

WHITE PHILOSOPHY IN/OF AMERICA

Michael A. Peters

(University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,
mpet001@illinois.edu)

Philosophy occupies an important place in culture only when things seem to be falling apart—when long-held and widely cherished beliefs are threatened. At such periods, intellectuals reinterpret the past in terms of an imagined future.

--Richard Rorty, 'Grandeur, profundity, and finitude', *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, 2007, p.73

Keep in mind that I come from that part of the world for which the question of old and new—call it the question of a human future—is, or was, logically speaking, a matter of life and death: if the new world is not new then American does not exist, it is merely one more outpost of old oppressions.

--Stanley Cavell, 'The Future of Possibility', In *Philosophical Romanticism*, edited by Nikolas Kompridis, 2006, p. 21

There is a widespread disenchantment with the traditional image of philosophy as a transcendental mode of inquiry ... mindful of the dead ends of analytical modes of philosophizing it is yet unwilling to move into the frightening wilderness of pragmatism and historicism with their concomitant concerns in social theory, cultural criticism, and historiography.

--Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 1989, p. 3

Introduction

The argument of this paper is that Richard Rorty and Stanley Cavell, between them--though in different and sometimes opposing ways--define American philosophy 'after Wittgenstein' and taken together they assert something distinctive of the tradition of American philosophy¹. Rorty and Cavell, now among the elder

statesmen of American philosophy—Rorty died in 2007 and Cavell is now in his early 80s—from the point of view of the majority of their colleagues were considered rebels or renegades—Rorty perhaps more overtly than Cavell. Each of them spent their careers framing questions about the nature of philosophy and the 'directions' it should take after Wittgenstein. Each has continued to ask or elaborate broad metaphilosophical questions about the relation of analytic philosophy both to Continental philosophy and to culture more generally. Each consciously sought to reference their work in relation to the idea and contemporary experience of 'America'. Rorty (1979) in his ground-breaking *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* positioned himself in close proximity to Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Dewey as he sought to rework and to redefine the tradition of American pragmatism. Dewey came to eclipse both Wittgenstein and Heidegger in his thought as he developed social and political themes in his reflections on America. Cavell (1969), by contrast, first explored the significance of Wittgenstein thought in *Must We Mean What We Say?* before returning to the transcendentalists, to Emerson and Thoreau, to reinvent the origins of American philosophy and explore their contemporary relevance while also exploring the nuances of ordinary language philosophy after Wittgenstein and Austin. Each initiated and refined a distinctive style of *writing* philosophy that took seriously the linguistic and cultural turns of the twentieth century that Wittgenstein helped to shape. Each of them took seriously and defined themselves in terms of Wittgenstein's anti-cartesianism—his rejection of foundationalism and representationalism. Similarly, they embraced the historicism of the later Wittgenstein, aided by readings of Heidegger and Hegel, on the historical nature of language, culture and philosophy.

¹ This essay is written in honor of Kenneth Wain at the University of Malta who was a strong commentator on postmodernism/poststructuralism which is the also the title of a chapter (Chapter 3) that we co-authored for the *Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Education*, Blake, N., Smeyers, P., Smith, R. & Standish, P., Oxford, Blackwell, 2003. Ken Wain has written extensively on

postmodernism, Foucault and Rorty. The essay emerges out of a series of conversations with Melvin Armstrong, an African American PhD student in the Department of Educational Studies who is completing his doctorate on black philosophy and black philosophy of education. My thanks to Melvin who has taken to trouble to discuss his ideas with me and introduce me to canonical texts.

