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The Diary and Notes of Marcus Christian as a Site of Rhetorical Education, Entries 1924-1945

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The Diary and Notes of Marcus Christian
as a Site of Rhetorical Education, Entries 1924-1945

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
English
Rhetoric and Composition

by

Nordette N. Adams

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Abstract

This thesis asserts that Marcus Bruce Christian (1900-1976), a New Orleans, Louisiana, black poet, writer, and historian, used his diary and notes as a site of rhetorical education and as a space in which he constructed and reinforced a Duboisian ethos, a particular type of black identity and character shaped by the political rhetoric of W. E. B. Du Bois. Maintaining this ethos, Christian, an autodidact throughout most of his life, negotiated a society strangled by white supremacist ideology and resisted being interpellated into the negative black identity constructed by a hostile and stifling Jim Crow South.

Marcus B. Christian, diary, ethos, autodidact, W. E. B. DuBois, African-American rhetoric, self-writing, Foucault

Chapter I: Introduction

*It was there that I became articulate—not to myself but
to the world. I had long been articulate to myself.
Marcus Bruce Christian, 9 September 1937*

A significant amount of scholarship on autobiographies by African-Americans has arisen since Rebecca Chalmers produced the first book on the topic in 1948. Scholars tackling the field have included not only Chalmers but William Andrews, Joanne Braxton, Stephen Butterfield, David Dudley, V. P. Franklin, Sidonie Smith, Valerie Smith, and others recognized in Kenneth Mostern's book *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics: Racialization in Twentieth-Century America* (11). Certain segments of academia and the political sphere may wince at the term "identity politics," but no respectable scholar of black autobiography can deny that the genre is unfailingly linked to identity issues and political commentary. Certainly the majority of black autobiographies from the antebellum era until now continue to be associated with a particular rhetorical stance that addresses the African-American struggle for full equality and bonds the "I" of black autobiography to the collective "we" of peoples of African descent. Mostern asserts that "African-American literary history begins with the self-consciously politicized autobiography" (11). He is of course referring to slave narratives, autobiographical narratives that served to establish the humanity of black men and women locked in the Euro-American forms of slavery, institutions that could thrive only if both free and slave alike were persuaded that people of African descent were subhuman, having no more intelligence than trained monkeys. Central to proving black humanity during the slavery era was proof that black people could be literate, maintaining a command of the English language in speech and writing equal to that of white males; hence, the modifier "as related by himself" or similar phrases were usually included in the

title of slave narratives. For instance, the earliest known slave narrative of the African Diaspora, published in 1772, is entitled *A Narrative of the Most remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, As related by himself*. The authenticating modifier is included in the title of another well-known narrative by a former slave, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*. Equiano's narrative tells the story of a former slave of Great Britain. A modifier attesting to the authenticity of a black writer appears on numerous other narratives, even on the title of the most famous slave narrative, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*. But even after slavery ended, many literate blacks still felt compelled to write their autobiographies and to write them not so much for themselves as for an audience that needed to hear, "I am a real person, an equal. I deserve to be free." As Mostern quotes Paul Gilroy's statement on African-American autobiography, the genre "express[es] in the most powerful way a tradition of writing in which autobiography becomes an act or process of simultaneous self-creation and self-emancipation" (11). But what of autobiography's predecessor, the diary, which is most frequently tapped only as a source of documentation for biographers, literary critics, and other writers? Have not similar statements about self-creation and self-emancipation been made about the diary as well? While diaries are unlike autobiography in that their authors do not know the future of characters and therefore cannot self-consciously craft an entire story with elements of climax and denouement or skillful foreshadowing of eventual freedom or self-realization, diaries remain "part of the process of self-formation" and "records of a life process rather than finished narratives about life, and as such they are only part of the practice of narrating and understanding what life means," as Julie Rak argues in her essay "Dialogue with the Future: Philippe Lejeune's Method and Theory of Diary"

(19). Even merely as “part of the process of self-formation,” African-American diaries should be invaluable to any scholar researching identity among marginalized people.

However, such diaries are rare.

The published and archived diaries of African-Americans would not fill a library shelf. This scarcity, probably, exists not because few black people ever wrote down their daily activities post-slavery (even this writer’s own grandfather, born in the 1883, kept a little journal noting the births and deaths of family members, the purchase of land and cows), but more than likely this scarcity results from insufficient education and consequently fewer diary keepers and fewer people in the African-American community who have recognized the value of keeping such artifacts. Another factor may be poverty causing a lack of access to writing supplies, as Professor Daniel Doll noted in a 2016 conversation about this paper. In addition to a lack of supplies, the constant marginalization of black people, resulting in their creative and biographical products being considered less valuable and so not as worthy of preservation, undoubtedly plays a large role in there being fewer African-American diaries. Consequently, as Shirley Wilson Logan writes in *Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America*, “only a few extant diaries of African-Americans” are available in archives (34).

That said, this paucity is not only the result of the marginalization of black and brown people (as well as women of all ethnicities), but it may also be an outcome of the marginalization of the diary itself as literature deserving more dedicated scholarship. Philippe Lejeune laments in his groundbreaking book *On Diary* that “the diary rarely receives the charity of careful study” (47). Noting that literary critics, such as Maurice Blanchot, “devote a few pages” to the study of diaries, Lejeune argues that critics seem inclined to use the diary only as a “foil for literature” and that diary is “an immense field, as yet largely unexplored, in particular in the area of poetics”

(47). In African-American studies and rhetorical studies, much of the scholarship on diaries has been confined to the diaries of nineteenth-century black women, such as Ida B. Wells, Charlotte Forten Grimké, and Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson. Notable exceptions are Charles W. Chestnutt's journals, wartime diaries of black Union soldiers, and the diary of A.M.E. Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner. Possibly unaware of the 1993 publication of Chestnutt's diary when submitting her 1994 essay on African-American women's diaries for publication, Nellie McKay writes in *History and Memory in African-American Culture* that "[no nineteenth-century diaries] by black men have yet surfaced" (267). More surprising is that this dearth continues into the twentieth-century, and the rarity of diaries by twentieth century black males is odd enough to cause this writer to believe that somewhere in the black community, in grandmothers' attics or great-aunts' trunks, hidden under dust bunnies and popular keepsakes, are the forgotten diaries and journals of grandfathers, brothers, and uncles. It is incredible that during the World Wars, the heyday of the Harlem Renaissance, and the fireworks of the Civil Rights movement, ordinary black men and women would *not* have been journaling every moment of their existence. Research to date indicates such diarists remain unknown.

While W.E.B. DuBois and other extraordinary African-American leaders and writers have produced autobiographies and have occasionally included diary entries in those narratives (as in the case of DuBois), the diary chamber remains relatively silent. When these diaries do appear, such as Countee Cullen's journal housed at the Amistad Research Center, they are more often merely fragments covering one or two years, or they are the journals of other highly-acclaimed authors, such as Richard Wright, a writer who knew literary critics and the public wanted to know more about him, or they are notes of Zora Neale Hurston, a writer-

anthropologist keeping a journal to document the ways of others more than to examine and reflect on her own life.

None of the diaries that have received attention in the last century chronicle the life of an ordinary Southern black man or that of a lesser-known luminary and Southern black man.

Marcus Bruce Christian is such a man, a lesser-known, black luminary of the South, and his diary and notes are archived in the Special Collections Department of the Earl K. Long Library at the University of New Orleans.

Born at the beginning of the twentieth century on March 8, 1900, in what is present-day Houma, Louisiana, Christian was a passionate autodidact and prolific Louisiana writer and poet. He was also a self-taught historian who lived through World Wars I and II, the Harlem Renaissance, the Great Depression, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Arts Movement. In a personal reminiscence of Christian, New Orleans writer Tom Dent recalls that he first encountered Christian on the campus of Dillard University when Dent's father was that black institution's president and Christian worked at the school's library. He describes Christian as "an indefatigable note maker," whose diary commented "on almost everything he came in contact with, from the seemingly trivial to the most pressing concerns of his life, like his fabled and painful battle with Hurricane Betsy in 1965" (23). Stored in two boxes, Christian's diary and notes span nearly five decades and are part of a larger collection of his published work and unpublished manuscripts as well as historical artifacts and books occupying "approximately 146 linear feet," according to the library's website.

