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# 'Grounding' Walter Rodney in Critical Pedagogy: Toward Praxis in African History

## **Cover Page Footnote**

The framework for this paper was developed from archival sources in the Walter Rodney Collection at the Atlanta University Center Woodruff Library Archives. A special thanks to Kayin Shabazz, Andrea Jackson, and Courtney Chartier at the Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library for their gracious assistance with this project. Also the author wishes to thank the Walter Rodney Foundation and organizers of the Walter Rodney Speaker Series in which a shorter version of this paper was presented in the spring of 2013.

# ‘Grounding’ Walter Rodney in Critical Pedagogy: *Toward Praxis in African History*

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## INTRODUCTION

Walter Rodney’s curriculum, as detailed in his syllabi on “Historians and Revolutions,” and his critical pedagogical theory as outlined in *The Groundings with My Brothers*, allows readers to better understand how he bridged the so-called gap between theory and praxis. Scholar-teachers are often faced with the dilemma of making their academic expertise and theoretical framework relevant to the immediate socio-political context of their pupils. For decades many academic historians resisted the urge to address the significance of the past to the present in their research and classrooms, warning of the dangers of presentism. The role of the historian, they argued, was not a dialogue with the present but an objective re-creation of the past. Arguing instead that the study of the past must be approached from a so-called “objective” frame of reference and remain untainted by the pressing social questions of the day. This view came under attack in the discipline, most notably by Peter Novick (1988) in *That Noble Dream*, but more than two decades after so-called radical revisionists in the Black Studies movement mounted an assault on the epistemology of the discipline (1973: 105).

Walter Rodney (1942 – 1980) was one of the most celebrated historians of African descent. His dissertation (1966) and monograph on the history of the Upper Guinea Coast (1969) and articles on slavery (1966) became widely cited as major sources on African history. His work demonstrates mastery of the academic style of critical histories of the period. However, many of Rodney’s greatest contributions came from

his work as an enthusiastic public intellectual. In addition to historical monographs, Rodney also wrote popular works such as *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1971) and *Groundings* (1969) that continue to remain popular today.

Both *Groundings* (the book) and ‘groundings’ as a teaching methodology, articulated Rodney’s vision of black history in a format that was accessible and empowering to a broad audience. Part history and part social psychology, his ‘groundings’ engaged the dilemma of the African diaspora in print and in practice. While *Groundings* provides useful sketches of history in the service of African and African Diaspora independence movements, it also can be read alongside Rodney’s work in Jamaica and Tanzania as a pedagogical document, revealing much about Rodney’s key insights into the uses of history and “practical” applications of the discipline.

*Groundings* provides glimpses into Rodney’s teaching in Jamaica during the volatile years of its post-colonial transition leading up to the election of Michael Manley and the People’s National Party (PNP) in 1972. Rodney’s insights reveal the role of historical consciousness in confronting the challenges of post-colonial societies. He argues for what Carter G. Woodson would call an “authentic” African history to address the plight of emergent black nations searching for a post-colonial identity and self-determined destiny. Throughout this text, Rodney reveals an approach to history that was both critical *and* pragmatic in addressing the immediate social concerns of the masses. While most scholars familiar with his work would consider Rodney’s pedagogy to be effective and engaged, some would debate whether he was a critical pedagogue.

Critical pedagogy has been broadly defined as a field of inquiry that addresses the shortcomings of education as they relate to the humanization of teachers and students (Freire, 1993: 43). Prominent theorists of critical pedagogy such as Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, bell hooks, and Peter McLaren are unified by a common belief that educators should seriously consider the relationship between students and teachers. This relationship is central in the process of learning as is challenging structured inequalities throughout society at-large, which schools are often complicit in maintaining

(Monchinski, 2008: 1; Burbules & Berk, 1999). Most of those familiar with Rodney's work and writings would consider him to be a critical pedagogue. However, others relying solely on the commonly accepted chronology and canon of the field would exclude him.