Yet even given their distinctive contributions and their bold reworkings of the idea of America and American philosophy, I will argue that neither took their historicism far enough to recognize the central fact of the birth of America—the form of racism that originated with colonization of America and black slavery. This absence is in part a reflection that the notion of power is not central in their philosophy. It is not until Cornel West appeared on the scene in the 1990s that questions of race made it into mainstream American philosophy and black philosophy at last became part of the canon and a legitimate object of philosophical study. This observation should be surprising because it bespeaks something of the serious lack of historical reflexivity in American philosophy even among its most original and enterprising philosophers—a lack that symbolizes both the privilege and power of America as well as its unexamined and assumed global centrality as a place and time to philosophize. There is little in either Rorty or Cavell that systematically draws attention to America in any negative sense—the ruthlessness of its colonizing beginnings, its early black slave economy, or indeed its consistent foreign policy, defined in a series of wars since the end of WWII: Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. Rorty and Cavell are good American patriots and their philosophies are patriotic. This essay explores Rorty and Cavell as two leading and distinguished philosophers and Wittgensteinian scholars who explore the question of philosophy in the post-philosophical culture of America, after the end of analytic philosophy.

This lack is not just an excusable occluding of the social or ignorance of the political but rather reflects a consistent and continuing failure of American philosophy in its own self-understanding and in its social and political awareness of itself. Such an interpretation is consistent with the historical approach to the rise of Black consciousness, culture and philosophy, the rediscovery of the racist nature of much Western philosophy, and the recovery of early Black philosophy in the figure of DuBois among others, the reconstruction of

the Black canon and its anthologizations. It is also an interpretation open to challenge on grounds of the development of liberal political theory by Rawls, Nussbaum, and others, and even sits uneasily with critical legal studies and critical race theory which arises out of the philosophical engagement with the cultural history of America. I christen this kind of color-blind philosophy, that which is unaware of its own philosophical historicity, ‘white philosophy’, a concept which I explore below in conjunction with the idea of America philosophy.

The Idea of American Philosophy

It is surprising that few scholars have written about Rorty and Cavell in the same breath or in relation to redefining the contours of American philosophy, a project that to me seems intuitively obvious given their intellectual affinities and differences and in particular they way in which they work their philosophy as a set of reflections on philosophy and the idea of America. The treatment of American philosophy normally focuses on pragmatism. Armen Marsoobian and John Ryder (2004), editors of *The Blackwell Guide to American Philosophy* basically follow this route elaborating sources of idealism, pragmatism and naturalism before identifying major figures in American philosophy (Peirce, James, Royce, Santayana, Dewey, Mead, Adams, DuBois, Whitehead, Lewis, Langer, Quine, Locke, Buchler) and major themes (community and democracy, knowledge and action, religion, education, art and the aesthetic. What is surprising about this selection is that DuBois but neither Rorty nor Cavell make it into the collection. DuBois’ selection is curious as he has no other company in Black philosophy. David Boersema (2005) writing an entry for *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* concludes ‘Despite having no core of defining features, American Philosophy can nevertheless be seen as both reflecting and shaping collective American identity over the history of the nation’. Boersema’s (2005) entry then goes on to explicate American philosophy standardly in relation to Peirce, James and Dewey. In the twentieth

century Boersema focuses on idealism, naturalism, process philosophy, analytic philosophy, Rawls' political philosophy, Rorty and feminism but no mention of Cavell and no mention of race consciousness as a philosophical theme..

The most successful attempt to define contemporary (white) American philosophy in my view is Giovanna Borradori's (1994) *The American Philosopher: Conversation with Quine, Davidson, Putnam, Nozick, Danto, Rorty, Cavell, MacIntyre, and Kuhn*. There is no Cornel West or Yancy or recognition of black philosophy but at least there is the attempt to map a new cartography of postwar American philosophical culture in its 'distinctively scientific self-representation' and its post-analytic formulations, bestriding two models or interpretations: 'the analytic fracture' that cuts off roots to American pragmatism and early concerns in social or political philosophy and 'the post-analytical recomposition' led by Rorty and Cavell. Borradori's (1994) conversations are very helpful in sketching a range of questions although it does not go far enough in its historicist approach to historicize American philosophy in relation to the idea of America, the cultural history of America, and the rise of American power (and perhaps its decline). For this interpretive project the best sources are Rorty and Cavell themselves.