Although multiple published academic sources containing some biographical information about Christian declare that he moved to New Orleans at age nineteen, in a passage of undated autobiographical writing in his papers, he declares that he moved to the city when he was

seventeen. His World War I draft registration card at Ancestry.com supports this fact. He registered on 12 September 1918, six months after his eighteenth birthday, and the card shows that he was employed then as a chauffeur with a permanent New Orleans address, 1569 Calhoun Street, one of four addresses he occupied over the course of his life in New Orleans. According to Margaret S. Hessler's essay, "Marcus Christian: The Man and His Collection," after arriving in New Orleans, he took night classes briefly at an unidentified institution, information that may be gleaned from his diary as well because some of his early diary entries or notes appear to be related to course work. Prior to his enrollment in night classes, until the age of thirteen, Christian attended Houma Academy where his father, Emmanuel Banks Christian, was his teacher. His studies in Houma and his brief time attending night school were the extent of his formal education; nonetheless, despite never attending college, Christian wrote during his lifetime almost 1,200 poems, numerous journalism articles, essays, and five books, including *Negro Ironworkers of Louisiana, 1718-1900*, which remains in print today, as well as the work with which he is most associated, the history manuscript entitled *The Negro in Louisiana*. He collaborated on the latter with the black unit of the Louisiana Writers' Project (LWP) under the Federal Writers' Project (FWP); however, he was its primary author. By age thirty-nine, Christian was the supervisor of the black unit, which had offices at Dillard University. Over the course of his time on the project, from March 1936 until the program ended in December 1942, Christian worked with notable Harlem Renaissance writer Arna Bontemps and historian Benjamin Quarles. He encountered other literary figures also, some who worked on the project or taught at Dillard or traveled through New Orleans, such as Frank Yerby, Margaret Walker, Sterling Brown, and Langston Hughes. He began working at Dillard's library when the FWP ended. Florence Jumonville speculates in her foreword to the digital publication of *The Negro in*

Louisiana that his job there concluded in 1950 “apparently because of internal dissention in the library” (6); however, writing at the *Chicken Bones Journal* at nathanielturner.com (NTDC), former UNO professor Rudolph Lewis surmises that Christian’s time at Dillard ended because he did not have a college degree. Despite not attaining a college degree, eighteen years later Christian accepted a teaching position at the University of New Orleans (UNO Library. Web. .pdf). The website of UNO’s History Department calls Christian a “renaissance man” who “climaxed the last seven years of his life as a very popular lecturer in English and History at UNO,” and associate history professor Michael Mizell-Nelson, writing about Christian in *Harlem Renaissance Lives from the African American National Biography* calls him the Zora Neale Hurston and Carter G. Woodson of Louisiana (116).

During his lifetime, Christian never left Louisiana, and this isolation may account for his not being as well-known as other African-American figures associated with the Harlem Renaissance. Still, Christian was a local public figure who earned a modicum of national recognition. His poetry appears in the same national black magazines as do the works of other esteemed African-American writers. For instance, he had works published in both the NAACP’s magazine, *The Crisis*, edited by Du Bois, and in the Urban League’s *Opportunity*. Both these publications published the works of Jean Toomer, Hughes, Hurston, and Claude McKay as well as other prominent black writers. Joan Redding’s “The Dillard Project: The Black Unit of the Louisiana Writers’ Project,” Clayton’s “The Federal Writer’s Project for Blacks in Louisiana,” and Hessler’s essay discuss Christian’s writing career. Those useful articles as well as Violet Harriet Bryan’s examination of his treatment of *les gens de couleur libre* focus mostly on the historical value of *The Negro in Louisiana*. However, Rudolph Lewis’s introduction to Christian’s *I Am New Orleans and Other Poems* and Lewis’s online article “Marcus Bruce

Christian & A Theory of A Black Aesthetic,” a paper he presented at the 1999 Zora Neale Hurston conference, examine Christian’s literary efforts and his attitudes about the goals of black writers.

None of the articles on Christian approach his formation as a writer and political leader in light of rhetorical theory, his ethos, or personal identity construction. Redding, for example, observes that the black writers’ unit at Dillard worked through the history manuscript to shape public opinion about “the Negro problem” and that their “major goals were to correct the established discriminatory history and prove [...] that blacks had contributed fundamentally to American history” (60), but that is the extent of her analysis of the manuscript’s rhetorical moves, how its discourse serves as constitutive rhetoric, and how Christian’s own identity as a black man in Louisiana may have shaped the manuscript. In addition, although the scholarship on Christian references his poetry and sometimes his diary and notes, as in Dent’s reminiscence, most studies stress his contributions as an historian so strongly that the significance of Christian’s diary and notes may escape readers¹. In these diary and notes, a reader will find the private writings of an exceptionally learned, perceptive man who navigated the lakes, rivers, and bayous of the segregated South’s rhetorical discourse and its adherence to white supremacist ideology with a keen self-awareness and high level of critical literacy.

This thesis shines the light of rhetorical theory on Christian’s diary and notes, specifically examining rhetorical practices evident in the documents that indicate they were a key site of rhetorical education for him. His praxis, influenced by pedagogical methods of the nineteenth century, provided him with the kind of rhetorical education others of all ethnic groups attained only through extended, formal education, if then. This thesis argues further that other than using

¹ At least twenty-seven entries from Christian’s diary and notes have been published at a website online; however, according to a conversation with a special collections librarian at UNO in 2012, these entries may have been published without the explicit permission of the university.

his diary in the pursuit of learning for learning's sake, Christian constructed and maintained a Duboisian ethos, shaping himself into what in his era would have been called a "race man," one worthy of acceptance by academia and someone who could be identified publically as a member of Du Bois's "Talented Tenth."

Chapter II: An Approach to Analysis

The ways in which Christian's diary and notes serve in the creation of his ethos is the root of this thesis, but as James Jasinski states in *The Sourcebook on Rhetoric*, "Reflection on the basic idea of human character or ethos leads to complex issues on the nature of selfhood and human personality" (264). While such reflection remains intriguing, this additional, complex issue, the nature of self-hood, is beyond the boundaries of this paper. Consequently, this writer concedes, as Dan Doll and Jessica Munns observe in their introduction to *Recording and Reordering: Essays on the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Diary and Journal*, that "the subject of the private/personal diary is always the self in one way or another, [and] the construction of that self is inevitably the product of shaping and selection, in short, of art" (13). A more fruitful discussion here is how this paper delineates the word ethos as it examines Christian's Duboisian ethos and how his diary and notes are deemed a site of rhetorical education in his maintenance of the Duboisian ethos.

This paper subscribes to Logan's definition of a "site of rhetorical education." She establishes that the term *rhetorical education* means "various combinations of experiences influencing how people understand and practice effective communication" (3), and she determines that any space is a site of rhetorical education when being there involves "the act of communicating and receiving information through writing, speaking, reading, or listening" (4). In these spaces, people learn about how rhetoric works, how language is used to influence others. Rhetoric is understood here as the art of effective persuasion or communication that moves others to act and change a situation, ideally for the better. In the field of rhetoric, understanding how rhetors construct arguments using the classical means of persuasion—logos, pathos, and ethos—is a critical skill, but possibly ever since Aristotle wrote that "character (ethos) is almost,

so to speak, the most authoritative form of persuasion” (1356a), rhetorical scholars have studied how rhetors establish ethos. Furthermore, *despite* Aristotle’s assertion that the credibility of the speaker “should result from the speech, not from previous opinion that the speaker is a certain kind of person” (1356a) and most likely *because* Isocrates contradicts that assertion in the *Antidosis* when he insists rhetorical ethos is also constructed by the audience’s assessment of a rhetor’s reputation, rhetorical scholars ironically have taken on how rhetors establish ethos as an ethical question. Does a speaker fake in speech a particular ethos as a snake oil salesman may or is ethos a means of persuasion that comes through maintaining certain habits of mind and a admirable lifestyle? Considering how Christian used his diary and notes, this writer argues that Christian’s ethos developed from his habits of mind which naturally shaped his rhetoric.

In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, modern rhetorical scholar Kenneth Burke submits that ethos or establishing ethos is a writer or speaker’s most potent means of persuasion, and he defines ethos as an exhibition of “consubstantiation,” the signs writers and speakers use to show that they share the same ethical substance with the audience, meaning they are of the same place and values as the audience they hope to persuade. In order to achieve “consustantiation,” writers and speakers must indicate that they are the same as their audience as much as possible. Referencing Aristotle’s teaching on identifying with an audience, Burke argues, “You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his. [. . .] You give the signs of such consubstantiality by deference to an audience’s opinions (55). Acknowledging the writings of Aristotle and Cicero, Burke says the orator must “display the appropriate signs of character needed to earn the audience’s good will.” Further that when a rhetor “yields” to an audience’s opinions in other areas, that rhetor has a greater chance of changing the audience’s opinion in another (56).

Christian fashioned himself so that he would be accepted by an audience of white Southerners. He understood persuading a large number of white Southerners to accept black people as fully-vibrant citizens was the only way to defeat segregation and other institutional inequalities. He needed to change the minds of those with more power. He also hoped to persuade black Southerners that they were capable of grasping citizenship and rising above the circumstances of a segregated, hostile South. He kept a third audience in mind as well. He sought the approval of W. E. B. Dubois and the educated, middle-class black people who followed him, striving to show himself to be like them in character, and *character*, often used synonymously with *ethics/ethos*, remains tied to having morals, “good” values, and doing right according to the social code of a group. White supremacist rhetoric declared that black people are incapable of having good character.

Nedra Reynolds, in her paper “*Ēthos* as Location: New Sites for Understanding Discursive Authority,” establishes that Greco-Roman teachers did not adhere to the belief that moral character and *ethos* were “singular or innate” (327). Character as an innate, unchanging quality is an idea associated more readily with concepts of the unified subject or Cartesian model of self-hood that was accepted during the Enlightenment Era. Reynolds quotes Aristotle to say *ethos* was viewed as “a combination of practical wisdom, virtue, and good will” (327). Since people are not born with practical wisdom, Aristotle’s view indicates *ethos* can be developed. Reynolds credits George Kennedy with saying that *ethos* is “reflected in deliberate choices of actions and developed into a habit of mind” (qtd. in Reynolds 327). She contends that “*ēthos* also refers to the social context surrounding the solitary rhetor” (327).

