graff—rhetoric was at the center of a relatively stable and unchanging college curriculum prior to the late nineteenth century. Since their appearance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, American colleges followed the traditions established by Oxford, Cambridge, and the continental universities in the preparation of its overwhelmingly white male student body for law, ministry, medicine, and politics (see Graff). Rhetoric was emphasized so heavily in these disciplines because, as Halloran explains,

It was understood as the art through which all other arts could become effective. The more specialized studies in philosophy and natural science and the classical languages and literatures would be brought to a focus by the art of rhetoric and made to shed light on problems in the world of social and political affairs. The purpose of education was to prepare men for positions of leadership in the community, as it had been for Cicero and Quintilian. (252)
Investigating the various ways in which rhetorical education was conceived in the classical college, Halloran argues that in contrast to the anti-classical bias in the seventeenth-century college, classical rhetoric as the art of public discourse flourished in the eighteenth century at Harvard, William and Mary, and Yale. As Halloran observes, the tradition of classical rhetoric gave "primary emphasis to communication on public problems, problems that arise from our life in political communities" (246). The emergence of the classical impulse was reflected in the increasing curricular emphasis on the English language and on effective oral communication that dealt with public issues and concerns, a shift that Halloran attributes to the greater availability of works by Cicero and Quintilian during the second decade of the eighteenth century (249).

A graduate of William and Mary in the mid-1760s, Thomas Jefferson wrote extensively on the relationship between higher education and the political life of the nation, and I would argue, his views are clearly reflective of the classical training he received there. In fact, Jefferson's vast educational plans for a free and universal multi-tiered educational system (including primary, grammar, and university training) are central to his social and political thought. In Jefferson's view, education was the primary means for producing the kind of critically informed and active citizenry necessary to both nurture and sustain a democratic nation, and he argued, in keeping with classical republicanist tradition, that democracy was the highest form of political organization for any nation because it provided the conditions for its citizens to grow both intellectually and morally through the exercise of these faculties. In addition to three legislative proposals that constitute the core of his educational thought—Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge; A Bill for Amending the Constitution of the College of William and Mary, and Substituting More Certain Revenues for Its Support; and A Bill for Establishing a Public Library—Jefferson elaborated his educational vision in his Notes on the State of Virginia and in numerous private letters to his nephew Peter Carr and others. Jefferson's classic preamble to the 1776 Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge bears the hallmark of his views on the relationship between education and public life:

Whereas . . . certain forms of government are better calculated than others to protect individuals in the free exercise of their natural rights, . . . experience hath shewn, that even under the best forms, those entrusted with power have . . . perverted it into tyranny; and it is believed that the
most effectual means of preventing this would be, to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large. . . . And whereas it is generally true that that people [sic] will be happiest whose laws are best, and are best administered, and that laws will be wisely formed, and honestly administered, in proportion as those who form and administer them are wise and honest. . . . (Boyd 526-27; emphasis added)

As this passage indicates, education is central both to Jefferson’s liberal philosophical leanings and to his republicanist agendas; it is both a means for preserving individual rights and property from all forms of tyranny and a means for enabling wise and honest self-government. What both traditions share, as is evident in Jefferson’s prose, is a concept of education as a preeminently political issue and a concept of politics as a preeminently educational issue. (As I will suggest shortly, Jefferson’s thought also reflects his ascriptive agendas as his role in the nation’s legacy of racialized exclusion makes clear.) After his administration, he penned Bill for Establishing a System of Public Education and the Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Fix the Site of the University of Virginia, commonly known as the Rockfish Gap Report. In this 1818 document, Jefferson maps the objectives for university education and provides an eloquent defense of higher education as a public good, worthy of federal funding. According to Jefferson, the purpose of higher education is to provide the following:

To form the statesmen, legislators and judges, on whom public prosperity and individual happiness are so much to depend;

To expound the principles and structure of government, the laws which regulate the intercourse of nations, those formed municipally for our own government, and a sound spirit of legislation, which banishing all arbitrary and unnecessary restraint on individual action, shall leave us free to do whatever does not violate the equal rights of another;

To harmonize and promote the interests of agriculture, manufactures and commerce, and by well informed views of political economy to give a free scope to the public industry;

To develop the reasoning faculties of our youth, enlarge their minds, cultivate their morals, and instill into them the precepts of virtue and order;

To enlighten them with mathematical and physical sciences, which advance the arts, and administer to the health, the subsistence, and comforts of human life;