Writing of 'Philosophy in America Today' in the *American Scholar* Rorty (1982) formulated a version of C.P. Snow's two cultures analysis to describe the split between a scientific motivated analytic philosophy and a historically oriented Continental philosophy. He describes his story in five acts: analytic philosophy moves from speculation to science centered around 'logical analysis' (1) which turns in on itself committing suicide in ordinary language (2) leaving itself without a metaphilosophy or genealogy (3) and hardening the split between analytic and Continental philosophy and jettisoning Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger (4), thus leaving American philosophy departments stranded between the humanities as their

ancestral home and science where they were never accepted. Rorty tells this story as one about academic politics and a split between two kinds of intellectuals: one who believes the best hope for human freedom is to be found in the application of scientific method, the other who sees faith in scientific method as an illusion that masks a nihilistic age. Rorty embraces pragmatism as a form of tolerance.

In his *Richard Rorty: the Making of an American Philosopher* Neil Gross (2008) begins his conclusion with the observation of how Rorty almost single-handedly had rescued pragmatism as an American philosophy from its vanishing point. He documents the decline of American pragmatism first described by David Hollinger in his 1980 paper 'The problem of pragmatism in American history' and goes on to note its rise and flourishing only sixteen years later, described by James Kloppenberg as 'alive, well ...and ubiquitous' (*Journal of American History*). Gross in his neo-marxist reproductionist sociology of philosophy goes on to explain the pragmatist revival with reference to leading scholars and also Rorty's ambiguous position in relation to the new community of pragmatist scholars who turned out to criticize Rorty's interpretations that had provoked a kind of fury against him. Gross recounts the way in which Rorty developed an attack on the paradigm of analytic philosophy as a whole, calling into question philosophy's self-image, while rediscovering the pragmatic elements in the thought of the later Wittgenstein and its overlaps with Peirce, James and Dewey to institute nothing less than an American pragmatist reading of the humanities.

Richard Wolin (2010) describes Rorty's political project in retrospect as it develops late in his career and involving a break from his 'postmodern' friends. Wolin's characterization of postmodernism is woefully inadequate and not one that Rorty would accept in any measure even though there is an attempt by Rorty to distinguish his own project as distinctively different.

Despite this background, Rorty's own political interests crystallized relatively late in life, with the 1998 publication of *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in the Twentieth Century*. It was in this work that Rorty sought to combine his philosophical interest in American pragmatism—John Dewey, a family friend whom Rorty had known as a boy, was one of his intellectual heroes—with a commitment to enlightened social reform, whose high water marks had been the Progressive Era and the New Deal. For Rorty, *Achieving Our Country* also signified a political break with his erstwhile philosophical allies, the so-called postmodernists. He had come to realize that it was impossible to reconcile postmodernism's glib philosophical anarchism with the social democratic credo he had imbibed as a youth and which, in his sixties, he belatedly sought to reactivate.

In *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (1998), Rorty differentiates between two sides of the Left: the cultural Left exemplified by postmodernists and a progressive Left, characterized by Dewey and American pragmatism. He criticizes the cultural Left for offering critiques of society, but no alternatives. I have argued that Rorty must be viewed in his native context as someone who engages the philosophical tradition from the perspective of an American living at the end of the millennium—one who views Nietzsche as a European pragmatist, as "the most eminent disciple of Emerson" (1991: 61) (Peters, 2000). Like Nietzsche, he wants to drop the cognitivism that has dominated western Intellectual life since Plato, but, unlike Nietzsche and under the Utopian influence of Dewey, he wishes "to do so in the interests of an egalitarian society rather than in the interests of a defiant and lonely individualism" (ibid.). This is the difference between the last philosophy of the old (European) world, bespeaking "the end of metaphysics" that focuses upon the question of European nihilism and imminent cultural disintegration, and the confident, self-assured, Utopian philosophy of the New World, which, in its youthful confidence, has never experienced itself as a

culture in an organic sense nor felt the crushing import of Nietzsche's question.

It is a New World pragmatist, