

Greg S. Goodman

Dr. Greg S. Goodman is an associate professor of education at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. He is the coeditor of Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education and Frederick Douglass Collaborative's Making Connections journal and executive editor of Peter Lang Publishing's "Educational Psychology: Critical Pedagogical Perspectives" series. His recent books include The Educational Psychology Reader (Peter Lang, 2010) and The Outdoor Classroom (Hampton Press, 2008).

A BOOK REVIEW

Teaching About Frederick Douglass: A Resource Guide for Teachers of Cultural Diversity

Maria Sanelli and Louis Rodriguez,
Eds. Peter Lang Publishing, 2012.

"... though I am more closely connected and identified with one class of outraged, oppressed and enslaved people, I cannot allow myself to be insensible to the wrongs and sufferings of any part of the great family of man. I am not only an American slave, but a man, and as such, am bound to use my powers for the welfare of the whole of the human brotherhood."

- Frederick Douglass (Foner 63)

"Free yourself from mental slavery ..."

- Bob Marley

Devotees of the iconic abolitionist and human rights' activist Frederick Douglass will be pleased to see the publication of this recent addition to the literature attesting to Douglass's timeless legacy. That Douglass remains alive in the hearts and minds of all who value freedom is further testimony to the continuing urgency of the work of antiracist educators and citizens. In this latest work dedicated to the legacy of Frederick Douglass, editors Maria Sanelli and Louis Rodriguez have assembled a collection of essays that bring Douglass into our schools with renewed relevance and meaning.

As a special treat, the readers of *Making Connections* will be buoyed to see the result of this scholarly collaboration between Kutztown University faculty and the statewide Frederick Douglass Collaborative's founding father, James Trotman. The Frederick Douglass Collaborative is a consortium of professors and administrators representing the fourteen universities comprising the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PSSHE). Douglass's work has been inspirational for these scholars, and their purposive mission to bring Douglass to the forefront of classroom practice is both timely and inspirational. As schoolteachers have been stripped of their creativity and autonomy through draconian policies of standardization and zero tolerance, it is not surprising that some children are equating today's classroom with the institution of slavery. A Douglass-inspired analysis of this parallel by thirteen-year-old Jada Williams is reported by Liz Dwyer:

In a bold comparative analysis of *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Jada Williams, a 13-year old eighth grader at School #3 in Rochester, New York, asserted that in her experience, today's education system is a modern-day version of slavery. According to the Frederick Douglass Foundation of New York, the schools' teachers and administrators were so offended by Williams' essay that they began a campaign of harassment—kicking her out of class and trying to suspend her—that ultimately forced her parents to withdraw her from the school.

In her essay, which was written for a contest, Williams reflected on what Douglass heard his slave master, Mr. Auld, telling his wife after catching her teaching Douglass how to read. "If you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there will be no keeping him," Auld says. "It will forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master."

Williams wrote that overcrowded, poorly managed classrooms prevent real learning from happening and thus produces the same results as Mr. Auld's outright ban. She wrote that her white teachers—the vast majority of Rochester students are black and Hispanic, but very few teachers are people of color—are in a "position of power to dictate what I can, cannot, and will learn, only desiring that I may get bored because of the inconsistency and the mismanagement of the classroom." (Dwyer)

This example of the power of Douglass's teaching may be the capstone argument for adding *Teaching About Frederick Douglass* to your library. What this book offers is an eclectic combination of intellectual, historical, spiritual, emotional, and cultural arguments for teaching for social justice—Douglass's style.

In section one, "Writing, Research and Literacy," Ellesia Blaque argues that Douglass's project of literacy has been furthered by the telling of the truths of racism and inequality. Douglass's life was dedicated to the literacy project, and David Walker, Ida A. Wells, and Malcolm X also carried a torch for literacy to inspire and unify the black community. Blaque argues that these black writers tell the stories of the true African American experience and that this exposes a verisimilitude that white writers, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, could not "entirely overcome."