This essay narrates significant milestones in Rodney's pedagogical past to address several aspects of this problem: (1) Narrating Rodney's writing about teaching and documenting his teaching practices in historical context firmly establishes him as a contemporary of Paulo Freire. Freire and Rodney shared life experiences and teaching practices that beg deeper consideration from historians and educational theorists alike. (2) After establishing that Rodney was in fact a critical pedagogue and contemporaneous to Freire, we can explore what this meant for the historical discipline and the study of Africa. Rodney's writings and teaching highlight some significant transitions in the historical discipline that had profound political consequences during his lifetime. (3) After establishing the historical context of Rodney's teaching and pedagogical legacy, we can better understand the challenges of teaching to and in the historical moment, adopting and appropriating Rodney's approaches to address unresolved questions about the problems of teaching African history and the promise of critical pedagogy.

This essay argues that Walter Rodney's pedagogy, most effectively articulated in his book *The Groundings with My Brothers*, helps educators better understand how to more effectively bridge the gap between anti-social academics and anti-intellectual teachers, students and teachers, and pedantic pedagogical theory and impatient political praxis. Using Rodney's writings and 'groundings' as an example of his work as a critical theorist and practitioner, this essay explores how concerned historians (and those who use history as a basis for teaching) can traverse traditional disciplinary challenges to make history meaningful to diverse audiences.

#### WHY CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN HISTORICAL TEACHING MATTERS

Before delving into Walter Rodney's curriculum as detailed in his syllabi on "Historians and Revolutions" and his critical pedagogical theory as outlined in *Groundings*, it is

useful to understand exactly *why* critical pedagogy became appealing to grassroots intellectuals and students in Latin America and Africa. Critical pedagogy, as an academic theory of education, was most popularly advocated by Brazilian theorist Paulo Reglus Neves Freire among marginalized communities in Brazil, Bolivia, and Chile during the 1960s. Freire was responding to a variety of social issues and political questions. His students, most of whom were culturally ostracized and economically oppressed, grasped the significance of formal education but struggled to adapt and learn effectively in the institutions as they existed. They needed a new intellectual framework to make the process of formal education more relevant to the pressing social questions of their day.

With this dilemma in mind, Freire challenged the fundamental authoritarian relationship between teachers and students and argued for a philosophy of education that incorporated a holistic approach to knowledge. He developed a pedagogy over a period of time anchored in an equal relationship between teachers and students, one that critiqued ideas of power as part of the learning process. While Freire is often credited as the founder of critical pedagogy, it is a designation he rejected. He was however part of a broader, global explosion of intellectuals responding to challenges of teaching and learning in asymmetrical contexts, whether defined by race, culture, class, gender, empire, etc. (Torres, 1998: 1-2).

Many of the theoretical undercurrents applied by Freire were also embraced by Rodney. These pedagogical developments occurred simultaneously as Rodney embarked in his first full-time academic stint as a history professor in Tanzania. Of these techniques, Rodney is most often associated with a practice that has come to be called *popular education*, a method of teaching that is overtly political and rooted in the struggles of ordinary people intent on bringing about social change, “not only about learning in order to act but also learning from action, even when it fails.” (Crowther, Galloway, Martin, 2005: 2,7)

Some of the earliest works in the field by Freire (1968) and Giroux (1984) emphasized the central role of students--not as subjects but participants--in a co-

intentional process of exchange; a view of students and learning that approached knowledge in a two-way dialogue. However, as Burbules has argued, dialogue has its limits. Language, procedural rules for participation, and the limits of reflexivity present with a certain kind of co-optation of the co-intentional process. Merely extending the invitation to participate and conversationally relate based on common terms is not a sufficient exercise of critical thinking in itself (Burbules, 2000: 257-258). For Rodney dialogue was a means to an end. The purpose was not merely to develop a critical thinking apparatus but to enable learners to act upon their convictions.