An individual’s *ēthos* cannot be determined outside of the space in which it was created or without a sense of cultural context. That cultural context, however, does not

necessarily mean a conflict-free environment; a social group is not necessarily made up of like-minded individuals who gather in harmony. (329)

In addition to Christian's self-writing in his diary and notes, the stifling and demeaning environment of the Jim Crow South mingled with the rich culture of Southeastern Louisiana was a unique space that contributed to forming Christian's ethos. Indeed his diary and notes served as a space where he evaluated that environment and culture, a space having a soil all its own where he processed the signs and symbols of his rhetorical situation and then chose to change his circumstances through developing his intellect and honing his persuasive abilities. He did so partly because his specific sociopolitical time and space challenged his right to exist within that time and space; nevertheless, through his diary and notes, he wrote and articulated himself into an existence in which he counted as a culturally and politically significant man.

Again, African-Americans have long had to prove that they are intelligent, literate, and deserving of recognition as fully human and, therefore, worthy of the same rights as other Americans. Following slavery, comprehension of this need to prove themselves prompted those who had the ability to run that gauntlet of proof to run it not only for themselves but also for the ascension of "the Negro race" as America defined it. Though born more than 30 years after the end of slavery, Christian confronted this same reality, one that drove black people to prove themselves civilized. Logan cites numerous self-help books that were advertised in nineteenth-century black newspapers post-emancipation, taking advantage of the "'Negro improvement' agenda." During this "Jacksonian era," as Logan calls it, "the belief in the people's ability to improve themselves" grew among the white middle-class as well (53). These manuals were often targeted to women, advising them in "etiquette, courtship and marriage, and homemaking," such as *The Skillful Housewife's Book* (1846) (53). However, some manuals were specifically aimed

at African-Americans, such as this one with its exceptionally long title: *Afro-American Home Manual and Practical Self Educator, Showing What to Do and How to Do It; Being a Complete Guide to Success in Life* (1902). Another was *The College of Life or Practical Self Educator: A Manual of Self-Improvement for the Colored Race*. Logan uses a footnote to give the entire title of the book, which extends for another four lines.

“Engaged in a project of recovery from the devastating effects of slavery,” Logan writes, “African Americans set about trying to change themselves into acceptable members of white society rather than trying to change society” (54). In other words, these freed slaves and their offspring believed in what today is called “respectability politics.” Nineteenth-century proponents of maintaining respectability in order to be deemed worthy of citizenship and equality insisted that black people would avoid discrimination if only they would conform to white, middle-class social mores. Consequently, from Reconstruction through most of Christian’s lifetime, habits such as attending church, getting an education, enforcing self-discipline, holding a strong work ethic, and participating in political and literacy organizations were encouraged for racial elevation.

Du Bois may be viewed as the poster boy for “Negro improvement,” and as will become clear later in this thesis, Christian admired him. Du Bois received his first undergraduate degree from then-prestigious Fisk University, a historically black school, then earned a second bachelor’s at Harvard. He was also the first African-American to receive both a master’s degree and Ph.D. from that ivy league institution. He studied abroad in Germany as well. As a result, Du Bois was the most well-known, public, black intellectual in his day and a living proof that black men could be learned scholars conforming to the values of the white middle-class. This high public profile gave him the contacts and clout to promulgate his version of black identity and

ideas about raising black achievement levels; however, his vision and views differed from nineteenth-century sculptors of blackness.

One of Du Bois's most well-known proposals for prioritizing higher-level education for African-Americans is his 1903 essay, "The Talented Tenth." Often described as elitist, the essay stands in direct opposition to Washington's promotion of limited education for blacks. Christian in Chapter 38 of *The Negro in Louisiana*, covering "Negro Education from 1900 to 1940," somewhat derisively characterizes Washington as advising black people "to stick to the three Ps for their economic salvation—preach, plow, and plant cotton" (1). In contrast, Du Bois, argues in the opening of his Talented Tenth essay,

The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races (A W.E.B. Du Bois Reader, Kindle Edition).

Du Bois wanted to change the race *and* the world and change it at a faster pace than leaders such as Booker T. Washington thought possible, but his agenda could not succeed without African-Americans pursuing and attaining higher levels of critical literacy, specifically the kinds of skills gained through rhetorical education. In order to change the world, to sway opinions about the capabilities and intelligence of African-Americans, the Talented Tenth needed to master standard English in both speech and writing, to think critically enough to understand Du Bois's own arguments for full citizenship, and to develop an appreciation for the art and music of Western-European culture, which would prove their humanity to whites. In other words, "the talented tenth" had to acquire all the traits associated with good citizenship and power in America. Logan

in another essay, “To Get an Education and Teach My People,” expounds on the connection between rhetorical education and power, stating that gaining rhetorical mastery was especially crucial given that black Americans had to catch up after “years of legislated illiteracy” (40). “With few exceptions,” she writes, “learning to read and write the language was the critical first step toward using it to persuade,” but she explains that often in the ante-bellum South, only basic literacy was deemed necessary (40). This attitude was a problem to solve, something to overcome. Undoubtedly, Du Bois knew this as did Christian and a significant part of the black community in the both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Two years after the publication of the Talented Tenth essay, Du Bois co-founded the Niagara Movement, “the civil rights group comprised of militant Talented Tenth men and women” (Levering 4). Fourteen years later, in his 1919 editorial “Jim Crow” in *The Crisis* magazine, he wrote of the need for a “new and great Negro ethos” that called for black people to work within their own communities developing art, industry, and their own society and culture (112). (Christian, by then, was 19 and working as a chauffeur in New Orleans.) Du Bois also embraced the Ethiopian Prophecy. The Ethiopian Prophecy is a teaching extrapolated from the Judeo-Christian Bible. It was interpreted by black preachers and political leaders even during the slavery era to mean Africa would rise again and black people would be kings and queens as they were said to have been in Africa before the African Diaspora. In “African Origins/American Appropriations: Maria Stewart and Ethiopia Rising,” included in her book *We Are Coming*, Logan writes,

Nineteenth-century black speakers frequently invoked the spiritual and political prophecy from the Old Testament Psalm 68:31: ‘Princes shall come out of Egypt

and Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hand to God”—alluding, in some instances, to a future international dominance of African people.’” (23)

Renowned nineteenth-century black preachers such as Richard Allen (founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church), Bishop Tanner, and Alexander Crummel “made [the Ethiopian Prophecy] a cornerstone” of their sermons, according to Logan (23). Scholar Ghelawdewos Araia in “The Historical and Ideological Foundations of Pan-Africanism” indicates Pan-Africanism, a political movement that strives for the union of all descendants of Africa around the world, was also connected to “the Ethiopian Movement” in the early twentieth century. As numerous historical documents confirm, Du Bois, a founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, was also a leader in the Pan-African Movement.

African Diaspora scholar Elliott Skinner and others argue that the image of Africa in the Western-European imagination and culture has been distorted to support white supremacist ideology (29). Du Bois believed this as well and understood that the promulgation of these beliefs succeeded through faulty rhetorical arguments but rhetorical arguments, nonetheless. Consequently, he constructed a counter-argument to change the image of the American Negro in the eyes of whites and in some cases blacks as well, one that would combat white supremacist propaganda. His desire to elevate “the Negro father land” in the world’s eyes, especially in the gaze of white Americans and Europeans, is obvious in his early writing. He clearly supposed that identification with a romanticized ancient Africa that rivaled the glory of Europe would position his people for prosperity and equality, which would counter white supremacist propaganda that black people were savages and more like apes. By identifying with a great past and land of origin, the descendants of slavery would connect to black people’s right to be “co-worker[s] in the kingdom of culture,” Du Bois suggests in his popular essay “Our Spiritual Strivings.” This

essay first appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1897, three years before Christian's birth, and again later in Du Bois's book *The Souls of Black Folk* published in 1903. In "Our Spiritual Strivings," immediately after Du Bois contends that the end of black people's striving is becoming "a co-worker in the kingdom of culture," he writes in the lofty language of Romantic poets, "The shadow of a mighty Negro past flits through the tale of Ethiopia the Shadowy and of Egypt the sphinx." Mostern notes that Du Bois, before his attraction to Marxism, identified with "a version of existential and intellectual individualism whose rhetoric is Emersonian, as in the striving individual within a capitalized 'Nature'" (61). Referencing *The Souls of Black Folk* and Du Bois's early autobiography *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*, Mostern further characterizes Du Bois's self-representation as well as the racial identity he constructed for the American Negro to be "the representation of individual heroism" (61). One may reasonably conclude that when Du Bois speaks of double-consciousness in "Our Spiritual Strivings" and represents it as an internal war that prevents "the Negro" from having a "true self-consciousness" (11), he viewed this true or ideal self as the Romantic hero that white writers and artists reified even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Du Bois's image of black identity merges this heroic Romantic self with ideas of the royal Ethiopian. Duboisian ethos, then, may be defined as having a strong identification with black self-improvement via higher education, liberal arts in particular; as holding a world view that privileges the European ideal of the autonomous male as indicated partly by his "talented tenth" rhetoric, a man who can be the hero or savior; as keeping a vision of the future greatness for black people as well via identification with a romanticized Africa that links the Negro to a glorious black past; and as possessing a passion to pursue equality within American democracy on behalf of oneself and the black race.

