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## Race-ing the Canon

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# RACE-ING THE CANON

## American Icons, From Thomas Jefferson to Alain Locke

*Jacoby Adeshei Carter*

### Introduction

The American racial canon does not lie in some pristine past waiting to be discovered. Instead, the canon is what it has been made to be; which has in part to do with what its contributors have intended it to be, though it is not exclusively that, in part to do with what it has and is currently understood to be, and in part to do with what its current interpreters and contributors both understand and intend it to be in the future. Canons are in a sense a codification of an intellectual tradition. In this regard they share with intellectual traditions the fact of being constructions; that is, canons do not exist ready-made. To be sure, there need be no prevailing consensus on any of these points, which is to say that canons are as much contested as they are constructed.

The driving idea of this chapter is to discuss how a serious consideration of race reorients us to questions of canonicity in regard to American philosophy generally, and pragmatism specifically. Canons may just be obstacles, inevitable traps that get in the way of a deeper sense of engagement with the thought and work of figures or traditions that might be fruitfully investigated. No presumption has been made regarding the value of canonizing. It is to be hoped that the critical reflection on the enterprise offered here in the limited context of racializing a canon will help to clarify the drawbacks and potential usefulness of canonical constructions. Emphasizing canons allows one to focus on the consequences of taking race seriously for understanding central figures and their work. It opens the possibility for a critical perspective on putative canons and novel ideas for the construction of new canons, particularly, one that focuses on the philosophy of race. A plausible assumption is that two things happen: the canon's content looks rather different, and one comes to a different understanding of the existing canonical figures. To that end, this chapter will not be a recounting of what all of the canonical figures thought about race, but what happens to American philosophy (and pragmatism) when one takes racialism seriously, does not forgive bigoted intellectuals their racism, and insists on the inclusion and centrality of intellectuals previously excluded from the canon. American philosophy is not usefully defined in the geographic and state-centric

sense of philosophy done in the United States. American philosophy names a number of traditions, schools, and camps. Pragmatism is one such tradition. At times pragmatism is the focus of this chapter; at others, the scope extends beyond pragmatism.

One approach to criticizing and reconstructing canons is to do so from the perspective of those excluded from them. That is the approach of this chapter. It aims to criticize the pragmatist and American racial canons from the standpoints of African descendant intellectuals. That is, Afrodescendant intellectuals in the United States are taken as representative of, and an entry point for, a broader anti-racist and decolonial set of traditions that offer crucial critical perspectives on the canon. This could of course be done from the perspective of other racialized and marginalized populations in the United States, for example, Asian American or Indigenous Americans. Afrodescendant people in the United States provided, arguably, the most well-thought out and well-articulated theories of race and racism, and the most thoroughly scathing criticism of white supremacist canons of any racial group in the United States. The perspective taken here does not assume that race is equivalent to blackness, nor does it assume a black/white binary. It does, however, proceed on the assumption that Afrodescendant people in the United States offer a uniquely insightful critical perspective on canonical construction—one with far-reaching implications.

The American racial canon is missing what every good canon needs: a lively active oppositional set of communities of inquiry. The American race canon historically excluded the very oppositional authorities that would have had the most theoretically corrective effect on its production. This exclusion was predicated merely on the race of those potential contributors. The history of race thinking in the United States has gone from naïve attempts to express the xenophobic sentiments of an imperialist culture, to putative religious accounts of human difference, to pseudo-scientific biological views of race, to semi-intellectual racialism, to staunchly recalcitrant racism, finally beginning to yield in the latter twentieth and early twenty-first centuries to a non-biological constructionist racial conception.

The American canon has also not dealt honestly with its own entanglement with the popular rather than theoretical conception of race (Locke 1990). Its architects have tried to proffer as pure science the rationalization of historical cultural bias and prejudice. Every black racial theorist in the history of the United States has inveighed against the intellectual shortcomings of pseudo-scientific accounts of race of their respective days, but the long history of marginalization of their scholarship has served as a bulwark against engagement with the critical perspectives of black men and women, and reified the insular chauvinism of white theorists. American philosophy has not re-oriented itself with an eye towards the centrality that racism has had in the construction and projection of America as a distinct cultural enterprise or an empire.