And, generally, to form them to habits of reflection and correct action, rendering them examples of virtue to others, and of happiness within themselves. (Honeywell 250)
As these objectives indicate, the branches of higher education are responsible for producing effective moral and political leadership, not trained technicians; where professional interests are alluded to, they are always tied to the interests and well-being of the commonweal. In contrast to the current state of affairs, there is no confusion between education and training. Jefferson divided the university curriculum into ten branches: ancient languages, modern languages, five branches of mathematics and the sciences, government, law, and finally “ideology” (which included studies in grammar, ethics, rhetoric, and belles lettres). Private letters to his nephew and protégé, Peter Carr, indicated more specifically what the study of ideology entailed. Jefferson advised Carr to read ancient history, including works by Herodotus, Thucydides, Quintus Curtius, and Justin; Roman history; modern history; Greek and Latin poetry by Virgil, Terence, Horace, Anacreon, Theocritus, and Homer; and moral philosophy (Peterson 382). According to Jefferson, such readings provide ordinary citizens “knowledge of those facts, which history exhibibeth, that, possessed thereby of the experience of other ages and countries, they may be enabled to know ambition under all its shapes, and prompt to exert their natural powers to defeat its purposes” (Boyd 526-27). The pedagogical emphasis here is on the production of an active and critical citizenry skilled not only in the protection of their individual rights but in the safeguarding of popular self-governance. “If the condition of man is to be progressively ameliorated,” Jefferson argued, “education is to be the chief instrument in effecting it” (Honeywell 148). In light of the direction that rhetorical education would take, it is interesting to note that Jefferson also advises his protégé to read Milton’s Paradise Lost, Ossian, Pope’s works, and Swift’s works “in order to form [his] style in [his] own language” (Peterson 382). These literary works were recommended as models for the improvement of form in oral and written communication and not, as they would later be proffered, for honoring one’s racial heritage.

Thus, Jefferson inevitably looked to education as a means of social, moral, and political uplift as well as an aid to the personal and professional advancement of individual citizens. He hoped that formal educational experience would lead, by force of habit, to learning as a lifelong practice. “Education generates,” Jefferson insisted, “habits of application, of order, and the love of virtue; and controls, by the force of habit, any innate obliquities in our moral organization” (Honeywell 251). In other words, education vouchsafed the progress of “man”:
We should be far, too, from the discouraging persuasion that man is fixed, by the law of his nature, at a given point; that his improvement is a chimera. . . . As well might it be urged that the wild and uncultivated tree, hitherto yielding sour and bitter fruit only, can never be made to yield better; yet we know that the grafting art implants a new tree on the savage stock, producing what is most estimable both in kind and degree. Education, in like manner, engrafts a new man on the native stock, and improves what in his nature was vicious and perverse into qualities of virtue and social worth. (Honeywell 251)

Jefferson was not interested in the rights, civic participation, or general progress of women and men of color; his views on both women and African Americans are now well known. The statesman who penned the Declaration of Independence and proclaimed universal human rights and human equality also insisted that, unlike Native Americans, African Americans did not have the natural intellectual endowment necessary for self-government. In his Notes on the State of Virginia, Jefferson wrote, “Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous” (Peterson 188). As if in anticipation of the eugenic vision of Coolidge a century later, Jefferson also argued that “amalgamation with the other colour produces a degradation to which no lover of his country, no lover of excellence in the human character can innocently consent” (Betts 38). All his major proposals for free public education excluded slaves. Furthermore, as in classical Greece, Jefferson held that women belonged in the private or domestic sphere and not in public life; inasmuch as citizenship was a male privilege, females were provided schooling only at the elementary level. As these exclusions make clear, Aristotle was correct in suggesting that a good citizen is not the same as a good man; in fulfilling the demands of their polity, citizens are only as good as the laws that they frame and obey. Any attempt to reappropriate elements of a “classical” rhetorical education with its emphasis on the responsibilities of citizenship and the importance of participation in public life will have to engage the ways that citizenship and agency itself—defined in terms of fitness for self-government—have been both gendered and racially coded since the nation’s inception.

Jefferson’s 1818 commentary on higher education is in keeping with classical liberalism’s faith in natural law, rationality, freedom, and the ameliorative force of social institutions such as education. Within the next
one hundred years, these "classical" liberal tenets undergo a profound revision in response to rapidly changing social and political conditions and the Darwinian revolution in scientific thought. Unlike Jefferson's faith in the average citizen's capacity to reason, debate, and take action in the interests of justice and the public good, the "modern" search for truth required scientific method and the intervention of expert knowledge. Jefferson's beliefs—that human reason would triumph over the basic instincts of human nature and that social progress was inevitable—were significantly challenged by modern scientific findings. Influenced in part by Darwin's observations that some species decline while the fit survive and in part by the crises brought about by rapid urbanization and industrialization (overcrowding, poverty, disease, crime, revolt), modern liberals no longer believed that progress was inevitable, but required expert social planning and scientific management. Moreover, in contrast to Jefferson's commitment to intellectual and moral growth through education, modern thought held that such improvement was limited by genetic endowment.

Lawrence Cremin explains the influence of Darwin and Spencer on educational thought and practice in the following terms: "because the development of mind followed evolutionary processes and because evolutionary processes worked themselves out over time, independent of immediate human acts, education could never be a significant factor in social progress. The only thing teachers could do was provide the knowledge that would enable people to adapt to their circumstances..." (390). Specifically, Spencer's *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical* was used to legitimate the transition from the classical curriculum to a version of "progressive" education associated with the work of Harvard president Charles W. Eliot and the National Education Association's Committee of Ten. It was in part through Eliot's efforts that the classical curriculum was eventually replaced by a differentiated course of study designed to help the nation's youth adapt to their environment rather than shape or reform it. Alarmed at the increasing ethnic diversity of the school environment and convinced of the intellectual incapacities of all but "pure American stock" (which excluded all those white races that came to the United States in the second wave of European immigration), Eliot became a staunch advocate for vocational education. In 1908, he suggested that modern American society was made up of four largely unchanging social classes: a small leading class, a commercial class devoted to business interests, skilled artisans, and "rough workers." Failure to recognize these divisions, Eliot claimed, resulted in an ineffi-
cient system in which "an immense majority of our children do not receive from our school system an education which trains them for the vocation to which they are clearly destined" (501). Once an advocate of liberal education for all youth, Eliot pushed for a differentiated curriculum appropriate to what he saw as the largely innate capacities of the variously classed and raced youth populations. In the same year, fellow Spencerian Alfred Schultz, bemoaning the limits of assimilation, captured in the following analogy the race consciousness that was so influential in educational reform:

The opinion is advanced that the public schools change the children of all races into Americans. Put a Scandinavian, a German, and a Magyar boy in at one end, and they will come out Americans at the other end. Which is like saying, let a pointer, a setter, and a pug enter one end of a tunnel and they will come out three greyhounds at the other end. (261)

What Schultz's startling pronouncement reflects is an increasingly common concern over the impossibility of Americanization for some (in this instance, white) immigrant races. In fact, some races were agents of de-Americanization, meaning that their presence threatened the purity of the gene pool of "real American stock." To understand how pervasive such race-thinking was in the first decades of the twentieth century, we must also consider the similarity in thought between intellectuals (such as Eliot and Schultz) and Klansmen, such as Imperial Wizard Hiram Wesley Evans, who over a decade later insisted that federal legislation must be passed to keep out delinquent and downtrodden races from the Mediterranean and Alpine regions. Evans proclaimed: "We are demanding ... a return of power into the hands of the everyday, not highly cultured, not overly intellectualized, but entirely un spoiled and not de-Americanized, average citizen of the old stock" (49).

Indeed, evidence of such race-thinking found its way to the executive branches of government. In a 1921 article in Good Housekeeping entitled "Whose Country is This?" Vice President Coolidge supported ascriptive Americanist legislative agendas, rationalizing his view by invoking the same rhetoric as Jefferson: the goal of inculcating good citizens. The production of good citizens, however, was less a matter of civic education than one of social engineering—an attempt to govern through the logic of scientific management and efficiency. In short, this meant subjecting citizens to a process of Americanization, which was only possible with those groups or "races" of people capable of self-government and thus of
full assimilation in the first place. With the racial science of the day behind him, Coolidge declared, "Biological laws tell us that certain divergent people will not mix or blend. The Nordics propagate themselves successfully. With other races, the outcome shows deterioration on both sides" (14). He concluded in favor of legislation restricting the flow of immigrants of non-Nordic origins, stating, "Quality of mind and body suggests that observance of ethnic law is as great a necessity to a nation as immigration law." This ascriptive Americanist agenda reduces the complexities of citizenship to the question of membership—which is determined on the basis of heredity—and ignores altogether issues of citizens' rights, civic duties, and political participation in the community.

As I've already indicated, such a limited notion of citizenship is in part the result of the declining faith in civic institutions as a whole that accompanied the growing influence of racial science. Although the origins of race-thinking hardly began with Darwin and Spencer, their work spawned an intellectual movement in which human society and politics were understood to be subject to the same rules of evolution that applied to the natural world. Thus, as Hannaford argues, it provided a scientific rationale for decrying Aristotelian political theory and all aspects of the Greco-Roman polity that were out of step with modernity (275-76). Society was now understood to be "a natural entity in a state of war in the classic Hobbesian sense, in which power and force in the hands of the classes or races, scientifically applied, would lead inevitably to the progressive ends of . . . 'industrial civilization'" (276). Accordingly, by the mid-1850s notions of legal right, treaty, compromise, settlement, arbitration, and justice that constitute political community were "eclipsed, and then obliterated" by a doctrine of "natural evolutionary course" that expressed itself in a language of "biological necessity, managerial efficiency, and effectiveness in a science of eugenics" (276).

Coolidge did, however, argue for the necessity of higher education, though in vastly different terms than Jefferson. According to Coolidge, the "first great duty" of education was "the formation of character, which is the result of heredity and training" (America's Need 51-52). Whereas Jefferson's educational thought bore the legacy of Enlightenment racism, Coolidge's flirted with eugenics. While the passing of the Johnson Act-Reed Immigration Act was a great victory for Coolidge's administration, he told the National Education Association that such legislation was, in the final analysis, of secondary importance. National progress depended not on the "interposition of the Government" but on "the genius of the people themselves" (13). Real appreciation of this "genius" required more
intense study of our heritage, and particularly those “events which
brought about the settlement of our own land” (38). Curiously, Coolidge’s
referent was not the Revolutionary Era and the end of English colonial
domination. “Modern civilization dates from Greece and Rome,” he
argued, and just as they were “the inheritors of a civilization which had
gone before,” we were now their inheritors (47). In answer to the question,
“What are the fundamental things that young Americans should be
taught?” Coolidge responded, “Greek and Latin literature” (44, 45).
Coolidge’s response gives rise to two apparent contradictions: first, real
“American stock” was not Greek in its origins and, as if to keep it that way,
the Johnson-Reed Act prohibited the real descendants of classical Greece
from acquiring U.S. citizenship. The latter contradiction is easily re­
solved. According to the Dictionary of Races or Peoples, which com­
prised volume five of the Dillingham Commission’s Report on Immigra­
tion and was presented to the sixty-first Congress in December 1910,
ancient Greeks were a different race from modern Greeks, which is now
a degenerated population as a result of the Turkish invasion and subse­
quent amalgamation. Hence, the former contradiction unfolds: Ameri­
cans were the inheritors of civilization not because “we” descended
racially from the ancient Greeks, but because we remained, as the
Johnson-Reed Act would ensure, a pure race. Thus, one witnesses in
Coolidge’s social and educational policy the same fear that Jefferson
voiced: his fear of racial amalgamation. According to Coolidge, “Culture
is the product of a continuing effort. The education of the race is never
accomplished” (America’s Need 49). The process of educating the nation’s
citizenry to understand and take pride in their racial and cultural inherit­
ance was ongoing because its purity was continually threatened by
unassimilable races. In short, the reasons for Coolidge’s support of the
study of Greek and Roman literature are vastly different from Jefferson’s.
For Jefferson, such a study contributed to learning how to take an active
and ongoing role in democratic public life; for Coolidge, it was about the
appreciation and protection of one’s racial endowment through the
harnessing (or educating) of desire in the name of individual morality and
patriotism.