As this paper examines how Christian constructed this Duboisian ethos for himself, it employs Michel Foucault's work in his book *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* as integral to analyzing ethos construction in Christian's diary and notes. Foucault documents and analyzes the use of self-writing in Greco-Roman culture, a practice that required citizens to physically copy to paper the discourse they read and heard daily. This practice enabled a person to digest the discourse of philosophers and leaders of the *polis* until they became one with the discourse consumed. Interpreting and paraphrasing the Greek philosopher Seneca, Foucault writes,

The role of writing is to constitute, along with all that reading has constituted, a body: [...] And this body should be understood not as a body of doctrine but, rather—following an often-evoked metaphor of digestion—as the very body of the one who, by transcribing his readings, has appropriated them and made their truth his own: writing transforms the thing seen or heard ‘into tissues and blood’ (*in vires et en sanguinem*). It becomes a principle of rational action in the writer himself.” (213)

This writer observes here a similarity between ethos construction according to Burke and self-construction as Foucault explains its operation in Greco-Roman culture. Burke proposes ethos is the sign that a writer or speaker has reached consubstantiation with an audience. Foucault's work asserts that Greco-Roman teachers perceived ethos construction as acts of becoming one with or figuratively absorbing into the body the discourse one has consumed and written down. This process of self-writing began with the “making of *hupomnēmata*.” In modern pedagogy, the making of *hupomnēmata* is referred to as keeping a commonplace book. In *Ethics*, Foucault discusses keeping *hupomnēmata*—a precursor to diary keeping. He asserts that during the Greco-

Roman period, these books “could be account books, public registers or individual notebooks used as memory aids” but in self-writing the writer keeps an account of him or herself.

Their use as books of life, as guides for conduct, seems to have become a common thing for a whole cultivated public. One wrote down quotes in them, extracts from books, examples, and actions that one had witnessed or read about, reflections or reasonings that one had heard or that had come to mind. They constituted a material record of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering them up as a kind of accumulated measure for subsequent readings and meditations.

(*Ethics* 209)

Recalling again the self-emancipating power of diaries, it should be noted that creating *hupomnēmata* to construct a healthy ethos is an emancipatory act, according to Foucault. He argued that a person’s ethos was “visible to others” and “evident in his clothing, appearance, gait . . . A man of splendid ethos” would “be admired and put forward as an example” and as one who helped to maintain a free society (286). Foucault concludes that cultivating a healthy ethos is “the practice of freedom, the conscious practice of freedom” (284). In Christian’s diary and notes, he often uses his entries in the same ways citizens of the Greco-Roman polis used *hupomnēmata*, which was as the means to creating a personal ethos that helped them to be better citizens who enjoyed and fostered freedom. Christian creates *hupomnēmata* in order to construct the Duboisian ethos he believes will set him and other African-Americans free as full citizens of America.

Foucault’s research on ethos aligns with other definitions of ethos previously presented and these definitions apply when considering Christian’s admiration of Du Bois. This admiration

manifests in his diary and notes as a desire to consume certain types of discourse until he possessed and exhibited a Duboisian ethos to himself and the public.

Chapter III: Constructing Ethos through Extracts, Imitation, and Evaluations of Discourse

One of Christian's earliest diary entries that reflects on his life is contained in his first bound journal in box one. The entry does not have a specific date; however, he annotated it, "1924-1926 Period. Written while at 2816 Tulane Avenue. Bertha and I had broken." The annotation, dated "8/5/54," indicates, as do some of his other diary entries, that he periodically reviewed his life by reading his diary. The fading script of the entry is difficult to read, but what may be deciphered suggests that he was experiencing emotional turmoil. He describes himself as being broken while dogs yelp at him. Other entries during this period include notes about what he must do for his dry cleaning business. That he began a business, which required that he not only do the physical work but also market the business, is a tribute to his work ethic. Additionally, the entries include his literary observations, bits of autobiography, and quotes from the works of professional journalists and poets as well as his imitations of these poets' writing. Though the entries are typically undated, Christian labels the top of the journal's pages "Extracts." In this early stage of diary keeping, his attention to his journal is closer to making *hupomnēmata* than it is to what modern readers might call a diary. He is building a commonplace book and as Foucault describes it, this is a book of self- and ethos-construction. Christian's entries also fit another writer's definition of the commonplace book. In an essay "Images, the Commonplace Book, and Digital Self-Fashioning," Bob Whipple's view of how writers use commonplace books is strikingly similar to Foucault's work on *hupomnēmata*. Whipple asserts that real commonplace books are not the neat pages of published commonplace

books. Published commonplace books have been shaped by editors to look like whatever it is editors think such books should look like. These books in their natural state, says Whipple, are an unruly space, a space wherein the compiler can both record and try out, are places wherein the compiler sets down material for future use and reference, and catchalls for the miscellany of one's determined knowledge. They are, in essence, places wherein the compiler begins a kind of making, a kind of building of intellect, of storing material that one keeps not for the simple sake of keeping but for the purpose of making the material part of one's intellect and therefore constructing part of one's self. (100)

By using these pages as he does, however, to practice writing and to keep and analyze the written words of others as well as his own experiences developing his critical literacy, Christian is not only creating the self, he is also tending a site of rhetorical education.

These early journal entries consist of extracts from northern newspapers, such as the *Chicago Journal of Commerce*, extracts of verse by internationally-known poets, and quotes from once popular but now forgotten political writers and novelists, such as Kathleen Norris, who wrote essays critical of war. Christian most likely preserved these passages of Norris's work because they reflect an anti-war, non-violence position. His public editorial writing and later diary entries indicate that he shared Norris's views or adopted them as his own. He also copied passages that reveal his curiosity about how media of human communication were changing. One passage by Norris in his journal reads, "The newspapers and magazines alone carry more world information every month than Caesar or Napoleon or Peter the Great ever had about any of their wars." He must often have contemplated the power of the press. Christian dreamed of running his own newspaper. This aspiration will be discussed later in this paper, but it is telling

that he copied long passages of writing by journalists in his diary while he longed to be a journalist and publisher himself. His diary “expose[s] a great deal about writers’ habits of mind and level of rhetorical sophistication,” as Logan argues diaries that serve as sites of rhetorical education must (34).

While it may be argued that all diaries expose diarists’ habits of mind and level of rhetorical sophistication, Logan’s argument is that diaries that are sites of rhetorical education are those in which the diarists spend time discussing specifically the power of language and how language works to influence their world. She states that such diarists “write out their thoughts on issues and respond [. . .] to what they have read, heard, or experienced thereby developing their critical skills” (34). Responding to what one has experienced is universal to all diaries, but focusing *critically* on what one has read and heard may not be. Her emphasis on the development of “critical [thinking] skills” separates diaries considered to be sites of rhetorical education from those merely used to record or work out feelings about one’s daily existence. Diaries that are also sites of rhetorical education provide researchers information on the literacy-related activities that diarists have pursued outside of the diary, says Logan. Christian’s diary and notes as a site of rhetorical education support her assertions. One sees in his commonplace book and journals a man attempting to learn French, listening to opera and the symphony, critiquing his conversations with others, and rhetorically analyzing political speeches, news articles, and radio programs. In a 1927 diary entry, for example, Christian writes about an argument he had with an acquaintance: “I had a very good argument with Tom Hell. Technically, I won it. He laughs at my newspaper aspirations.” This short entry shows that he was aware of rhetoric in its purist form, functioning to help win arguments.

Although not versed in modern theories of constitutive rhetoric or epistemic construction, Christian, nonetheless, believed in the power of discourse to alter not simply his life but to change a world entrenched in a complex and oppressive system for those like him. He believed specific types of discourse would elevate the black community, as illustrated in the plan he wrote for that newspaper he dreamed of. He writes that it will be “a race paper,” that is “a newspaper having *power and influence* [emphasis added]—holding a unique position in relation to Southern newspapers; having for its personnel men and women who have made some unique or beneficial contribution to the race at large” (MCCBXI, bound journal). The entry is undated but appears in the same bound journal that includes his entry about arguing with Tom Hell. Documenting life events that took place between 1924 and 1930, the journal was also created during the same period in which the *Louisiana Weekly*, a black newspaper in New Orleans, was founded (1925); however, Christian was aware of black newspapers around the nation before the *Weekly* began, such as the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Afro-American*, as indicated by his correspondence and published writing found in special collections. The position of his entry about creating a newspaper appears earlier in the journal, making it more likely that he wrote his plan for a newspaper closer to 1924 than to 1930. His concept of a “race paper” so early is one of many examples reflecting how the Duboisian ethos influenced him, and by the mid 1920s, that ethos included a vision of black women serving also as those “co-workers in the kingdom of culture” Du Bois sought, not just “talented tenth” men.