Presumably, a larger more diverse community of inquiry will likely strengthen a canon. Among other things, a diversity of critical theoretical perspectives, critical evaluation of theories and attempts to defend them against such criticism, the introduction of novel theories and concepts that better explain observed phenomena, are commonly understood as methods for advancing knowledge. However, the historical exclusion from the American canon of non-white male inquirers and communities of inquiry has resulted in a theoretically weaker canon than might have otherwise existed. It is weaker in at least two ways. First, in that it is simply missing informed rigorous theoretical conceptions produced by non-white men and women. Second, that even as this historical

exclusion is beginning to be addressed the tendency of contemporary scholars is to interpret the thought of those now finding inclusion in the canon either as ancillary to the thought of white canonical figures or in terms of contemporary philosophical thought; rather than through the theoretical frameworks of previous historical periods. Despite enlarging the canon somewhat, this still happens today, and the result is that the history of philosophical thought about race in the United States has developed largely along two different paths.

### **Lacunae, Derelictions, and Under-Specialization: Two Unreconciled Racial Strivings**

It has been argued that African American philosophy faces a dereliction crisis. One meaning of dereliction is dilapidation; falling into a state of ill repair. Another is the shameful failure to meet one's responsibilities and obligations especially in a professional capacity. There is a tendency in American philosophy, very pronounced in pragmatism, to understand and characterize, explicitly or implicitly, the thought of African American philosophers as the mere extension of canonical white philosophers to issues of race and racism, or the experiences of African descendant peoples in the Americas (Curry 2011a). African American peoples are regarded as the subjects of experiences to which European and Anglo-American philosophies can be applied (Gordon 2000). The subject matter of philosophical reflection, the concrete experiences are black. The theoretical frameworks through which those experiences are given philosophical meaning are white, even when articulated by black people.

American philosophy is dilapidated by this derelictical crisis because it undermines the full articulation, comprehension, and appreciation of genuinely novel philosophical contributions of Afrodescendant peoples. The unprecedented, uniquely critical and radically alternative products of African American thought are not understood or studied as such. It ought not to escape attention that (African) American philosophy is in a state of dilapidation because academic philosophers have been derelict in their intellectual responsibilities. Some philosophers have read canonical figures unstudied in race theory into debates where they are out of place, and neglected a rich tradition of well-studied scholarship on race. Others have failed to express the appropriate indignation at such an unjustifiable intrusion and seemingly purposeful negligence. One form that this dereliction takes is mistaken, incomplete, and misleading canonization.

Arguably, the more interesting focus of this chapter is not so much on racing or racializing "the canon" as it is on articulating a view about the canonizing of race theory. The former presupposes both the existence of a discernable canon, and the legitimacy of that canon as representing, in this case, a tradition of thought in the United States. In that sense, racing or racializing the canon is in large part a process of first identifying iconic intellectual figures, and subsequently asking what if anything they thought about race or racism. This can have a number of undesirable results, such as overemphasizing such thinkers' concerns with racial questions; overestimating the contribution of relatively few and insignificant works to the philosophy of race; attempts to explain the apparent derelictions of iconic figures as relatively benign oversights; or efforts to show that recognized canonical figures concerns with other concepts and social problems, were in fact, implicitly concerns about race or racism.

A different approach is offered by the latter alternative; namely, canonizing race theory. A marked difference of this latter approach from the former is that it begins by first asking what are the central and novel theories, concepts, or arguments about race and racism in the United States, and subsequently asks which thinkers articulated them. The primary concern is with philosophizing about race. This approach has the advantage of not making individual figures appear to be more concerned with racial questions than they in fact were; places important and significant work in the philosophy of race in its proper context; and elevates and recognizes key contributions and contributors to the philosophy of race on their own terms. It is important to note that a number of thinkers who may be included by the latter approach were not vying for inclusion in “the canon” (though admittedly some were). Far from seeing themselves as potential members in a US racial canon, many in fact understood their work as being in opposition to the sort of scholarship that would likely make up such a collection (see for example Cooper 1998; Delany 2003; Stewart 1987; Walker 2000). One such example is the polemicist abolitionist David Walker.