But what role did history play in this process of education? Historians have been reluctant to explicitly advocate theory as a guiding force but paradoxically have been captive to the construction of narratives within theoretical frameworks. An influential essay written by Isaiah Berlin (1961) outlined the rationale for a scientific history that illustrates the tension between history and theory. As Berlin demonstrated and subsequent works have suggested, historians have been much more willing to engage implicit positivist assumptions about historical knowledge than commonly accepted. Few scholars of the era actively critiqued the “objective” function of historical narratives in undergirding imperialistic expansion, preferring instead to malign critical pedagogies as unscientific for confronting existing epistemological frameworks. Consequently, historians have felt much more in tune with emphasizing critical thinking over critical pedagogy.

This poses a significant problem for a historian employing critical pedagogy. Burbules and Berk (1999) have discussed the relationship, differences, and limits between critical thinking and pedagogy, exploring how both of these concepts begin with similar starting points but end with very different expectations. Critical thinking emphasizes debunking irrational and/or illogical thinking, emphasizing “skills of formal and informal logic, conceptual analysis, and epistemology” to challenge unexamined assumptions and beliefs (Burbules and Berk, 1999). On the other hand, critical pedagogy is also concerned with unexamined beliefs, but much more so in how they operate systematically and who they benefit. The inquiry of critical pedagogy

emphasizes not only how to think critically but also “*how to transform* [my italics] inequitable, undemocratic, or oppressive institutions and social relations.” (Burbules and Berk, 1999)

As Freire himself framed the role of a critical pedagogy in historical terms:

While the problem of humanization has always, from an axiological point of view, been humankind’s central problem, it now takes on the character of an inescapable concern. Concern for humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization, not as an ontological possibility but as an historical reality. And as an individual perceives the extent of dehumanization, he or she may ask if humanization is a viable possibility. Within history, in concrete, objective contexts, both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for a person as an uncompleted being conscious of their incompleteness (1999, p.43).

Nowhere is this dilemma more pronounced than in the discipline of history, where the historian acts as a conduit in dialogue with both the past and the present. The historian’s role is making his/her students aware of the biases and prejudices of selection and omission, emphasis and de-emphasis, engaging opportunities for alternative truths. In a post-colonial context, teaching of this order becomes “transgressive” in nature because it challenges not only epistemological frameworks but also the parameters of what is possible in political and economic terms, pushing students to think historically but also to make history (hooks, 1994). As Mignolo (2008) has affirmed, this is easier said than done, since the expansion of a Western epistemology, dominated by the *trivium* and *quadrivium* in which history is central, has displaced the mere possibility of other conceptualizations of knowledge derived from local sources of knowing (Mignolo in Morana, et.al, 2008: 227).

As a historian trained at the influential University of London School of Oriental and African Studies during the 1960s, Rodney confronted the perception that history was at the core a reactionary discipline, characterized largely by archives and documents, with a natural bias towards the elite and linear thinking. Historians such as William Miller (1949) and medieval scholar Morton Bloomfield (1974) criticized the pre-1960s elitist bias of the “the queen of the humanities.” Rodney was part of the changes taking place in the discipline towards social history during the 1960s that have since reworked



concerns of racial and social justice into narratives previously considered unacceptable in academic debates.

Historians during the 1960s were faced with the challenge of making the subject relevant to students, explaining how and why knowing about particular developments of the past were important, while at the same time presenting a critical interpretation of the evidence. However, the idea of relevance can take on a variety of meanings in different places and contexts. For example, in Tanzania in 1966, the relevance of a historical education had shifted towards the realm of *praxis*. Teachers at both the elementary and secondary level were expected to train students to become productive citizens of a post-colonial socialist nation. The new educational policy was based in African revolutionary principles; the state sanctioned a pedagogy to eradicate the throes of colonialism but also to provide a pragmatic ideological framework for the new socialist nation to emerge. His challenge was to integrate historical themes to address principles of self-reliance in the service of the nation and to simultaneously develop the critical faculties of his students to critique colonialism (Mnguni, 1998: 132-133).