In chapter two, coeditors Louis Rodriguez and Marietta Dooley consider the role of technology in expanding access to information in a more egalitarian and democratic manner. They argue that the "digitization of information" increases students' ability to read primary sources and to communicate their ideas beyond their immediate environs to impact a greater audience. This is a modernization of *The North Star* and a call for the empowerment of today's student. As suggested by these authors, if Douglass could accomplish empowerment in the nineteenth century sans technology, imagine what you can

do today!

In chapter three, authors Linda McMillan and Mary Ann O'Neil make a solid argument for the connection between literacy and social equity. Using the example of Douglass's own writing, McMillan and O'Neil emphasize the foundational importance of literacy in a democratic society. Using the example of Douglass and other slaves' denial of access to education and literacy as a means of perpetuating their enslavement, the authors affirm Douglass's literacy project as a critical component of emancipation from both physical and mental slavery.

The final chapter of part one: "Of Swimming, Computers, and Race: Lessons Learned from the History of Swimming and the Relevance to Computing and Computer Science," author Randy Kaplan recounts his experience growing up in a racially segregated community. He believes that the cultural barriers of the past are maintained within the majority white computer science field through the underrepresentation of diverse populations pursuing technology careers. Kaplan uses the swimming analogy to demonstrate the cultural collusion (Beachum and McCray 1) associated with culturally segregated activities and institutions.

Part two continues Kaplan's conversation on the role of culture and its ability to morph through history. Just as Douglass confronted his own identity as a man of mixed race (a white father and a black mother), so do the children of our many varied and diverse family constellations. Issues of culture and cultural identity are enmeshed and central to the broader questions of negotiating these intersections of diversity in our daily lives.

In chapter five, Meredith Holladay examines the role of Christianity in her chapter, "Religion, Race, and American History." Christianity, according to Holladay, has played a major role in the perpetuation of both segregation and slavery and in their abolition. The schizoid splitting of Christian ideology was part of Douglass's

experience. The questioning of religion and the development of one's own position were critical and quintessential of Douglass's identity challenges.

Chapter six, "Frederick Douglass's Spirituality," is a contribution of the noted Douglass scholar, James Trotman. Author of a recent biography of Douglass (Greenwood Press, 2011), Trotman examines the internal struggles Douglass confronted in his quest for identity. Challenging slavery, the subordination of women, and the paradoxes of turning Christ's teaching into organized and conflicting (not loving) religions, Douglass was a warrior for truth and social justice. Trotman eloquently evokes his broad understanding of literature and philosophy to connect Douglass to Kierkegaard's existentialist and spiritual explorations of the self and identity.

Chapter seven is authored by Editor Louis Rodriguez. "Frederick Douglass and Latino Immigration" draws parallels between the black and Latino/a experience. Although certainly not involuntary immigrants (Ogbu 178), Latino/as have "experienced discrimination, poverty, and crime" (71) in their quest for integration within American society. More importantly, their assimilation into America has caused major issues of identity and cultural conflict. Rodriguez notes the similarity to Douglass's experience of simultaneously being physically included as an American citizen and being excluded from full participation. Both students and teachers of multicultural education can benefit from this analysis by Rodriguez.

Part three is titled "Issues of Social Justice." Feminist S. Pascale Dewey explores the international perspectives of abolitionism in "Aspects of Sisterhood and Slavery: Transatlantic Anti-Slavery Activism and Women's Rights." Douglass was noted for his contributions to both the antislavery and suffrage movements and his impact was international. Besides his attendance at New York's Seneca Falls Conference in 1848, a milestone event in the women's movement, Douglass's newspaper, *The North Star*, was a

beacon of hope for all who cherished freedom and social justice.

In chapter nine, Denise Darrah continues to demonstrate the connections among Douglass's indefatigable work for equality regardless of race, gender, or cultural diversity. Educator Darrah demonstrates the need for a classroom based upon mutual respect, and she connects this to Douglass's equity project. Teachers need to emulate Douglass by standing up for fairness and equal treatment of all of their students.