David Shumway has situated the shift from rhetoric to literature in the
period when “historians first proposed the Teutonic-origins theory of
American civilization, that Anglo-Saxonism and Anglophilia reached its
peak among the American cultural elite, and that concerted efforts were
made to Americanize immigrants” (19). In such a climate, the turn to
literature was quite natural. As Shumway explains, “Literature was more
than peripherally related to this racism since it was widely held that literature expresses the essential character of a race. This was true because language, the substance of literature, "is an expression or function of race" (38). As I have attempted to show, however, "Anglo-Saxonism" did more than influence literary conversations; it also changed the ways in which far broader concepts such as the nation, politics, civic duty, citizenship, and civic education were understood. Additionally, the forms of race-thinking that gave rise to racist exclusions have flourished throughout the entire modern period, as they continue to exert their influence today. Covering centuries rather than decades, the influence of racist thought and practice on civil institutions cannot be reduced to the "Anglo-Saxon mystic" or "Anglophilia" of the turn of the century, as if such institutions were now untouched by the politics of race.

What the comparison between Jefferson's and Coolidge's educational thought suggests is that different versions of citizenship—liberal democratic, civic republican, and ascriptive Americanist—find expression in curricular and pedagogical models that put into place subjectivities invested with specific notions of identity and community, knowledge and authority, values and social relations. Additionally, each pedagogical model makes claims on particular forms of consciousness, memory, and agency that influence not only individual subjects but also the collectivity as a whole. By posing the following questions, it is possible to critically assess each model as it circulates in contemporary conversations about the future direction of liberal arts education and around several allied dispositions that bespeak how the relationship between pedagogy and politics is both theorized and enacted. First, what are the conditions for the development of both individual and collective agency? Or, put in slightly different terms, how is learning linked to civic action or social change? Do citizens learn to take an active role in self-government, or is the educational agenda one of adaptation and subordination? Second, how is knowledge produced? Is knowledge production dialogical and open to critique, or is it canonical and sacred and therefore above criticism? Who controls the production of knowledge and who benefits from it? Third, how does each model of pedagogy legitimate different versions of social relations? Do they legitimate democratic relations or hierarchical ones? Do such curricular models and pedagogies give rise to notions of political community that are marked by inclusion or exclusion? Fourth, does the given pedagogical model make clear the grounds for its own authority, or is it considered natural, innate, or prepolitical? Finally, what values are created by such pedagogies? Are social homogeneity and consensus
privileged? Or are difference and dissent privileged? Is obedience or the questioning of authority privileged? With these issues in mind, and in light of the ways in which different versions of citizenship have been articulated to educational policy, I would like to turn to contemporary debates over civic education.¹³

The Contemporary Contest over Civic Education

In a September 1996 issue of the National Review, senior editor and Dartmouth professor Jeffrey Hart announces that something has been terribly amiss in higher education for at least a decade. He compares the discovery to an occasion in a W.H. Auden poem in which a guest at a garden party senses disaster and discovers a corpse on the tennis court. What has so profoundly disturbed the country-club serenity of the Ivy Leagues? His answer: recent intellectual trends such as postmodernism and multiculturalism, as well as their corollary in public policy—namely, affirmative action. “Concomitantly,” he adds, “ideology has been imposed on the curriculum to a startling degree” (38). Nonetheless, Hart assures his readers that all is not lost. And as the title of the essay, “How to get a College Education,” forecasts, he offers the following advice to undergraduates:

Select the ordinary courses. I use ordinary here in a paradoxical and challenging way. An ordinary course is one that has always been taken and obviously should be taken—even if the student is not yet equipped with a sophisticated rationale for so doing. The student should be discouraged from putting his money on the cutting edge of interdisciplinary cross-textuality.

Thus, do take American and European history, an introduction to philosophy, American and European literature, the Old and New Testaments, and at least one modern language. It would be absurd not to take a course in Shakespeare, the best poet in our language. . . .

I hasten to add that I applaud the student who devotes his life to the history of China or Islam, but that . . . should come later. America is part of the narrative of European history.