As David Walker points out in his critique of Thomas Jefferson, white theorists in the United States often underestimate the effects of chattel slavery and social exclusion on the progress of African descendant peoples (Walker 2000: 12–20). Walker takes issue with Jefferson’s contention that it was unfortunate that God made some human beings black, where that is understood by Jefferson to mark either a cultural or biological inferiority (Walker 2000: 12). Walker’s response on this score is perhaps along the lines Alain Locke had in mind in rejecting the idea that lack of political power and fortune could be correctly explained by supposed cultural or biological inferiority (Locke 1992: 22–24). Walker asserts that African descendant peoples are equal in their endowments to whites, and that both have the same right to be free from enslavement or to enslave the other. Walker contends that it is the greed, thirst for power, and pursuit of profit and material gain, not a biological or cultural superiority, or possession or lack of rights, that motivates whites to enslave blacks (Walker 2000: 14).

Walker sees the need for educating Negro youth to meet the intellectual challenges to their personhood (Walker 2000: 17). Walker maintains that the refutations of white Americans are not enough because as white they embody a certain cultural perspective (that same sort of perspective that one finds on display in Emerson, Addams, and Royce); they, unlike Afrodescendants, cannot write from the perspective of the down-trodden in a white supremacist world. Even white intellectuals such as Emerson and Addams who decry the evils of slavery may hold to problematic racial views, or misunderstand the phenomenon of racism. Moreover, such thinkers may fail to appreciate fully the intellectual and cultural contributions of Afrodescendant peoples (Walker 2000: 16–17).

It is important to Walker’s mind that blacks themselves offer a refutation. He writes:

For let no one of us suppose that the refutations which have been written by our white friends are enough—they are *whites*—we are *blacks*. We, and the world wish to see the charges of Mr. Jefferson refuted by the blacks *themselves*, according to their chance; for we must remember that what the whites have written respecting this subject, is other men’s labours, and did not emanate from the blacks.

(Walker 2000: 17)

For one, Walker thinks that blacks themselves must offer a refutation of Jefferson's pronouncements because thorough refutation requires criticism from the perspective of the enslaved (Walker 2000: 17). Moreover, Walker sees the writing of such a refutation itself as an assertion of one's humanity and dignity. This is also why he thinks that such activity cannot be left to whites; for Walker, it seems that the humanity of a people must be claimed and maintained through repeated acts of assertion and confrontation (Walker 2000: 17). Walker is keenly aware of the damage that Jefferson's claims about African descendant peoples has done, and will continue to do when he writes: "Do you believe that the assertions of such a man, will pass away into oblivion unobserved by this people and the world?" (Walker 2000: 17–18).

Walker argues for an existential demonstration of black personhood; an active affirmation of one's humanity manifested through a refusal to be subject to the dehumanizing actions of white Americans (Walker 2000: 30). The difference between Walker and Jefferson is not the call for such demonstration, but Jefferson's "suspicion" that no such demonstration is in the offing, and Walker's unyielding confidence that it is. Already, Walker alludes to a possible way to situate Jefferson into the American race canon; Jefferson gives clear and forceful articulation to the intellectual and cultural challenge facing Afrodescendant peoples in the United States from the perspective of white Americans (Walker 2000: 29–30). Walker's consideration of Jefferson raises another interesting aspect of the American racial canon. It is not only that white intellectuals are included and blacks are not, nor is it simply that white intellectuals are able to determine who is admitted and who is not, but the thought of white intellectuals functions so as to set the terms, the very conditions for the possibility of the inclusion of African descendant voices in the canon. And importantly, their work is able to serve that function regardless of its intellectual warrant; but merely in virtue of being the product of a member of a group believed capable of theorizing, and producing knowledge, relative to the work of members of a group deemed incapable of such pursuits (see for example Curry 2010; Harris 1987, 1988, 1989, 1997, 1999). This is why the mere "suspicions" of a man like Jefferson can become a standard of legitimacy, and a *prima facie* intellectual hurdle for black thinkers who must first demonstrate that Jefferson's suspicion is false, before they can establish facts about the humanity and potential of African descendant peoples. This is so even when such refutations already exist in the form of the intellectual works of African Americans such as Alexander Crummell and Benjamin Banneker.