#### WHEN THE REVOLUTION WAS (NOT) EN VOGUE

The 1960s provided an opportune time for Walter Rodney's turn towards a critical pedagogy. Several historical undercurrents explain why the 1960s were so central to his shift towards a radical pedagogy. Rupert Lewis (1994) has outlined several key concerns of Rodney's activism in 1968 that are essential insights into the significance of Rodney in the context of the turbulent year of 1968 and his charismatic appeal to the marginalized masses in Jamaica. However, there are certain aspects of that discussion that beg greater consideration of Rodney's pedagogical practices in the historical moment and how they relate to his pedagogical philosophy.

For example, Lewis (1994) refocuses our attention on the "very small personal things" that attracted students to Rodney (3). Rodney impressed students, according to Lewis' assessment, because he and his wife Patricia embraced the aesthetic impulses of the Black Art Movement. Also, his relationship with Patricia, who was very visible

in his public intellectualism, signaled the intellectual possibilities of marriage between a black man and black woman, when it was widely perceived that Jamaican academic elites shunned black women as partners (3-4).

In engaging these themes, Lewis urges us to consider the writing of Rodney and the expounding of his pedagogy in *Groundings* as only half of the story. To really understand the significance of Rodney's pedagogy, one must engage him as a person and his day-to-day interactions with people in Jamaica. Lewis (1994) discussed how Rodney lived and worked amongst the working-class and Rastafarian communities in Trafalgar Park (Lewis, 1974: 4). Trafalgar Park was a developing middle-class community surrounded by working-class neighborhoods; perhaps an unintentional example of what is referred to today as mixed-income housing. The neighborhood was well-suited to Rodney's practice of complete immersion within the communities in which he worked — an instance of the personal becoming the political. Furthermore, as Lewis asserts, despite the paranoia on the part of the Jamaica Labour Party, "so far no hard evidence of Rodney trying to overthrow the Jamaican government has emerged." (7)

In October of 1968, days before the October 16 crisis in Jamaica, Rodney delivered a "statement on the Jamaican situation" at the Congress of Black Writers in Montréal, Canada. His main address was entitled, "African History in the Service of Black Revolution" (Small in *Groundings*: 11). This work was published in *Groundings* and reveals several important aspects of the pedagogical perspectives Rodney developed in Jamaica.

First, Rodney called for independence, not merely by flag or by sloganism as had been the practice of the political leadership he criticized, but also in social thought. Emancipatory thinking stemmed from a historical consciousness that explained Africa's relationship to Jamaica and their common plight but also navigated the terrain of future possibility (Rodney, 1969: 12).

Secondly, Rodney's critical pedagogy, focused on historicizing racial oppression and humanizing black people, spoke to a psychological need. While mainstream

historians have come to regard this process as patronizing and undermining the capacity for critical thought, Rodney demonstrated that a failure to do so on the part of a teacher was undermining the intellectual capacity of both teachers and students to fully engage what it meant to be human. In engaging race and its economic dimensions, Rodney was engaging the “most fundamental thing about us [black people].” (Rodney, 1969: 16) In recognizing the centrality of race as a central unifying factor for black people, Rodney challenged the boundaries of critical thinking and engaging critical pedagogy. Critical thinking ends with exposing the illogical foundations of race but critical pedagogy challenges the broader framework that makes its existence possible.

He stated:

...I have chosen skin color as essentially the most binding factor in our world. In so doing, I am not saying that is the way things ought to be. I am simply recognising the real world—that is the way things are. Under different circumstances, it would have been nice to be color blind, to choose my friends solely because their social interests coincided with mine—but no conscious black man can allow himself such luxuries in the contemporary world. (Rodney, 1969: 16)

When Rodney attempted to return to Jamaica following the conference, he found that he had been banned from re-entering the country. Initially only students were demonstrating against the ban but larger numbers of the public joined as the protestors progressed through the streets. The public linked the student outrage regarding Rodney’s expulsion with broader issues and simmering resentments over living conditions in the nation. It is important to consider the broader historical and global context for these developments. In 1968, global student protests exploded around the globe. In the United States, the Black Campus Movement, in institutions as diverse as Northeastern, Occidental, and UCLA, spawned a variety of Black Student Unions, Black Studies courses, and (Rogers, 2012: 95; Biondi, 2012). Similarly, in 1964 Freire had also been exiled from Brazil during the American-backed *coup d’état* that overthrew President Joao Goulart by the Armed Forces.