Christian clearly accepted the call Du Bois issued in his essays for black men of intellect and good character to become “race men,” leaders who exhibited pride in African-American history, identity, and culture, and who through their own pursuits and exhibitions of intelligence negated the tropes of white superiority. He was a prime candidate for this kind of campaign due

to the environment in which he was raised. Not only was his father literate and a schoolteacher, but his grandfather was as well, according to Hessler. In addition, Christian's father was a political activist. Christian's unfinished autobiography, entitled "Dark Record," is included in his diary and notes and reveals that he, like Hurston, spent his formative years in a community where he heard stories about black people who retained a strong sense of agency. He writes in "Dark Record" that his father came from a town farther north in the state and participated in planning an uprising there during the deconstruction of Reconstruction, but "it was nipped in the bud by alert whites." The black men involved were hunted by night-riders (the Ku Klux Klan); therefore, his father and twelve other men escaped and settled in an all-black section of Houma called Carpentersville. There they bought land and built their family homes. As a child, Christian overheard these men retell this story of resistance, grounding him early in a sense of history in which black men took action.

The title "Dark Record" is similar to the title of Du Bois's early autobiography, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, and Christian's unfinished autobiography opens in a strikingly similar way. Du Bois opens his narrative with the words, "I was born by a golden river and in the shadow of two great hills five years after the Emancipation Proclamation." The opening gives Du Bois's birth a mythic quality, suggesting that he was born at a special moment in time in an unusual environment. "Dark Record" begins "I was born in The Deep South. The state in which I was born is so very far South until its southernmost end is washed by the waters of The Gulf of Mexico." While many autobiographies begin with the words "I was born," not as many autobiographers begin with such clear placement the self in special circumstances using poetic language. Like Du Bois, Christian casts himself as a person of substance, destined for greatness, or at the very least, someone born in place that stokes the imagination. Indeed, he

makes sure that his readers know he was born so far South, few may doubt his credibility as someone knows Dixie and the black man's segregated existence. This thesis does not compare passages from Christian's autobiographical writing with DuBois's to establish that Christian greatly admired Du Bois and undoubtedly emulated him but to give more evidence that Christian used his diary to analyze and imitate the work of leaders and writers he admired. These practices are examples of how one twentieth-century, self-educated black man who wanted to pursue a literary career went about developing the skills for that work. As such, his documentation of these activities in his diary suggests that his diary was a site of rhetorical education for him. Ample evidence beyond his diary supports that he remained inspired by Du Bois. For instance, a letter from Christian to Du Bois, dated May 17, 1944, is included in Du Bois's papers at the University of Massachusetts library. Christian's letter thanks Du Bois for returning poetry and articles Christian had previously submitted to *Phylon*, a magazine edited by Du Bois. Apparently the submission arrived as Du Bois was leaving the magazine. Christian laments that his work will not be published under Du Bois's editorship (as some of Christian's other work had been while Du Bois was at *The Crisis*). He writes that he "had a feeling of sad defeat" when he read news of Du Bois's departure. He continues praising Du Bois: "I know that there are Negroes in the South who have never seen you and yet speak of you with pride and affection." He says these admirers "remember the great work" Du Bois has done and his "long hours of thankless toil."

Du Bois was not the only prominent leader to whom Christian wrote. As is evident in his correspondence and his public writing, Christian positioned himself as a leader and spokesman for African-Americans in Louisiana, living up to Du Bois's expectation that exceptional black men would lead their communities forward. Entries in his diary and copies of correspondence

also show that he pressured himself to become extraordinary and contribute to society, perceiving great possibility for his future despite Jim Crow's roadblocks. Du Bois's private writing from his youth reveals that he, too, perceived himself to have a great future ahead. In multiple diary entries between 1930 and 1940, Christian writes of a "need" to record his life. In an entry dated March 23, 1936, the same month that he began working with the FWP, he complains that he has wanted to "keep a record" of his days. On Labor Day, the same year, he logs, "Started a diary yesterday. I have found it necessary to catch passing events." A year later in September, he mentions that he is drafting "I am New Orleans," a poem still quoted sometimes today, and then again, "I feel I should keep a record of these hectic days. . . . I'd like to tell it all, but it is impossible." Sprinkled throughout his diary and notes are brief drafts of narrative he intends to become part of his autobiography, showing that he thought his life was worthy of sharing with a larger audience. Undoubtedly most diarists feel compelled to record their daily activities, but considering the contents of diaries by young girls, such as those Lejeune discusses in his chapter "Journal de Jeune Fille" in *On Diary*, not all diarists assume their lives deserve to be recounted for the masses and published as autobiography. Lejeune mentions specifically the diary of Marie Bashkirtseff written in the 1800s, and he describes it as being "abnormal" for its "narcissistic sincerity (139), her expectation that she and her diaries would be famous and "read by the general public" (140). He also speaks of diaries kept for different purposes, confessional or religious diaries, for example. Such diarists may feel compelled to express themselves but also compelled to avoid expressing any expectation of greatness.

At NathanielTurner.com, Lewis has published multiple letters transcribed from originals in the Marcus Christian Collection at UNO. Christian contacted northerners he perceived to dismiss Louisiana's black population as completely illiterate or portrayed it as barren of literary

achievement. Christian would write as an advocate for his part of the world. His tendency to speak out, write, and self-publish both poetry and prose on topics that ranged from religion to black identity and to distribute that work both locally and nationally establishes him as more than a struggling writer and self-trained historian for his time. Like Du Bois at the international level, Christian on a local level was a public intellectual. Making points similar to these about the public Christian, Yulbritton Shy argues in his UNO Masters in History thesis, “‘This is OUR AMERICA, TOO’: Marcus B. Christian & the History of Black Louisiana,” that the self-trained Christian was “an organic intellectual,” and the materials in Christian’s collection “all highlight the activities of an organic intellectual seeking to channel the history, culture, and intellectual traditions of a marginalized group of blacks in America” (5-6).

Christian self-published “his first book of poems *Ethopia* [sic] *Triumphant and Other Poems* in 1922, a project on which he lost money because he was unhappy with the unprofessional printing and refused to accept delivery,” writes Hessler (38). His disappointment with the printing that presented his work with typographical errors evinces his desire to produce a public self with a higher level of literacy, not the basic literacy of reading and writing that he observed being taught in Louisiana’s “colored schools,” but the literacy of a critical thinker, a well-read person of understanding, someone like Du Bois and perhaps like Louisiana’s aristocratic free people of color of the 1800s. In other words, he pressured himself to represent black people well just as nineteenth century blacks pressured themselves to do. The title of the book also reveals his exposure to the same Ethiopian rhetoric that Du Bois used in his writing. An early entry in Christian’s diary reads, “O’ Ethiopia, who shall write thine epic.” Furthermore, among his notes is the draft of a welcome speech he prepared during the 1920s for the national convention of the African Methodist Episcopal church, the Afro-centric sect founded by Richard

Allen who preached the Ethiopian Prophecy, and in it he says that he speaks “on behalf of the awakened youth of New Orleans.” He declares that the city’s awakened youth are “those who are striving to lay a good foundation for the higher ideals of Christianity, and the higher ideals of citizenship, the higher ideals of race unity and race-consciousness.” The structure of this passage with its use of anaphora and appeals to an ethos of higher moral ground suggests he was exposed, either through his own reading, church services, his father’s teaching or, most likely through all three, to some form of rhetorical training in oration; however, this supposition is also based on evidence that nineteenth century pedagogy in black America included training in rhetorical oration. Heidi Morse, in her dissertation “Minding “Our Cicero: Nineteenth-Century African American Women's Rhetoric and the Classical Tradition,” states,

“donations of secondhand schoolbooks from the North arrived in even greater numbers [than those developed specifically for emancipated slaves], making available a set of pedagogical practices emphasizing public speaking and classical rhetorical legacies common in early-nineteenth-century American education that were not reflected in books written for freed people (28).

She declares that these pedagogies had a lasting impact on education in black communities, playing a critical role in African-American civic engagement (29). This classical rhetorical education would have been the kind of teaching nineteenth century African-Americans would have been exposed to through the literary societies that Logan mentions (56) and the Republican Loyal League (6). The hypothesis that Christian’s father, born in the 1860s, probably practiced this pedagogy when educating his son at Houma Academy is reasonable, especially considering that Christian’s poetry was so heavily influenced by nineteenth-century aesthetics, as Dent notes (24). Furthermore, according to Betsy Petersen’s 1970 interview of Christian for *Dixie*

Magazine, Christian had impressive stage presence and was an excellent speaker. Again, this is evidence that his formal education, though limited, probably followed a nineteenth-century model, making it probable as well that he learned about keeping a commonplace book from his father or while reading articles about how to become better educated on one's own.