Neither pragmatism nor American philosophy is characterized by a deep and abiding criticism of racialization or racial injustice in the United States (or anywhere else in the Americas) (Curry 2010). Preoccupation with meta-philosophical concerns—standards of rigor, what counts as philosophy, and the rules of philosophical inquiry, and so forth—may distance interested philosophers from the substance of race theory. Contemporary philosophers unfamiliar with black intellectual history, opt instead to approach the philosophy of race by extending the thought of revered members of Anglo and European traditions to the subject of race and racism. This is the crux of underspecialization in race theory; it is both a lack of expertise in intellectual traditions that have made race and racism primary concerns, and the attempt to refashion those traditions in accordance with more mainstream philosophical views and philosophers. One is extremely hard-pressed to determine whether contemporary pragmatist or contemporary continental philosophers are most guilty of this particular form of

underspecialization (Curry 2010). (The focus here will remain on pragmatism and more will be said on the matter in the next section.) More than the privileged infiltration of Anglo and European descendant philosophers into an area of study in which they cannot reasonably be regarded as specialist, the attempt to make the work of such scholars relevant to race theory obscures the inadequacy and irrelevance of their thinking on race and helps to maintain some rather dubious views about race (Curry 2010).

Emerson offers us an example of how false beliefs about race and races can be compatible with opposition to some forms of racism (Field 2001: 1–3). So we find in an analysis of his writings evidence that opposition to chattel slavery is no bulwark against either racism or false beliefs about race along with a clear example that opposition to slavery need not be rooted in a positive attitude toward peoples of African descent, nor in a desire or willingness to share social, cultural, or democratic living with black people in the United States. Emerson's earlier belief that Negroes were intellectually inferior to whites and that slavery was justifiable if it tended toward the improvement of the enslaved is demonstrably false (Field 2001: 6). There were in fact Negroes of considerable intellect, but what is more, this sort of thinking about race has been responded to by black intellectuals.

While Emerson observed in his journals that specious argumentation could never provide a satisfactory defense of slavery to any reasonable person, not even that realization would help him to avoid the specious argumentation for the natural inferiority of the Negro (Field 2001: 6). Black thinkers such as Fredrick Douglass, Maria W. Stewart, David Walker, Alexander Crummell, Anna Julia Cooper, and Martin R. Delany argued that failure to recognize that slavery was an imposition on the full expression of Negro ability and potential and not a consequence of natural inferiority was an egregious mistake, and that the ability of the Negro to overcome it in many ways is a mark of Negro fortitude and ability (Cooper 1998; Crummell 1995; Delany 2003; Douglass 1995; Stewart 1987; Walker 2000). This marks an important difference between Emerson and David Walker. Walker sometimes has a rather low opinion of those who are in bondage, and certainly thought that continued enslavement was incompatible with human personhood (Walker 2000). Walker, however, distinguished quite carefully between inferiority in consequence of condition, and inferiority in consequence of race (Walker 2000: 9–20).

Pernicious racialism was so ingrained in the intellectual and cultural attitude of white scholars and writers as evidenced by Jefferson, Emerson, Addams and Royce, that any hope of finding in their work an accurate or well-reasoned study of race is at best whimsically nostalgic, and at worst baseless apologetics for undeserving heroes and heroines, or blatant myopia to their numerous theoretical shortcomings, or a misguided attempt to read into past racial theory contemporary conceptions and beliefs about race (Field 2001: 7; see also Curry 2010, 2011b).

Emerson held to the now anthropologically discredited view that race is causally and determinately related to culture (Field 2001: 7; for an alternative view see Locke 1992: 1–19). Emerson held a good deal of disdain for New England abolitionists whom he regarded as sappy moralists lacking in self-reliance (Field 2001: 9). Emerson's view of abolitionists as non-self-reliant "dog-cheap" moralists might have been tempered by the likes of Delany and Walker. Emerson was acquainted with a number of well-known abolitionists and a few of his relations supported the abolitionist's cause more strongly than he, so it was not for want of familiarity with abolitionism that he himself failed to take up the cause.