Another important historical development framing his pedagogical vantage point developed in 1969 when Rodney returned to the University of Dar es Salaam as

Senior Lecturer. He would reside there, teaching the first generation of college students in post-colonial Tanzania, for the next five years. During this period, he developed a twenty-lecture sequence on the Russian Revolution as part of the “Historians and Revolutions” course grouping at the University of Dar es Salaam. Learning the history of the Russian Revolution was not considered strange by Marxist tradition during the Cold War, but following a period of colonialism when Africans were often expected to learn histories of the metropolises at the exclusion of their own histories, the emphasis on Russian history by Rodney may have seemed out of place. There are several ways of looking at this. One approach points to an attempt by Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania, to educate citizens on the principles of an egalitarian social structure and to address the class structure forming between peasants and the new managerial class (Hinzen, 1979: 4). Nyerere had lofty ideals for Tanzania to develop an African form of socialism but faced some resistance, particularly by students who saw some of his reforms requiring mandatory state service as denigrating and hypocritical.

Another more likely interpretation of this curricular decision is to place Rodney at the fore of an important but understudied school of African post-colonial thought. Horace Campbell (1991) has discussed how Rodney influenced a cadre of progressive scholars that came to be known as the Dar es Salaam School. “The debates, monographs, papers, books and lectures on class formation, on disengagement, on underdevelopment, slavery and the emancipation of the oppressed distinguished this university from other African universities.” (101) Campbell contends that Rodney was part of the movement to transgress artificial divisions between the social sciences and to recast the purpose of education. The aim was no longer to civilize Africans into compliance but to fundamentally transform educational processes (102).

While many point to *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* as being most indicative of this educational ideal, it is important to consider how *Groundings* reflected his pedagogical evolution also, presenting a transnational pedagogical statement that resonated throughout the world. The book urged intellectuals to attack racist distortions of imperialism in the academy, challenge social myths especially prevalent in a multi-

racial, multi-ethnic Caribbean and Latin America, and become one with the masses.

In Rodney's own reflections on the significance of the period, he pointed out that there was a great deal of interest in Caribbean history during his times as a student at the University of the West Indies (Rodney, 1974: 38). This signaled a break with the traditional emphasis of European history in the Jamaican educational system but not its complete disregard in the curriculum. As Rodney pointed out, "We were exposed to Caribbean history as a distinct break with a pattern in which previously there had been preoccupation with European history, we then proceeded to explore much more deeply European and American history." (Rodney, 1974: 38)

In later speeches and in political organizing work, Rodney used historical knowledge to expose and deconstruct racial myths that had been used by ruling elites to deepen divisions. In summary, *Groundings* was an outline of speeches and lectures given by Rodney in Jamaica. It addressed both content and the theoretical framework for using history to address the psychological trauma of the black masses.

The publishing of *Groundings* in 1969 illustrates how Rodney was engaged in similar challenges faced and theorized by Paulo Freire in Brazil. During this same time, Freire was watching Brazilian society descend into chaos. In the years preceding the 1964 *junta*, Freire helped to develop a literacy campaign to bring about a critical consciousness (Giroux in Lake & Cress, 2005: xiv) The youth in Brazil faced similar challenges encountered by those in Jamaica. The macroeconomic issues of colonization and economic dependency were common themes played out in social relations in the Brazilian population, encountered issues of color, caste, class similar to those in Jamaica. (Morrow 2002: 71) Like Rodney, Freire also became somewhat of a traveling teacher out of necessity, applying his educational insights abroad in Chile and elsewhere. (Westerman in Ewing 2005: 116)