Christian's journal sheds light on his creative writing process as well, on how he honed his craft as a poet. As mentioned earlier, he practiced imitation, a way of learning advocated by Quintilian and other Greco-Roman teachers as well as nineteenth-century composition instructors. The following excerpt from his commonplace book is verse from the poem "Charles Sumner" by Longfellow, suggesting again that Christian tended to identify with figures of the British and American Romantic period and men considered to be great in general:

As the great Longfellow said of the immortal [Charles] Sumner:

"So when a great man dies,

For years beyond our ken,

The light he leaves behind him lies

Upon the paths of men." (Extracts page 5)

The poem pays tribute to someone regarded as a great man leaving behind a good legacy. In an undated entry near this excerpt, Christian quotes Shakespeare, "King Richard cried out "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!" and then berates himself for not pursuing his dream to publish the "race paper" previously described, an enterprise that would be a lasting legacy. Again, he used his diary as space in which he copied and examined the literature he read, but more than this, he related what he read to his own development as a writer and rhetor. Between his welcome speech and diary entries, it is obvious that even during his younger years, he identified with images of autonomous manhood. Furthermore, his aesthetic, perhaps internalized

in part from his father's nineteenth-century pedagogy and not just through his admiration of Du Bois, pushed him to emulate Western culture. The lines he records are from the first stanza of Longfellow's poem, "Charles Sumner." Here is the second stanza:

His was the troubled life,
The conflict and the pain,
The grief, the bitterness of strife,
The honor without stain (324).

Sumner was an antislavery politician, and Longfellow presents him in elegy as a man who overcame grief and pain. These aspects of Sumner's life may be another reason the poem resonated with Christian, who had lost his mother, father, and twin sister all before he was 14 years old. Christian, too, was acquainted with grief. He follows the Longfellow extract on great men's legacies with a verse of his own mirroring Longfellow's theme of a person who overcomes grief and tribulation and is destined for glory.

Nursed into being from the torrid realm,
Terrible tortured, swift as the wrath of god;
Bursting forth from the poor flesh,
Like Pallas
Fully armed and ready to do battle.

For in pain and in travail

Forth have I brought thee,

O Soul

And none can deny thee!

Original (Bound journal 1924-31, Box XI)

The sweeping, panoramic view of the poem echoes poetry by Romantic-era poets and its contents—the hero bigger than life with allusions to Greco-Roman gods. He writes himself as the titan Pallas, god of war craft, “born ready to do battle,” or as the goddess Athena, who sprang from Zeus’s head in full armor, according to Greco-Roman mythology. Another entry shows his affinity for Romantic era concepts, such as Shelley and Byron’s fascination with daemons, a touch of divinity in the soul: “Somewhere within me is a spark of greatness,” Christian writes, “sweltering at red-hot heat, warming and firing my very soul, until at last that soul shall burst forth into flame.” Among his papers is a list of names written on the back of an envelope, including the names such as Emerson, Whitman, Robert Burns, and Robert Southey, literary figures who were also advocates of freedom. Du Bois’s self-representation prior to the 1930s also privileged notions of the Romantic hero, as Mostern writes.

Extracts beyond Christian’s bound journal also include quotes from Emerson, such as ““Our thoughts are interior to our deeds and must ever be so. Were it not for the imagination of our thoughts, we should still be in the Stone Age of the World,” and ““What is the hardest task in the world? To think.’ –Emerson on Intellect.” Christian may not have been aware that he was creating his own ethos through keeping a common book, but given his copying down the Emerson quote, he certainly considered that one’s thoughts proceed from an interior self and precede one’s actions. He recorded the words of scientists and dabbled in writing science fiction. On a loose page, he copied what appears to be an entire speech delivered by Charles Proteus Steinmetz, an inventor who received the first patent for an alternating current generator. The speech covers physics and debates the existence of god. And on other pages damaged by time, looking closely, one can see faded writing with reference to historical figures such as Alexander

Dumas, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Frederick Douglass, and William Lloyd Garrison, as well as mentions of Greek and Roman philosophers. His diary and notes contain proof after proof that he used his diary and notes as a site of rhetorical education, much more proof than can be evaluated in the limits of this paper. However, as Logan says of the private learners whose diaries she studied, the diarists needed not know that their diaries are sites of rhetorical education (34). Christian's goal was to become a person of superior literacy. For him that meant being not only well-educated but also skilled in using his knowledge as a sword against segregationist propaganda, which makes his effort a journey toward attaining a rhetorical education as well.

Chapter IV: Diary and Navigating the Complexities of a Binary System's Façade: Fruits of Rhetorical Education

Christian's early diary and notes consists of lists and reminders written on a variety of materials from full sheets of writing paper to mere strips, the backs of envelopes, handbills, and even a book spine that has fallen away from its body. Many of these snippets of writing are undated; however, archivists have labeled the first two folders 1924, 31 and 1928-1939. The diaries in the first box (MCCBXI) span 1924 through 1967. After 1930, the number of extracts decreases. His entry dated Thanksgiving Day, 1931, is the first of what becomes frequently longer and more reflective entries. He writes:

It must be '31, but the years are traveling so fast until I cannot keep up with them.

I am coming back to you — poor inconstant diary. It has been so long since I made an entry. Like the hero in any story, I sit before the radio, Frank Aresma:

'When the autumn leaves of life begin to fall.' In it was something about the 'harvest being sweeter then.' I started thinking of women I might have loved and married.

There again is his affinity for identifying with the heroic self. He names a few of the women he has known, deciding one named Hattie seems to have been best "10 years after!" Then he writes, "I must be someone with a terrible amount of will power to do the things I have done in life." After reflecting more about his dalliances, he concludes that he is better off as he is. The entry continues for two pages. His next legible entries span two weeks in July 1935.

On March 23, 1936, after he had been working for the FWP for nearly a month, he returns to analyzing his life experiences under Jim Crow; however, New Orleans is an unusual

city. Its Jim Crow was not like other Jim Crows. In the 1930s, its restaurants, water fountains, and public accommodations were segregated, but some of its neighborhoods were not. Christian lived among whites, but he remained ever aware that he was perceived to be beneath them. In his diary, he becomes wrapped up in the behaviors of his white neighbors, in particular the lives of the O'Rourkes. Their fourteen-year old daughter, Gloria, visits him often, and the two appear to have a mutual fondness; however, he remains uneasy because she is white and becoming a woman. One moment he is buying her ice cream because she falls ill, and the next he worries that she spends too much time near him and has become too familiar. In his long entry on March 23, he writes that after he has been chatting on the porch with several neighbors, the group disperses, but Gloria, who has been curled up on his steps and practically in his lap, refuses to leave. "Then Frank . . . [a young, white male appears]. I feel that they want to impress upon me the awful omnipresence of white might."

According to multiple entries, he had been warning Gloria that their friendship will be coming to an end. By September 9, the girl is angry, he writes, most likely because he told her that her father has forbidden her to run errands for him. Working for the FWP, he has given up his dry cleaning business and explains in the entry that his friendship with Gloria and another young, white female, Elizabeth, "were the outgrowth of this pressing place [dry cleaning], and now that I am out of it, they cannot survive." He may mean not only due to the loss of friendship they may not survive, but also due to his being unavailable and not giving them nickels to run to the store for him. He records later that Gloria passes by his house and yells, "Hello, presser."

Two days later, in the street, Bobby Miller, a white boy, asks him about whether he can clean some pants. Christian writes, "They cannot see anything but a presser in me. Anything else is a joke." He perceives that they do not believe he can move beyond his life station. These types

of entries—those in which he worries over his relationships with white women and observes that white men want to emphasize “the awful omnipresence of white might” to him—reveal Christian’s struggle negotiating between his desire to be recognized as the literate black writer and scholar he aspired to be and seeming to be just another black laborer. He lived beside immigrants, “working class” white people whose American roots were much more shallow than his own. He bore them no ill will, but he knew that a black man loving books was an odd creature to them indeed and that doors of opportunity would open for them that remained closed for him. His September 11 entry suggests also that he fears being stuck in the “presser” position. Having a dry-cleaning business made him a business owner, yes, but he was an owner whose business had failed.

An earlier passage written on September 8, 1936, illustrates his attitude about being held back even more but also shows his level of rhetorical sophistication in considering his rhetorical situation.

By keeping a diary, I am beginning to learn that I am like a prisoner, who seeing only a few faces each day puts an exaggerated importance upon them. But when I go out, I still feel that way. Perhaps my prison is my mind. The South is pretty good at making prisons for dark people. We are all in prison perhaps. That applies to whites as well. (MCCBXI)

This paper uses the term rhetorical situation as Lloyd Bitzer defines it in his essay “The Rhetorical Situation.” Bitzer first establishes that “rhetoric is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world” (3-4). He then defines rhetorical situations to be sets of circumstances in specific times and places that demand a response in order to change the situation. The response comes into

being the same way that “an answer comes into existence in response to a question.” Further, he declares that whatever speech arises during such circumstances is only rhetorical when it addresses the situation at hand in order to change the situation. “The situation,” argues Bitzer, “is the source and ground” that drives the rhetoric (5-6). Christian views his rhetorical situation to be one that captures his mind, driving him to spend too much time worrying about what his white neighbors do and say. Thus, his thoughts, actions, and words are driven by his relationship to a white world. Christian discerns as well that his rhetorical situation has merely the façade of being binary, of black world versus white world. He is astute enough to grasp that the oppression of a white supremacist system harms both blacks and whites. He is also aware that the power to change the situation is within him, but he knows he cannot change his world in any immediate way. In analyzing his reality and self-writing his existence as a man greater than the South will acknowledge, he is writing, as Lejeune says, to a future he cannot see. Christian writes to a moment ahead in which people, perhaps, will see him as the writer he has constituted himself to be, and he recognizes that his diary can teach him something about himself. With this self-awareness and keen perception of the present, a solid grasping of the history of black people in the South, and the hope that the future will be different, he in many ways straddles time.