If the student should seek out those “ordinary” courses, then it follows that he should avoid the flashy come-ons. Avoid things like Nicaraguan Lesbian Poets. Yes, and anything listed under “Studies,” any course whose description uses the words “interdisciplinary,” “hegemonic,” “phallocratic,” or “empowerment,” “anything that mentions “keeping a diary,” any course with a title like “Adventures in Film.”

Also, any male professor who comes to class without a jacket and tie should be regarded with extreme prejudice unless he has won a Nobel Prize. (38)
At first glance, it is easy to disregard Hart’s polemical essay as so much right-wing hysteria. But the challenges posed to these academic “fads” are hardly confined to conservative circles alone and therefore cannot be dismissed as merely ideological. In the 1990s, for example, a number of progressives denounced the cultural left, as Ellen Willis points out, for “its divisive obsession with race and sex, its arcane ‘elitist’ battles over curriculum, its penchant for pointy-headed social theory and its aversion to the socially and sexually conservative values most Americans uphold” (18). In Professional Correctness, Stanley Fish takes to task the literary critic who would conclude an analysis of The Grapes of Wrath with a commentary on homelessness and assume it will find its way to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (57-58). Exposing as fallacious and insipid any academic pretense to social change, Fish advocates a return to the practical and professional criticism associated with the New Critics of the 1940s. In short, he argues that the contemporary push for English studies to become cultural studies (hence more interdisciplinary, more theoretical) threatens the integrity of the “kind of thing we [allegedly] do here,” which, according to Fish, is about the aesthetic reading of canonical texts (16). Furthermore, the loss of “distinctiveness” of what “we do” in English threatens to nullify the discipline’s raison d’être. It is worth noting that Lynn Hunt makes a similar claim that cultural studies “may end up providing deans with a convenient method for amalgamating humanities departments under one roof and reducing their faculty size” (28). According to this logic, theoretical discourses associated with cultural studies—rather than the logic of corporatization and downsizing—challenge the continued existence of the humanities. Moreover, criticisms by Hart, Fish, and others resonate powerfully with the growing concerns of many undergraduate populations over politically correct curricula, diversity requirements, and teachers who assume that race, class, and gender are the only analytical tools for engaging cultural texts. These are the very students who are supposed to feel more empowered, critically literate, and socially conscious through their encounter with these discourses. Thus, for the latter reason alone, it is necessary to engage Hart’s depiction of the contemporary “multicultural turn” in university education as a kind of representative critique and to offer a response.

While there is much to oppose in Hart’s essay, some of his basic assumptions and concerns hold merit and warrant further analysis. First, Hart’s repeated rant against courses such as “Nicaraguan Lesbian Poets” and identity politics in general is one which—for vastly different rea-
sons—gives intellectuals across the ideological spectrum some pause. While for conservatives, such as Hart, identity politics gives way to the horror show of “political correctness” across university campuses in the 1980s and 1990s, progressives have criticized its tendency to reproduce facile, and often reactionary, understandings of the complexities of identity and the politics of race and gender—hence, Gilyard’s insistence that the necessity for theorizing race now be taken seriously in rhetoric and composition (ix). Similarly, given the ways in which the academy has variously attempted to fix and reify her identity, Gloria Anzaldúa rejects being reduced to labels, such as lesbian, feminist, mystic, Marxist, “other.” She contends, “Only your labels split me” (qtd. in Lunsford 43). Such practices not only undermine complex notions of identity as multiple, shifting and in process, they parade under the banner of a form of multiculturalism that Hall criticizes for reproducing “an essentialized notion of ethnicity,” gender, and sexuality (Drew 226).

Second, it seems to me that the vast majority of scholars—even those in cultural studies, postcolonial studies, and women’s studies—share Hart’s commitment to providing students with an introduction to the intellectual traditions that have shaped contemporary culture. Unlike Hart, however, such scholars approach the question of content dialogically. According to Aronowitz, they distinguish between the hegemonic culture (which constitutes the common sense values and beliefs of society) and subordinate cultures (“which often violate aspects of this common sense”); and they do not “assume the superiority of the conventional over the alternative or oppositional canon, only its power.” In short, they substitute the practice of critique for reverence (Knowledge 169). Bhabha has eloquently described the necessity for educators to promote critical literacies by teaching students to

intervene in the continuity and consensus of common sense and also to interrupt the dominant and dominating strategies of generalization within a cultural or communicative or interpretational community precisely where that community wants to say in a very settled and stentorian way: this is the general and this is the case; this is the principle and this is its empirical application as a form of proof and justification. (Olson and Worsham, “Staging” 12)

In contrast to Hart’s emphasis on the transmission of “depoliticized” content that rejects the need for educators to make explicit the moral and political thrust of their practices, real higher learning, in Aronowitz’s and
Bhabha's views, takes on the task of showing how knowledge, values, desire, and social relations are always implicated in power. What the contributors to both *Race, Rhetoric, and the Postcolonial* and *Race, Rhetoric, and Composition* share is an awareness that knowledge is not only linked to the power of self-definition, but also to broader social questions about ethics and democracy. Similarly, Freire argues that the "permanent struggle" that educators must participate in against forms of bigotry and domination does not take the place of their responsibilities as intellectuals. He insightfully concludes, "Since I cannot be a teacher without considering myself prepared to teach well and correctly the contents of my discipline, I cannot reduce my teaching practice to the mere transmission of these contents. It is my ethical posture in the course of teaching these contents that will make the difference" (94).