Freire, a professor/teacher at Colegio Oswaldo Cruz proposed a similarly subversive approach to teaching literacy to urban youth in the Pernambuco region while participating in the Industrial Social Service (SESI); in much the same manner that Rodney used among the urban and rural youth in Jamaica and Tanzania. For Freire,

the role of education was not merely the preparation for jobs or political indoctrination, or even a particular method in itself, but rather part of a broader democratic process, “the making and changing of contexts,” and an emphasis on the debate, discussion, and dialogue of ideas over the mere authoritarian transmission of knowledge that he referred to as banking. (Giroux in Lake & Cress, 2005: xviii; Freire in Lake: 204) Freire’s grounding methods involved “solderings” and “splicings” of his experiences and critical readings into what worked in the practice of political education (Freire in Lake: 200). Freire himself was first imprisoned and then self-exiled from Brazil for 16 years (after Joao Goulart was overthrown in a military coup), and like Rodney then also became involved in projects of transnational importance (Mayo, 2004: 1, 4-5). Collectively, these developments explain why the chronological parameters of Rodney’s critical pedagogy took place within the 1960s, not earlier and not later.

#### A PERSONABLE PRAXIS: BEYOND BEST PRACTICES TO AUTHENTIC INTERACTION

Finally, it is not sufficient to understand when and why Rodney embraced a critical pedagogy; educators and practitioners can learn how to bridge the gap between critical pedagogy theory and praxis by incorporating Rodney’s model of teaching African history. Both Rodney and Freire learned that using education as a vehicle for social change required flexibility and sincere dialogue based on authentic and organic exchange. Both of their pedagogies reflected a conflict theory of society but they also both rejected the doctrinaire reductionism of Marxism, reflecting on the historical experiences of the communities they engaged, realizing the totality of race, color, ethnicity, and class in framing interpersonal experiences. (Macedo in Freire, 2000: 15; Morrow, 2002: 67; Mayo, 2004: 40-42)

Giroux’s reminiscence of Freire provides an interesting comparison with Rodney: “Freire loved theory, but he never reified it...he never treated theory as an end in itself; it was always a resource, the value of which lay in understanding, critically engaging, and transforming the world as part of a larger project of freedom and justice.” (Giroux in Lake & Cress, 2005: xix) Nowhere is this clearer than in Freire’s published letters,

*Teachers as Cultural Workers*, which dare teachers to move from talking *to* learners to talking *with* them, the work is the Brazilian counterpart to Rodney's *Groundings* (Freire, 2005: 111).

In practice, Rodney's application of theory required less in terms of a rearrangement of specific teaching assignments than a greater investment of the soul and sincerity of the instructor. For example, Rodney's courses often focused on community readings, commensality, and space as central features of his teaching. Current attempts to engage marginalized students are often frustrated by a lack of adequate resources, a sense of alienation brought by the increasingly digital interactions that take place, and most important for this essay a lack of real-world examples of the application of course content. While these factors certainly make it difficult for students to fully engage some subjects, in the case of history too many auxiliary resources may actually distract students from the central themes of historical study—a protracted and introspective evaluation of the human condition. This is not to say that inadequate resources are justifiable but rather that good historical inquiry can be undertaken quite effectively with limited resources.

In Tanzania, Rodney made extensive and creative use of reading lists and the library course reserves. By placing a reading list on reserve and allowing students the ability to choose the books and their resources, he effectively addressed the issue of students unable to afford books for class. While this approach is not unique to Rodney, its significance in a critical pedagogy framework is worth consideration for two reasons.

First, it filters information for students and then models a behavior for them to critique and/or to replicate. Ironically, in an age where accessibility to information is at an all-time high, students are inundated with too many sources of information but often not the sources most appropriate to the challenges they face. Rodney demonstrated how the history professor, acting as an editor, points students to a variety of perspectives on a subject, gently nudging them to make interpretation and decisions about the content on their own through the selection and omission of the most relevant sources in a deluge of infinite possibilities.