It was around 1844 that Emerson's views on race began to change (Field 2001: 15). One such change was his recognition that a powerful refutation was needed of the pro-slavery argument. Fortunately, such refutations already existed and had been forcefully called for by Walker in his *Appeal* (Walker 2000). Perhaps what Emerson was on to here was not simply the need for cogent arguments against the institution of slavery; those were already to be had. Emerson became further convinced that fighting slavery required the repudiation of claims of African American inferiority (Field 2001: 15). This need not be the case. One could believe blacks inferior to whites and still maintain that slavery is an unjust institution better abolished than continued. Even in changing some of his false beliefs about race—that the Negro was inferior and the Saxon superior, that race was a precondition for cultural aptitude and intelligence, that the Negro's condition resulted from his own subservient nature—Emerson's later support of abolition was not radical, and failed to issue into any overt plan of action. It was perhaps a theoretical improvement, but made little if any difference in practice.

A non-negligible element of Emerson's anti-slavery stance was opposition to and disdain for the lack of moral fortitude manifested by white New Englanders in the face of attempts by Southerners to defend and preserve the institution of slavery. Perhaps Emerson is a testament to the damaging effect of false beliefs about race on the thought and actions of otherwise reasonable and conscientious people. This makes the role of Afrodescendant peoples in the United States in the canon all the more important. The presence and prescience of their work in the incipient stages of the canons formation provides evidence of African American intellect, their personhood and character, and their active agency in their own plight, and a critical insight on US racial injustice, that is not compromised by the advantages and privileges of membership in the larger white US culture.

It is reasonable to think that Emerson found slavery a grave injustice, incompatible with American principles and values as he understood them, that needed to be abolished, and that he was not committed to a multiracial American future or strongly committed to racial equality. Emerson is proof positive that a white intellectual in the nineteenth century could speak out against slavery, join the abolitionist movement, participate in the Underground Railroad, and still hold false beliefs about race, fail to see a future for America as a racial democracy, and maintain a belief in Saxon racial superiority. And this, all the while he is friends and a close acquaintance to Henry David Thoreau, whose thinking on race matters in the United States was less problematic (McBride 2013; Harris 2002a).

Arguably, Emerson suffered from the epistemic limitations of his particular standpoint. Situated in and embodying a different epistemological perspective, Anna Julia Cooper's pioneering intellectual work, *A Voice From the South*, argues for the importance of black women to black social progress due to the tremendous burdens they are required to shoulder, the importance of education to black social progress, and articulates a theory of race and human value against the prevailing racist view of the worth of black people (Cooper 1998: 53–196). Cooper argued against the prevailing white supremacist view that African descendant people had, and have, nothing of value to contribute to Western civilization (Cooper 1998: 161–187). Perhaps best at articulating the value of speaking from a gendered or racialized perspective is Anna Julia Cooper. She is keen to recognize both the embodied and socially situated position of other writers, as well as her own. An oft quoted passage from *A Voice From the South* makes plain the importance



for Cooper of social location to one's thought and praxis. What is often missed is what immediately precedes Cooper's important claim about the situation and role of black women in advancing the cause of the race. It is worth quoting Cooper here at length.

The late Martin R. Delany, who was an unadulterated black man, used to say when honors of state fell upon him, that when he entered the council of kings the black race entered with him; meaning, I suppose, that there was no discounting his race identity and attributing his achievements to some admixture of Saxon blood. But our present record of eminent men, when placed beside the actual status of the race in America to-day, proves that no man can represent the race. Whatever the attainments of the individual may be, unless his home has moved *pari passu*, he can never be regarded as identical with or representative of the whole.

Only the BLACK WOMAN can say "when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole *Negro race enters with me.*" Is it not evident then that as individual workers for this race we must address ourselves with no half-hearted zeal to this feature of our mission. The need is felt and must be recognized by all. There is a call for workers, for missionaries, for men and women with the double consecration of a fundamental love of humanity and a desire for its melioration through the gospel; but superadded to this we demanded an intelligent and sympathetic comprehension of the interests and special needs of the Negro.