Thus, in spite of Hart's compulsive use of the term, there is nothing "ordinary," historically given, or apolitical about the course of study he and a score of others—from Harold Bloom to Richard Rorty—propose for undergraduate education. In fact, Hart's overzealousness betrays his efforts to legitimate such selections through an appeal to a version of common sense that is increasingly open to question; his obsessive iteration of *ordinary* reveals that such assumptions can hardly be taken for granted. On the contrary, the selection of courses and topics that Hart mentions have not always existed; some, in fact, have been added to university curricula relatively recently. The study of Shakespeare, for example, is only as old as the English department itself, which has been around for slightly over one hundred years.

Finally, Hart's assessment of the essential function of a liberal arts education is a judgment with which few scholars could disagree. "The goal of education," he asserts, "is to produce the citizen" (38). At first glance, Hart's insistence that citizenship is the goal of higher education seems paradoxical, particularly in light of his pronouncement that ideology generally has thought little of academic pursuits. How is it possible, after all, to decouple civic education from the broader culture of politics? The answer to this apparent irony lies in Hart's definition of "the citizen," which abstracts civic membership from active, public performance in the interests of the commonweal. According to Hart,

The citizen should know the great themes of his civilization, its important areas of thought, its philosophical and religious controversies, the outline of its history and major works. The citizen need not know quantum physics, but he should know that it is there and what it means. Once the
citizen knows the shape, the narrative, of his civilization, he is able to locate new things—and other civilizations—in relation to it (38).

Hart's citizen is a passive bearer of national cultural traditions, here made identical to those of western culture. This view of citizenship is a far cry from the Aristotelian model of the virtuous citizen who “live[s] in and for the forum,” actively pursuing the public good with single-minded devotion—a model that has always haunted republicanist notions of American civic identity (Shklar 11). This citizen does not even have to master this knowledge, but rather must only be able, in game show-like fashion, to name it and know it's there. Republicanist emphasis on constant and direct involvement in governing as well as being governed, on duties and reciprocal responsibilities, remain untheorized and, one assumes, unimportant to his civic and educational vision.

Similarly, Hart's definition of citizenship is at odds with the liberal version of American civic identity. According to Samuel Huntington, for "most peoples national identity is the product of a long process of historical evolution involving common ancestors, common experiences, common ethnic background, common language, common culture, and usually common religion" (23). In contrast, American civic identity historically has been based on "political ideas," on an allegiance to the "American Creed" of liberal democracy (Huntington 23). Yet, as I will shortly demonstrate, Hart's definition of the citizen is clearly based on "common ancestors, common experiences, common ethnic background, common language, common culture, and usually common religion" and thus is a direct descendant of the ascriptive Americanism that was dominant at the turn of the century. As such, this form of citizenship offers no theory of politics because it cannot deal with notions of conflict or antagonism. Insisting on a common culture that promotes harmony on the basis of social homogeneity, it requires the exclusion of dissent and difference.

In spite of its deviation from common republicanist and liberal conceptions of citizenship, the definition that Hart espouses has nonetheless been a popular one in the contemporary debate over liberal arts education. For example, the notion of citizen as bearer of cultural knowledge has been powerfully articulated by such scholars as Hirsch and Roger Shattuck. In Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, Hirsch argues,

As the universal second culture, literate culture has become the common currency for social and economic exchange in our democracy, and the
only available ticket to full citizenship. Getting one's membership card is not tied to class or race. Membership is automatic if one learns the background information and the linguistic conventions that are needed to read, write, and speak effectively. (22)

The language that Hirsch uses to describe national civic identity bears a striking resemblance to Hart's. Both scholars rely heavily on the criteria of common knowledge (and hence, common culture and experience) for civic membership, while at the same time claiming that conditions of inheritance—such as one's gender, race, or socio-economic status (which is, in many ways, inherited in spite of the myth of class mobility)—are not prerequisites. Yet, the knowledge Hart and Hirsch require of citizens is, nonetheless, race- and class-specific (Aronowitz and Giroux, Postmodern). Like the nativist arguments at the turn of the century, their understanding of national cultural identity not only privileges a Eurocentric perspective of history and culture but also silently equates “American” with “white” in the interests of promoting an allegedly time-tested Western “Great Books” curriculum that in actuality has only been around for little over fifty years (Graff, Professing). Consider the similarity between the eugenicist language of Coolidge and the language that Harold Bloom uses to defend American cultural traditions:

We [the United States of America] are the final inheritors of Western tradition. Education founded upon the Iliad, the Bible, Plato and Shakespeare remains, in some strained form, our ideal, though the relevance of these cultural monuments to life in our inner cities is inevitably rather remote. (32)

Bloom’s rhetoric, like Coolidge’s, not only summons up a genealogy that links ancient Greece to modern American culture, but also establishes the vast distance between the “we” who are the final inheritors of Western European cultural traditions and the “inevitable” remoteness of our inner cities as a racial—as distinct from spatial—divide.