Secondly, it re-centers the significance of place in critical pedagogy. The physical practice of ‘groundings’ as evidenced in Rodney’s close encounters with Jamaicans via a Pan-African solidarity is also modeled in Freire’s concept of *conscientization* (critical consciousness) in which Freire urged similar cooperative approaches among so-called minority groups facing an oppressive ideological power (Rosatto, 2005: 13; Monchinski, 2008: 4). “Grounding” as both Rodney and Freire demonstrated, requires a certain sense of meeting people where they are on both a physical and intellectual level. Freire often conducted an exercise in which he would ask illiterate farmers to ask him detailed questions about their work that he did not know the answer to and he would do the same, demonstrating that knowledge was not an exclusive domain but that everyone knew something that someone else did not. (Monchinski, 2008: 116)

Rodney also illustrates best practices in critical pedagogy through his engagement of psycho-social forces encountered by his students. History is a useful discipline for exhortation. Traditionally, history has been used to develop a sense of belonging and a sense of patriotism. It can also be used as a source of togetherness by marginalized groups in search of meaning, a common heritage, and to articulate the source of feelings of alienation. At the onset of the Black Studies movement, many critics derided the rhetoric and aims of the movement as preaching to the “amen corner” and lacking the objectivity necessary. Rodney’s pedagogy illustrated how to confront what Habermas (1971) referred to as the “hegemony of technical rationality.” He refused to accept the idea of gentleman’s history, but made the narrative of European history relevant to the African Diaspora and history of the African Diaspora central to the story of Western development. This may initially seem contradictory, using Western European history to discuss the African reality. However, by linking the humanity of Africans and their past within the European narrative, not as onlookers but as critical participants, Rodney was directly confronting a colonial mindset of predetermined conviction and engaging the imagination of possibilities.

Rodney’s work in popular education delivered a new history to the people of Tanzania and Jamaica that has been explored in a variety of other curricular and



geographic contexts. Transformative pedagogies with a collective goal are not easily evaluated and or assessed, since the emphasis is often not new information or skills but rather a sense of belonging, identity, or collective action for the common good. These goals for educators and others emphasize the significance of strategically and simultaneously working inside and outside of the system, tactics endorsed by both Rodney and Freire (Schugurensky in O’Sullivan et. al., 2002: 70; Mayo, 2004: 130).

## CONCLUSION

Historians have long implied that by studying the historical works of an author, one is drawn into a deeper understanding of two lives—one unknown to the past (the author) and another unknown to present (the subject). That is to say, when reading a historical treatise we read as much about the author as the subject studied. We become better acquainted with both subjects—but ironically more familiar with the author than the past.

On the other hand, some educational theorists see the reinforcement of theory and praxis as self-evident and inevitable. This may be characteristic to some degree of some disciplines more than others. However, in historical teaching this is clearly not the case. Firstly, historians are encouraged to assume a mantle of objectivity but as Novick and others have demonstrated seldom do they explore the subjectivity of the discipline at work in every aspect of teaching and research from the selection of sources, to the omission of certain events from the chronology of the past, and most prominently in the distortion of the idea of race in the framing of the narrative and the impact on subjects of the narrative. (Marable 2000: 16-17)

Rodney illustrates why historians should critically engage a theoretical framework using historical methods of thinking and research to make the historical moment relevant to contemporary challenges. He powerfully demonstrated that it was necessary to analyze local politics through a broader historical and theoretical framework that could not be contained by disciplinary boundaries or cultural assumptions. Through his course on the Russian Revolution as part of a “Historians and Revolutions” curriculum taught

in the History Department at the University of Dar es Salaam from 1966 to 1974 (with an intermission in Jamaica in 1968), Rodney demonstrated that traditionally-trained historians can adapt histories of revolution and social change to address conditions of post-coloniality. He incorporated interdisciplinary and integrated approaches to history to address the conditions of the oppressed with stunning results.