(Cooper 1998: 63–64)

Properly situating such authors in the American racial canon not only adds to that body of literature the particular location from which African Americans write, but it helps highlight the fact that white authors write from no less embodied, gendered, and racialized a perspective than their African descendant counterparts. More than that, it shows the diversity of perspectives even among African descendant theorists, by demonstrating that no one member of that community is able to speak for every member of the community, even while contending that some members are able to serve as litmus tests for the social plight of the whole. Thinkers such as Delany, Cooper, Walker, and Stewart challenged the normalized white perspective that treats the location of white male theorists as abstract, unembodied, and universal. As Cooper points out, Delany was always keenly aware of his embodiment as a black man, and the ramifications that had both for the character of his thought and his ability and manner of occupying certain spaces. African American writers position us to ask about the American racial canon, not just who are included or excluded, but which perspectives, which theoretical constructions for understanding race and racism in the United States, are able, or unable, to shape our understanding of these things.

There is not a single conception of a canon; this is why issues of their construction, constitution, and legitimacy are so contested. Canons are best conceived as a pluralistic conception. One way to approach the topic is to focus on what the American canon has to say about race. Yet another way is to focus more narrowly on the American philosophical canon's concerns about race. And narrower still would be to canonize works specifically on race.

## The American Evasion of the Philosophy of Race?

Canons are not uniformly positive. They are not simply repositories of the best thinking by the best minds. A canon is as often the vindication of a cultural bias, a reification of stereotypes, an amalgam of dogma, or a codification of a forcibly imposed hierarchy, as it is a positive contribution to culture, a reshaping of beliefs, or a critical reflection on the world or culture that produced it. Canons are not *a priori* or naturally bounded. There is no predetermined way to demarcate a canon; say, nationally, racially, by gender, linguistically, or time period. Rather in choosing any such method of demarcation and construction other beliefs, principles, and importantly, values must be brought to bear on a canon's creation.

Let us first disabuse ourselves of the fictitious belief that pragmatism's canonical white figures—James, Dewey, Addams—had any pressing concern for America's "race problem." And the claim here is twofold. First, that individually and personally, no pragmatist other than Alain Locke, save Cornel West and perhaps Josiah Royce, was seriously concerned with the problems associated with race and racism in America (Curry 2009; Tunstall 2009). Second, the claim is that not only has pragmatism as a school of thought almost completely avoided race as a pressing social concern worthy of conscious ameliorative effort, but that it does not require of its practitioners that they do so as a function of their pragmatism (Carter 2013; Harris 2013, 2002a).

One might ask what it is reasonable to expect in the work of a pragmatist social philosopher on issues of race in the United States. As it turns out, one should expect nothing of note; or perhaps, better, one should expect nothing in stark contrast to the prevailing sentiments about race characteristic of the pragmatist philosopher's own race, class, gender, and social status. The belief that there is something inherent in their pragmatism that would motivate a social agenda or program aimed explicitly at racial justice is unfounded (Carter 2013; Harris 2013, 2002b, 1988). Even were this not the case, we would still be well shy of the contention that pragmatist philosophers ought to be seen as experts on race or race relations in the United States. Furthermore, that a contemporary philosopher's own thinking about race was sparked or influenced by a classical pragmatist, does not make the canonical figures themselves important to, or significantly involved in the theory or philosophy of race. What is more, occupying a place in the canon is not itself an affirmation of the truth or legitimacy of one's position. Some views constitute part of the canon in the negative sense of representing prevalent, but false, theories that needed to be debunked, or representing views once important but now outdated and replaced by better positions.

As telling as an examination of the racial theorizing of major figures in the pragmatist philosophical tradition is for understanding the shortcomings of the US philosophical canon on race, the examination of exchanges between Afrodescendant and white intellectuals in the United States can be even more illuminating. An exemplary instance is the exchange between Jane Addams and Ida B. Wells-Barnett on lynching (Addams 1977; Wells-Barnett 1977). To begin with, Addams is willing to concede to Southerners who support and engage in lynching that they genuinely believe public lynching to be the only effective means of punishing and curtailing the rape or attempted rape of white women by black men (Addams 1977: 24). Moreover, Addams assumes further that Southern whites are convinced that a campaign of public terror is the only way to subdue the underdeveloped Negro (Addams 1977: 24). She later describes the rape of

white women as a crime committed by black men against the white race, though she does not describe the lynching of black people as a crime that victimizes the entire black race.