More recently, Shattuck lambasts educators and school boards alike for attempts to foster critical thinking over well-defined content requirements reflective of a “core tradition” in the humanities. In English, the arts, and foreign languages, Shattuck claims, “the emphasis falls entirely on what I call ‘empty skills’—to read, to write, to analyze, to describe, to evaluate” (11). How Shattuck proposes that students engage a “core tradition” without recourse to such “empty skills” remains unclear—unless, like Hart, he feels that students “need not know” what (or how)
texts such as *Moby Dick* mean, only that they are simply "there." Not only do the advocates of an Anglo common culture rely on transmission theories of education, but they claim, in Shattuck's words, that "our schools will serve us best as a means of passing on an integrated culture, not as a means of trying to divide that culture into segregated interest groups" (25). In fact, Shattuck juxtaposes one view of education (that the primary purpose of schooling is to pass on an integrated culture) with a view of education proposed long ago by such thinkers as Jefferson, Horace Mann, and John Dewey: that education is "the best vehicle through which to change society," that free public schools could "serve to establish a common democratic culture" (25). In other words, the goal of education is to help students preserve forms of social and cultural hegemony for the purposes of adapting to existing social conditions rather than challenging common sense assumptions in the interests of social transformation.

Recent progressive thought works against notions of citizenship that denigrate individual and collective agency, and against forms of civic education that reinvent racist national traditions rather than expand the scope of individual freedoms and the conditions for democratic public life. Freire's *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Gilyard's *Race, Rhetoric and Composition*, and Olson and Worsham's *Race, Rhetoric, and the Postcolonial* share a commitment to education as, in Freire's words, "a specifically human experience" and "a form of intervention in the world" (90-91). Such a commitment, I have tried to show, is entirely in keeping with the historical responsibilities of the university, as Jefferson and others conceived it, to produce an active and critical citizenry. As the above debates indicate, however, citizenship and civic education are historically contested terms. Just as there is nothing self-evident about the largely ascriptive notion of citizenship that Hart, Hirsch, and others subscribe to (in spite of their rhetoric), there is nothing self-evident about their concept of an appropriate college curriculum for producing good citizens. I have attempted to show that the very historical moment when the concept of citizen as bearer and protector of Anglo-American cultural traditions displaces the liberal-republicanist citizen as bearer or rights and duties is also the moment when the liberal arts curriculum shifts from classical rhetoric to literary studies and the subsequent racist invention of national cultural tradition. I have also tried to demonstrate, following Raymond Williams, how the pedagogical imperative of higher learning correspondingly shifts from the production of texts to their consumption, from production of active citizens to passive consumers of high culture.
Although I have been largely concerned with mapping the historical conditions—inflected by the politics of race—that led to these transformations, my purpose has been to demonstrate just how central race is to any understanding of past and present notions of citizenship and civic education and their relationship to the liberal arts.

Conclusion
Needless to say, we have always known that institutions such as education perform a "socializing," if not "civic," function; however, we have given little thought to the process because we have assumed, for the most part, that our value systems and social norms are worth perpetuating. Within the last few decades, however, there has been growing disensus in the academy and English studies in particular about education's most basic function—the production of an active and informed civic body, as recent work by Hirsch, Shattuck, Hart, and others clearly indicates. With the advent of new theoretical discourses—such as multiculturalism, critical race studies, postmodernism, women's studies, critical pedagogy, and others—questions concerning the kind of citizen that contemporary society needs, and hence the kind of education that universities should provide, have become hotly contested issues in both the professional and public domain. Rather than generate a much needed analysis of the relationship between the purpose of higher education and the complexities of citizenship and political community, the problem is often posed as a set of simple binaries. Do we need an critically informed, democratic citizenry capable of participating in the political life of the nation, or do we need a mass of trained workers who can fit into existing niches in the social structure? Do we theorize political community in terms of a common cultural heritage that devalues difference and rewards assimilation to a white, Anglo, Christian, and patriarchal notion of heritage, or do we need to pluralize the traditions—both dominant and subaltern—that constitute American culture and render them dialectically? In any case, what recent progressive work makes clear is that the alleged crisis over the " politicization" of university curricula is chimerical, for it is impossible to engage the university's historic commitment to civic education apart from the political life of the nation, to think citizenship and community without politics. Although this has not prevented a mainstream logic from emerging that insists that English studies has been unnecessarily and unreasonably saddled with questions of race, class, and gender—the so-called mantras of multiculturalism—while the vaunted traditions it has been committed to protecting are sliding into the sewer.
The upshot of these debates is a field seemingly at a loss for a sense of social vision and future direction. Many in English studies have met this crisis with calls for a return to those practices that made the study of language and literature a lofty and ennobling enterprise. Some have advocated a return to the aesthetic formalism of the New Criticism, while others have made recourse to an even older tradition of classical rhetoric. My effort to trace the history of various modes of civic education, however, is not an attempt to trade one form of nostalgic recovery for another; a “return to the past” can never provide a viable option for a present of dramatically altered contexts. Rather, through an analysis of the ways in which the politics of race and class informed the transition from rhetoric to English in the U.S., I attempt to challenge more fundamentally the alleged existence of a professional past unburdened by a politics of exclusion and thus unanswerable to its legacy. But my effort here is also part of a broader attempt to revitalize the relationship between the university and public life by reclaiming its historic commitment to civic education and the important insight, as Pierre Bourdieu reminds us, that there “is no genuine democracy without genuine opposing critical powers” (8). Educators must not only demystify those forms of knowledge that undermine democratic social relations, but also provide opportunities for students to engage in public discourses, deliberations, and social relations that put into place democratic identities, practices, and values.