In an undated diary entry, Christian recounts touching bales of cotton that lined Canal Street outside Krauss Department Store. Christian considers the weight of the bales and contemplates how dearly slaves paid to help build New Orleans, listing the atrocities African-Americans endured, such as lynching, rapes, and near starvation:

How many outraged cries of an oppressed people were muffled when the huge press had descended down upon the soft fleecy cotton? [...] how many cries of help from the black manhood of the South have been called in vain because of

that bale of cotton? Before my eyes the building faded—the multi-colored lights of the twentieth century dimmed—and there stood before me the queen city of the South—New Orleans in the days of old. (MCCBXI)

Cleverly, even in his diary here, he works a bit of wordplay, a dance between the literal and figurative. The weight of the bales presses the oppressed. The people are literally and figuratively pressed down by something that is white and fluffy but in volume, crushing. Hence, he uses his diary to examine the conditions of the past that create his rhetorical present and to recount his understanding of these connections. Such use of that space again illustrates his diary functioning as a site of rhetorical education. He has written out his response to an issue, one that requires interpretation of political events, further developing his critical skills, as Logan might say. Christian's intense awareness of African-American struggle in the face of injustice—his ability to connect to his people's pain and rage and to examine the contradictions of the black experience spanning centuries in Louisiana—emerges in much of his writing, both private and public. He often brushes against the opaque curtain that blurs comprehension of the past, but he sees an opening, and gazes back centuries, finding connections to his present.

As Christian's diary and notes are the writings of a professional journalist and creative writer and because he often did not clearly date his entries, it has been necessary to pause at times and draw from external material to verify when entries are factual to his life and not one of his attempts to craft fiction; however, it has been argued that even fiction is rhetoric. The passage discussed in the previous paragraph comes from a longer passage that Dent, in his reminiscence of Christian, accurately gauges to have been written "probably in the thirties or early forties" (24). Although undated, the entry begins with Christian recounting part of his day, saying that he "just came in from Dillard," and on the way home he had stopped at Krauss to buy meat for

Caliban, his dog, and also meat for himself. Although Christian worked as a librarian for Dillard from 1942 to 1950, as previously stated, he was on the school's campus before that with the FWP. Given how he describes a sense of the present falling away to reveal the past and says, "there stood before me the queen city of the South-New Orleans of the days of old," he probably wrote the entry sometime in the first nine months of 1937. According to his September 9, 1937, diary entry, he began drafting the poem "I Am New Orleans" the same day he saw the bales. During his time in the FWP, he was part of a community of writers as well and studying not only history, but the *belle lettres* of free people of the color writing in the 1800s. What he learned from books and observed of people's language related to his work frequently appears in his diary.

His diary again serves as a site of rhetorical education when he decides that some of the racially-shaded incidents he experiences with Gloria "will be some help in 'No Second Spring,'" a story he hopes to write. Taken by the title he has given the work, he writes, "Those free Negroes have taught me what a rich thing a phrase is to the writer, and what a splendid thing is a paragraph" (September 6, 1936). Given Logan's definition that a rhetorical education offers "various combinations of experiences influencing how people practice effective communications" and that a diary is a site of rhetorical education when "it provides such combinations of experiences" (34), becoming a space where the diarist discusses specifically the power of language and how language works to influence their world, then Christian's diary frequently served as site of rhetorical education for him, and the development of his rhetorical skills there became increasingly evident in his public life.

The rhetorical education he pursued privately and the rest of his self-education enabled him to understand how the United States claimed to work versus how it actually worked on

behalf of its black “citizens.” He developed a sharp socio-political literacy, recognizing propaganda and bias when he read and heard it. In *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African-American Women*, Jacqueline Royster defines socio-political literacy as “a socio-cognitive ability. It is the ability to gain access to information and to use this information variously to articulate lives and experiences, and also to identify, think through, refine and solve problems, sometimes complex problems over time” (45). This understanding of sociopolitical or critical literacy is useful in examining the complex rhetoric and linguistic maneuvers in Christian’s diary, allowing for, as Royster says, a more “comprehensive view” of literacy. The following entry exemplifies not only his righteous indignation but his consciousness regarding the hypocrisy and injustice operating in the political system of his day. On June 6, 1944, he hears state representative Felix Edward Hébert on the radio speaking about D-Day, and he writes:

He predicated everything upon the South. From the way he sounded only the south was in the war. Boy. It was narrow. [...] All the world is moving towards invasion and a new day but southern Edward Hebert. D-Day is here but no day is D-Day to Southerners but a field day of killing or lynching niggers. I am so tired. Laughing in the back while fixing something to eat and telling myself that someone had hoodooed me. (MCCBXI)

He dissects the congressman’s speech, calling it “narrow,” showing that he recognized slanted narratives. The entry brims with passion and *pathos*. He mentions lynchings, and then tells himself, “I am so tired,” negotiating his negative feelings by acknowledging his weariness with the struggle. He is so burned out with it all that he laughs at a world that has him feeling manipulated, “hoodooed” him or manipulated him. He is experiencing both a literal fatigue and

an emotional fatigue in this passage, but his analysis relates his weariness to his sociopolitical situation, and as Bitzer defines it, Christian is evaluating and responding to a rhetorical situation as well. His life's work revolved around changing that world.

Christian's world challenges him in other ways, too. His desire to produce a literate public self, one having mastered standard English, was complicated during his lifetime by the popularity of well-educated black authors writing in black dialect, writers such as Hughes, Hurston, and Sterling Brown. Christian was a man who had spent his life running from negative "Negro" stereotypes and speaking non-Standard English, so it is not surprising that he worked through some self-resistance when it came to writing in dialect, to presenting to the public the persona of an illiterate black man. Apparently, his attempt to reproduce black dialect on the page was not always artful, as a letter he received from Hughes, dated February 15, 1932, indicates, four years before Christian began his work with the FWP. In the letter, Hughes offers Christian constructive criticism and advice about a better approach to writing black dialect: "your dialect is too complicated for the average person to read [...] limit your dialect to a few words like spelling 'the' in the conventional 'de' way and not attempting to dialectize every word" (Web. n.p.).

When Christian received that letter in 1932, he was living at 2500 Palmyra Street. He lived there as late as 1935 when his dry cleaning business failed, a difficult time for him. His September 9, 1937, diary entry indicates that he later moved around the corner to 314 South Rocheblave Street. That entry is also the entry from which the quote that opens this paper is taken in which he declares that there, meaning at Palmyra, he became articulate to the world. In the entry, Christian attempts to ameliorate the discomfort he feels privately about appearing to write poorly or seeming to be ignorant. In the entry, he describes watching his former residence from his Rocheblave address, and he reflects on the physical and mental spaces of his past.

The sun is just falling across the side of the house in which I spent my last days in hell. Funny! That I say it! I may see harder days—I have in here—and yet they are different days. I am not groping in blind fashion. I know what I want to do.

Yet I bear no ill will to 2500 Palmyra. (MCCBXI)

In the same year of this entry, his correspondence with George Schuyler of the *Pittsburgh Courier* creates a picture of his activities while he lived at Palmyra. Christian directs the newspaper editor to a 1932 newspaper announcement of a poets' meeting at 2500 Palmyra, a gathering that Christian organized. Apparently, even while he took notes on the adventures of Gloria O'Rourke and others, he also attempted to connect with other writers. His initiation of literary club meetings aligns with Logan's assertion that creating literary societies was an aspect of race elevation among African-Americans in the nineteenth century, and as has been already stated, much of Christian's approach to achieving literacy in the twentieth century was based on nineteenth-century educational practices. Through his letter to Schuyler (one of the letters he wrote correcting misconceptions about black culture in New Orleans), it becomes evident that when he writes in his 1936 entry that "It was there that I became articulate—not to myself but to the world. I had long been articulate to myself," he is speaking of his early days working at his poetry, eventually being published in national magazines, writing for the *Louisiana Weekly*, watching his dry-cleaning business fail, and landing his job with the FWP.

In the lines that follow his declaration that he knows how to articulate himself, he writes, "So, I must go through four years of straining body and mind to give birth to eight poems in *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* and be able to walk across the pages of *The Weekly* in the garb of an illiterate clown, with grammar all awry." Quite possibly, he is upset because his writing

published at *The Weekly* is riddled with grammatical errors, but what matters here is that he associates the use of non-standard English with appearing to be “an illiterate clown.”

His concern about appearing illiterate may also refer to writing in black dialect intentionally. Earlier in the entry he says that on Wednesday, he “received three copies of *Opportunity*. It contained my poem ‘The Slave,’ done up in boxed form and placed within the address of Dr. [William Stewart] Nelson.” (Nelson was the first black president of Dillard University.) He mentions the poem, invoking connections to slavery which by its nature links to illiteracy, but then quickly switches to talking about an activity that exemplifies him as a Talented Tenth type: “Learning to translate French rather good. Best way to learn French is to learn it as we learned English. Use it as you learn.” From there he writes to himself for a while about friends and family. Later he turns to his thought on self-articulation. The articulation of self versus “grammar all awry” suggests a self-dialectic or the two warring selves of Du Bois’s double consciousness. He argues against being interpellated into conflicting positions, the literate man he wants the world to see and the illiterate slave/clown he fears they see.

Over the six years that Christian worked at the FWP, he reported to Lyle Saxon, who became a friend to Christian, allowing him to have a more intimate view of a white male writer’s life, his counterpart. Saxon is known for writing Louisiana folklore and the book *Gumbo Yaya*, to which Christian contributed, and Saxon is discussed here because Christian often reflects on segregation’s false binary when writing about his interactions with Saxon. In some ways their relationship illustrates an aspect of Du Bois’s theory of double consciousness, which argues that black people constantly measure themselves against white people. Through his interactions with Saxon, Christian did not deal with a Ku Klux Klan-type white supremacist ugliness but the more genteel wing of segregationist thought, paternal racism, which can be both calming and

frustrating, illuminating and baffling, so often kind yet insulting. Frequently, its expression unveils the subconscious acceptance of white superiority that manifests itself as a seemingly loving tolerance for perceived black ineptitude that may, such people assume, over time and with enough exposure to white culture, be overcome. The problem with such an assumption is that it too is grounded in a belief that whiteness or white culture is inherently superior to blackness. Christian, in a recollection, nonetheless describes Saxon as “a friend to the Negro.”

Saxon was gay, according to Jordan and De Carro’s essay about him, not a southerner by birth and perhaps the son of unmarried parents. Hence, he was marginalized as well to a degree. Writing about Saxon’s issues with his own identity, Jordan and De Carro contend that he felt some sympathy with black people through a sense of his own societal marginality (49). Still, Saxon indulged mythologies of antebellum Louisiana and plantation culture as the picture of beauty, an era of Southern charm and gentility. The stereotype of the contented slave, for instance, appears in *Gumbo Ya-Ya*. Despite considering Saxon “a friend to the Negro,” Christian understood his supervisor’s myopia on matters of race.

In his diary entry of December 10, 1943, which shifts between crafted autobiographical writing and diary, Christian appears to be unaware of Saxon’s sexual orientation, but he perceives that Saxon empathized with black people. This recognition prompts Christian to wonder why Saxon is different from other white men, from where came his “love of the underdog and hatred of the overlord--of which he himself is one, and even likes it sometime? Were there black blood connections in the ascending or descending scale of the thing. Or was there [a] love? [...]Who?”

Jordan and De Carro’s assessment of Saxon does not echo Christian’s speculation that Saxon may have had African blood; however, they agree with his observation of Saxon as

“overlord.” According to them, Saxon felt a deeper connection to the white gentry of the antebellum south that had lived in the comforts of plantation life, served by slaves. While he identified with African-Americans, especially black folklore, he identified more so with southern aristocracy (46).

In Christian’s diary, Saxon appears sometimes for long passages. His presence often illustrates a tension, the point at which Christian grapples with problematic experiences in his struggle to affirm an autonomous identity. An examination of the draft outline or proposal for *The Negro History of Louisiana* reveals the tension between this black male and white male of the segregation era as each tries to construct black history and black people’s contributions to Louisiana culture; however, Saxon’s role is only to give feedback, not to write or edit the manuscript, and yet, where Christian writes that “people generally conversant with American History erroneously believe that the Negro has made no considerable contribution to the advancement of American art, invention, economic progress, education or literature,” Saxon writes in the margin, “A controversial approach will simply alienate readers.” Where Christian asserts that although some people assume that African-Americans were simply given their freedom or think that “the American Negro was the only person ever to have freedom thrust upon him without struggling for it,” and that such people are “unmindful or ignorant of the fact that slave man-power of the South” was a “deciding factor in the outcome of the Civil War,” Saxon writes emphatically, “No No Prove it?” And when Christian writes of insurrections and slave rebellions followed by a graphic description of how a black slave who beat a French soldier was sentenced to a life of brutal beatings and having his ear cut off,” Saxon comments “gruesome. Spare your reader.” Christian thought it should be common knowledge that black men joined the Union army and fought for their freedom, that freedom was not merely handed to

them, but Saxon seemed to be as resistant to accepting that information as he was to believing that most slaves were not content. To Christian, Saxon may have seemed determined to downplay both the stories of horror and the stories of courage true to the black experience in America.

Saxon's objections are understandable when he is seen as a man who preferred to view the era of slavery as a white utopia. His presence in Christian's life is emphasized here because Saxon's notes to Christian expose a power relation, illustrating the kind of challenges a literate black man would have faced even from friendly whites in the South during segregation, and in his diary, Christian's writing about Saxon often includes Christian's attempt to negotiate both black and masculine identity. But seeing in "The Negro in Louisiana" manuscript Saxon's resistance to Christian's black world view provides some sense of how Christian, with almost inexhaustible passion, took on the mission of educating not only his fellow people of color about the contributions African-Americans made to Louisiana and the nation (Christian's work appeared more often in black publications), but also that of educating white people, hostile or friendly, and anyone else who suffered from what Christian called in one of his editorials "a cluttered mind."

At times in his diary, Christian fixates on Saxon, a man he admires; however, he also sometimes clearly resents Saxon's white privilege. On November, 10. 1943 (the FWP had ended nearly a year before), he writes about a telephone conversation he had with Saxon in which they discuss the black history manuscript, and Saxon asks him to bring it to his hotel. Visiting Saxon meant Christian would have to take a freight elevator because black people were not allowed to use the hotel's guest elevator, and Saxon apologizes for that: "'So just come down to the hotel, and I am really sorry that you will have to use that damn freight elevator, and you just can let me

read it while you're here,'" Saxon said, according to Christian. The conversation continues, and the two men figure out the logistics of Christian's delivery and also discuss Saxon's health. Saxon believes that Saxon is dying. (Christian did not know then that Saxon was indeed seriously ill.) Their conversation ends with a word that disturbs Christian:

I noticed, that he said, rather slowly and reflectively, and a little sadly, 'good-bye, boy'. I was just thinking. Roark Bradford wrote long ago—and it does seem ages ago, although it is only a year or two—that Mr. Saxon never called you boy.

(MCCBXI)

Saxon calling him "boy" bothered Christian because white men used to call black men "boy," even black men old enough to be their grandfathers, as a way of reducing the black male's stature and ensuring that the black man addressed recognized the white man speaking as his superior. This practice—and the overall attempt from slavery through the Jim Crow era to emasculate black men by telling them that were not really men—undoubtedly influenced Christian's decision to refer to himself as "the Man" in his later attempts to write an autobiographical novel rather than a straightforward autobiography. He sometimes slipped into calling himself "the Man" in his diary entries as well, but he did not refer to himself as "the Man" when he described how it felt to ride the freight elevator to Saxon's hotel room because he was not allowed in the people elevator.

"How could I go?" he writes, "Turn my head to the wall, and not watch the comments or the wisecracks of the white elevator tender." If his life were a novel, riding the freight elevator would be a metaphor for his existence confined and yet called free. He stood in a box, moving up toward the sky only to arrive at a room where his "white friend" may slip up and call him "boy." Despite his position as a professional writer, the author of books and poetry, despite being

someone who had worked with giants of black literature, he remained subordinate to men who, without their whiteness, would be considered of a lower class and stature than he, but he dare not tell the white elevator operators of his world what he thinks to their faces, so he writes his dissent in the hush harbor of his diary. In his diary, he is the subject not object, the hero, not the clown. In his diary, the “White gaze” inverts to black. What a weird world, segregated New Orleans, and yet Christian loved his city in much the same way residents love it today. It is the place where he “became articulate to the world.”

In November 1976, Marcus Bruce Christian collapsed while teaching a class at UNO and died a few days later on November 21, according to the Department of History’s website and Knowla.org entry 828. Now it may be observed that his life was more like Longfellow’s “Charles Sumner” poem than he ever knew. Scholar, poet, educator—he left a praiseworthy legacy, and this paper scratches only the top layer of Christian’s diary and notes. Given more space and time, a researcher could plumb deep ravines of observations about the creative process and glean what may be gleaned about what makes a rhetorical education stick. Can his habits of mind and practice of using a commonplace book teach rhetoric and composition instructors anything new about helping students consciously construct an ethos for life, not merely a virtual position for 101 papers? Similarly, a history scholar will find within Christian’s diary and notes a trove of complex and fascinating historical information from the view of an uncommon subject. Christian understood that he was living history, but this thesis surveys his diary and notes only up to 1945, the end of World War II, because after that date, new challenges appeared; a new era began. So much more remains to be studied within the years this thesis covers and in the rest of his diary and notes that extend more than two decades beyond 1945. The later entries are equally detailed and surprising about a life that was both ordinary and remarkable. His praxis of

hupomnēmata, his detailed observations about his white immigrant neighbors, his discomfort with being attracted sometimes to young white women, his issues with women in general, his insight into the racial climate of his lifetime as a smart man in black skin, and his constant battle to not slip wholly into poverty in New Orleans all deserve time and attention from scholars. He was a fascinating man and one this writer finds hard to let go. To use Christian's own words about his diary and notes, "I'd like to tell it all, but it is impossible."

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Vita

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