Attention to figures such as Alexander Crummell, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and W.E.B. Du Bois demonstrates how their white contemporaries' speculative thinking about race is often misguided and under-informed by the actual facts of the case (Crummell 1995: 78–100; Curry 2010). Wells-Barnett and Crummell demonstrate how a lack of familiarity with the facts of Negro life lead to grossly inaccurate estimation of the problems facing black communities (Wells-Barnett 1977: 22–27; Crummell 1995: 85–94). It was Du Bois, of course, who first gave theoretical articulation of the fact that Negro populations are groups who face problems and are not themselves inherently problematic (Du Bois 1995). Addams allows herself to entertain the idea that black men are the problem, and the question then becomes how best to deal with them when they rape white women. Wells-Barnett herself once entertained the idea that lynching was a particularly heinous form of punishment for a particular class of crime until she came to the existential realization that it was not (Curry 2012). In the same way that Cooper earlier illustrated the importance of gender perspectives among African descendant peoples, as it cannot be assumed that the perspective of Afrodescendant men represents the entire race; so too we see here one of the ways in which the perspective of Afrodescendant women can obfuscate the realities black men in the United States sometimes face. Wells, on the other hand, is able to see them as a population that faces a complex problem, and the question becomes, how can African descendant peoples in the United States make themselves safe from the extra-legal terror of lynch mobs? What is important here is the proper alignment of one's perspective or standpoint with the facts.

Wells has an important insight that calls into question the possibility that white commentators on lynching, in particular, but race and racism more generally seem to suffer from some impediment that blinds them to the facts of racial injustice, and inhibits the proper operation of their otherwise estimable intellects (Wells-Barnett 1977: 30). The facts about lynching, Wells points out, were not difficult to come by. Such an easily avoidable mistake is indicative of some more nefarious cause that underlies such a damning blight on such commentaries on America's race problem given that the oversight is so easily avoidable (Wells-Barnett 1977: 30).

### **A Concluding Note Regarding the Use of Du Bois as a Pragmatist**

It is important at this juncture to raise a couple of worries about the use of Du Bois as a pragmatist. There is good reason for scholars to remain unconvinced by attempts to claim that Du Bois was a pragmatist, Paul Taylor's very insightful suggestions regarding what might be useful about thinking of him in that way notwithstanding (Taylor 2004). The possibility of reading Du Bois pragmatically is not denied. Neither is it denied that such reading may prove useful for philosophical projects intended to illuminate either pragmatism or Du Bois. It is reasonable to think that pragmatism might be aided by incorporation of Du Boisian insights, but such likely illuminations are not the only consequences of so reading Du Bois. In terms of his substantive commitments he does not strike many scholars as very pragmatist; few, if any, outside of philosophy read him this way, and it is not the least bit clear that connection with pragmatist figures such as William James shows up prominently in much of his thought. Admittedly, he may at

some early point have had some affinity for some of pragmatism's founding figures, but that he was majorly influenced by any of them, or thought of himself as a pragmatist, strikes one as mere wishful conjecture on the part of pragmatists that want to portray the tradition as having been more inclusive than in fact it was.

One could argue that incorporating Du Bois into the pragmatist racial canon provides a window otherwise closed into the problem of race and racism in the United States. It might be thought that the inclusion of Du Bois in the pragmatist canon might mitigate its cooptation by white male supremacist culture. At the very least, reading Du Bois pragmatically in regard to the philosophy of race is lopsided. The benefit is double-sided, perhaps, but unequal. The trouble is that though Du Bois is perhaps further illuminated when read pragmatically, his thought on race is fairly well understandable without it. Whereas pragmatism without the inclusion of figures like Du Bois is almost wholly irrelevant to understanding the phenomenon of race in the United States. But the worry goes deeper than that. One might observe that there are two potential consequences that follow from the pragmatist invocation of Du Bois or any other member of the African American philosophical tradition (with the obvious exceptions of Alain Locke and Cornel West) that are deeply troublesome. First, such invocations set pragmatism up as the standard of legitimacy for the black intellectual tradition, and second, these invocations give pragmatism a legitimacy that it does not deserve.