At the heart of recent progressive work in rhetoric, race, and pedagogy is a fundamental commitment to democracy as an ongoing educational and ethical project; to teachers as intellectuals who connect knowledge to the pressing demands of everyday life; and to ethical and political practices that enable students to comment broadly on society, politics, and culture. The rhetoric of civic education provides a language of possibility steeped in democratic—rather than market—traditions that challenge the ongoing vocationalization and privatization of higher education. In light of the corporate university’s current suspicion that the humanities really are ornamental or even irrelevant to the task of job training, the rhetoric of civic education provides the warrant for what we in the humanities do. By focusing on citizenship as a practice—a guarantee of basic rights in an exchange for the performance of civic duties—we acknowledge that the “conditions for real political participation include rights with respect to information, education, [and] the ‘right to know’” (Hall and Held 185).

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Notes

1. For a provocative assessment of contemporary university life as well as a proposal for a new curriculum that takes seriously the reform strategies offered by critics on both the right and left, see Aronowitz, Knowledge.

2. I borrow these categories for distinguishing among different versions of citizenship from Smith, Civic.

3. For a further elaboration of liberalism’s core principles, as well as a critical assessment of its response to racism, see Goldberg; Hall; Hall and Held.

4. As Shklar has convincingly argued, citizenship is as much about the right to vote as the right to achieve independent social status, or standing—in short, to reap the benefits of one’s own labor. Those who did not own their work—women and slaves—thus lacked the capacities for citizenship.

5. This view can also be found in Kohn; Harrington; and Huntington.

6. See Higham; Horsman; Fredrickson; and Goldberg.

7. In mapping the decline of politics and the rise of the racial state, Hannaford also details the history of European misreadings of classical texts, particularly the projection of modern racial classifications onto antiquity. Additionally, Hannaford comments on the shift in European philosophy away from Aristotle’s Politics and an ever-growing interest in his Poetics, a point of interest in my own efforts to address the eventual transition from rhetoric to literary studies in the late nineteenth-century university.

8. Although I am proposing an articulation between the rise of literary formalism and organicism in English studies and the rise of racial science and politics at the turn of the century, I do not want to suggest that a concern for aesthetics is inherently racist or that its late nineteenth-century deployment overdetermines and cancels out the contemporary study or use of aesthetics for politically progressive ends. At the same time, I am interested in the connection between certain forms of literary discourse and nationalist extremism—or what Carroll provocatively names “literary fascism.” Carroll has effectively demonstrated how certain forms of extreme nationalism in France came to be formulated in literary terms by addressing “the totalizing tendencies implicit in literature itself and [how it] constitutes a technique or mode of fabrication, a form of fictionalizing or aestheticizing not just of literature but of politics as well, and the transformation of the disparate elements of each into organic, totalized works of art” (7). He further suggests that such nationalist extremism is a logical extension “of a number of fundamental aesthetic concepts,” such as “the notion of the integrity of ‘Man’ as a founding cultural principle and political goal; of the totalized, organic unity of the artwork as both an aesthetic and political ideal; and finally, of culture considered as the model for the positive form of political totalization, the ultimate foundation for and the full realization and unification of both the individual and the collectivity” (7).

9. For outstanding analyses of the rise of English in Britain and the United States, see Williams; Eagleton; Berlin; and Crowley.
10. Of course, counter-narratives of race (associated with the work of Franz Boas) and civic education (associated with John Dewey) emerged simultaneously with concepts of biological racism and social efficiency in education. While Dewey remained somewhat marginal in spite of his contribution to American educational philosophy, Boas gained greater recognition in the 1930s. See Jacobson for a commentary on Boas’ challenge to biological racism. For an excellent analysis of Dewey’s legacy see, Kliebard.

11. For an eloquent elaboration of the distinction between education and training, see Aronowitz Knowledge.

12. Of course, other factors played a role in the general educational movement away from the traditional classical curriculum. Although I won’t elaborate on those factors here, I would argue that they were no less racially-inflected. “Advances” in modern psychology by figures such as G. Stanley Hall (who advanced the general scientific proposition that “ontology recapitulates phylogeny” as a curriculum theory) and Edward L. Thorndike (who became the great apostle of the intelligence testing movement and its drive to place students in “inferior” and “superior” categories) also affected the shift to a differentiated school curriculum. For further discussion of such contributions to “progressive” education, see Kliebard.

13. For a substantive and rich analysis of the relationship between the institutional arrangement of schooling, critical pedagogical practices, and democratic public life, see Giroux, Schooling.

14. See, for example, Bloom; Rorty.

15. See also Levine for an incisive history of the “Western civ” debate.

16. Recently, the New York Times announced that Yale University was investing five hundred million dollars in new science and engineering facilities, illustrating the growing emphasis that universities are placing on corporate-funded science research. The expenditure represents a “serious bid to reposition Yale’s reputation,” which has long enjoyed prominence in the humanities (Arenson). For additional analysis of the downsizing of the humanities following the corporatization of the university, see Press and Washburn.

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