Chapter ten is authored by multicultural educator Carol Watson. "Linguistics and Social Justice in Public Schools" pulls from Douglass's tenacity, as Watson links student success to "believing in oneself; taking advantage of every opportunity; and use the power of the spoken word" (128). As she evaluates the mismatch between white, middle-class school cultures and the diverse minority children needing to be taught, she advocates for "sociolinguistic" understanding and compassion.

Chapter Eleven is co-authored by editors Maria Sanelli and Nathaniel Williams. This chapter, "Frederick Douglass: Words of Wisdom for all Centuries," will be of great interest to those teaching adolescents. The authors examine autonomy, identities, and intimacy: three essential elements of adolescent development. Sanelli and Williams relate these phenomena to Douglass's own quest for self-discovery. Demonstrating Douglass's transformation from slave to free man allows adolescents to develop their experience of empathy for

the pains of evolution from adolescence to adulthood. This chapter further strengthens the reader's connection to the real challenges of social injustice, and it provides hope for the successful resolution of these conflicts. "Frederick Douglass's insight about the mind being held captive, giving power to the truth by speaking out, and combating institutions of control are three particularly applicable lessons to young adults today" (180).

Teaching About Frederick Douglass is enhanced by the addition of several lesson plans and a set of links to resources for teachers interested in taking on the challenge of teaching for social justice. Each of the book's three sections is accompanied by a set of lessons appropriate for grades K-12 and divided into upper primary (grades 4-6), middle level, and high school.

Teaching About Frederick Douglass is a tribute to Douglass's work, and it furthers the spirit of Douglass in the present and into the future. Anyone teaching for social justice will be well served to apply the wisdom of this book to their classrooms. As Sanelli and Williams so aptly state, "Douglass was a man ahead of his time" (189). For readers unfamiliar with Douglass's writing and oratory, these pages will entice you to employ Douglass's project for social justice within your classroom. For readers cognizant of Douglass's work, this book will only further a connection to his genius and personal projects of literacy, social justice, and true democracy.

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COMING SOON!

School Sucks!

Arguments for Alternative Education

edited by Rochelle Brock & Greg S. Goodman

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"Schools Sucks! is a must read for all who care about changing education for the better!"

—Karen T. Carey, Associate Vice President for Arts and Sciences, California State University Channel Islands

Contributors:

Rochelle Brock
Greg S. Goodman
Howard Hanson
Christopher Knaus
Rasheedah S. Woodard
Alfred W. DeFreeze, Jr.
Chance W. Lewis
Terah Venzant Chambers
Bettie Ray Butler
Floyd D. Beachum
Carlos R. McCray
Luis F. Mirón
Adriel A. Hilton
SuSan Fuhrman
Christine Sleeter
Ebony Elizabeth Thomas
Julia Ellis
Susan Fitzsimmons
Jan Small-McGinley
Jane Bean-Folkes
Larry F. Forthun
Jeffrey W. McCombie
Caroline Payne
Shaneshia R. F. Brooks-Tatum
Mary Hollowell
Donna Moye

School Sucks! is designed to complement the dominant discourse of school reform by presenting a compendium of critical pedagogical writings that analyze the current issues in urban education and demonstrate alternative praxis for failing schools.

The two editors of this volume also serve as the series editors for Peter Lang Publishing's *Educational Psychology* and *Black Studies* Series, giving them a remarkable resource from which to draw this selection of writings that represent the very best concepts of pedagogy and praxis. *School Sucks!* furthers the reader's knowledge of the pretext of urban educational problems and promotes a positive praxis of urban educational reform. Inspired by mentors Mary McLeod Bethune and Paulo Freire, *School Sucks!* is filled with a critical pedagogy and praxis calling for wholesale changes within our urban schools.

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