With regard to the first, attempts to bring Du Bois into the pragmatist fold intentionally or inadvertently situate pragmatism in the privileged epistemological position of legitimizing African American thought and thinkers in the United States. It is as though the primary reason that pragmatists have to take Du Bois or any other aspect of the African American intellectual tradition in the United States seriously is only that it can be shown to be related to pragmatism in some way that it meets the standard of knowledge that pragmatism establishes. One might understand this as a particularly US instantiation of the problem that anti-colonial thinkers like Dussel and Mignolo have in mind when they talk about the geopolitics of knowledge and the geography of knowledge, and Lewis Gordon borrowing from Frantz Fanon has in mind when he writes about the geography of reason. The idea is that one must recognize that knowledge production is sometimes political and cultural, particularly, who can or cannot be a legitimate source of knowledge, and who gets to set the standard for what is to count as knowledge can be deeply culturally embedded and political. One way to think about this in this case is to ask why Du Bois or any Afrodescendant thinker in the United States needs to be associated with pragmatism for a pragmatist to take their thought seriously. This is not a requirement for members of other traditions, like continental philosophy, that pragmatists sometimes consider. No one sees the use or benefit in trying to make Habermas or Sartre out to be pragmatists. You even see pragmatists do this in the case of non-philosophical figures such as President Barack Obama.

The trouble is that intentionally or not, such attempts to situate members of the African American intellectual tradition in the United States within pragmatism sets pragmatism up as a legitimate and legitimizing tradition from which other presumably illegitimate traditions can earn legitimacy through a demonstration of how they can be squared with pragmatism. If something like this is not the unacknowledged underlying assumption, then one wonders why the turn to pragmatism in the first place? If one recognizes the thought of Du Bois or other African American intellectuals in the United States as legitimate in their own right, then what is the *use* of pragmatism? One could

just study Du Bois or African American intellectual history in the United States in their own right, much the way they do Habermas, Sartre, or existentialism.

The second worry is that the attempt to include members of the African American intellectual tradition, namely Du Bois, gives pragmatism a legitimacy that it does not merit. The trouble here is that pragmatism is able to claim to be something that it may in fact not be through the inclusion as pragmatists of figures who are not in fact pragmatists. If you include the likes of Du Bois, Martin Luther King Jr., Anna Julia Cooper, and so forth, then pragmatism can claim to be inclusive of perspectives and philosophical approaches they have historically excluded without really being in favor of those things. Moreover, pragmatists are then able to advertise themselves as more pluralistic in their philosophic methodology and orientation, even if the inclusion of alternative perspectives and methodologies is predicated on the ability to portray thinkers and schools of thought as commensurate with pragmatism in the first place.

This relates importantly to an earlier point regarding two differing approaches to race-ing the canon. When one begins with a primary concern for the canon per se, or iconic figures one may be led far afield of the most important work in the philosophy of race. One should not begin out of a fascination with Du Bois as an intellectual icon (though such fascination does have its place); rather one looks to Du Bois when doing work in the philosophy of race because no more sustained, critical, original, or detailed sociological and philosophical analysis of race in the United States is to be found. As regards canon formation, one is then left with an appreciation that canons are not best constructed through the mere subsuming of the African American intellectual tradition in the United States into existing white canons; but rather, through the appreciation of the novelty and expertise of persons outside the traditional canon in their own right and as uniquely situated to contribute much needed perspectives.

Consider for example Martin R. Delany's *Condition, Elevation and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*. There are within that text considerable pragmatic elements (or significant pragmatic moments)—space will not permit summarizing them here—that would reconcile quite well with aspects of pragmatism. Where perhaps increased caution is authorized is in thinking that where Afrodescendant thinkers have been extremely pragmatic, as they often have been, they were also being pragmatist. Lying back of this claim may be the supposition that pragmatist methodology can be divorced from substantive commitments. If that supposition turns out to be false in regard to the *philosophies born of struggle* that pragmatism seeks to adopt into its canon the rift between pragmatism and the black intellectual tradition may be *substantial*.

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