Secondly, we can see the significance of *when* Rodney implemented these pedagogical approaches. Rodney's transnational teaching itinerary placed him at the center of several major streams of social change in three continents during a very volatile period of world history from 1966-1974. Rodney was not only influenced by the Black Power era in the United States and post-colonial transitions in Jamaica and Tanzania, he also channeled these changes into his teaching and the learning outcomes of his courses.

Thirdly, we have seen how Rodney's strategy can be replicated in African history and Africana Studies. His insights are useful not only for their historical significance but for the importance of establishing critically-conscious community readings, commensality, and the role of physical space in an increasingly digital era. Rodney's engagement of psychosocial realities through historical exhortation exposed the utility of world history for black students and challenged longstanding assumptions about the utility of history in the modern world.

Walter Rodney's grassroots curriculum in Tanzania and Jamaica presents a poignant model for the application of critical race pedagogy in the African Diaspora. Examining Rodney not only as revolutionary theorist but also as a scholar helps educators and academics alike to better understand how to bridge the gap between theory and praxis in critical pedagogy.

Walter Rodney's curricula is useful as a primary source and with *Groundings* helps us better understand how to more effectively bridge the gap between critical pedagogy theory and praxis in the teaching of African history and Africana Studies. Studying Rodney as an example of a critical pedagogue, theoretician, and a practitioner illustrates methods of countering traditional disciplinary challenges in the historical

profession. We see an alternative approach to make the purpose of academic historical writing meaningful to audiences in the African Diaspora who most academicians had ignored as a possible audience for their scholarship.

Numerous critics of critical pedagogy, such as the right-wing dictatorship in Brazil that prompted Freire's flight and Christian nationalists who advance a "religion of resentment" (Reynolds in Kress and Lake, 2013: 137-138), have argued that the implicit biases of political teaching undermine the ability for students to develop their own views. Rodney's experiences teaching in Jamaica and Tanzania illustrate the contrary, and demonstrated, in the process of decolonization, what a powerful role a critical pedagogy can play.

Equally important is the central role that history can play in the development of a cultural and critical consciousness amongst the underserved masses. Rodney illustrates in both form and function that historians can critically engage a theoretical framework for social change using historical thinking and methods of inquiry. However, as Freire cautioned and Rodney realized, disciplinary or pedagogical methods in themselves cannot be the goal of education, the democratization of knowledge must be reinvented and recreated in the contexts of social inquiry and change. (Macedo, 2005: x-xiii)

Furthermore Rodney demonstrated that African history and Pan-African consciousness could best be developed in an understanding of world history. Arthur Schomburg, John Henrik Clarke, Willis Huggins, and John G. Jackson all promoted a broad based understanding of world history as method to effectively engage and develop an understanding of African history. Today, many Africanists spend so much time correcting distortions and popular misconceptions that students are often left with a better idea of what Africa is not rather than what it is, how it fits in the world, and how an understanding of its dynamics are relevant to their personal interests.

Rodney's course on the Russian Revolution as part of a "Historians and Revolutions" curriculum taught students along some of the same lines as the aforementioned great historians of black history. As early as 1937, Huggins and Jackson's course outlines approached African history not in isolation but alongside

other civilizations in the world (1998: 48-52). As Ahati N.N. Toure (2009) has argued about the John Henrike Clarke's approach to history: "For Clarke the exigencies of oppression and colonization required not simply a narrating of the past, but an interpretation of what the past means for the present and the future. In its essence it constituted a reenvisioning to power." (8)

Rodney's adoption of this critical approach in both his writing and teaching, relegates him to a particular class of black historians writing and teaching African history such as William Leo Hansberry, J.A. Rogers, Chancellor Williams and others. Unlike Rogers however, Rodney enjoyed the academic credentials of a terminal education from the London School; but similar to both Rogers and Williams, he remained committed to broadly engaging black popular audience in his writings and teaching. Rodney demonstrated that traditionally-trained historians can adapt histories of revolution and social change to critically address conditions of their students wherever they may be.

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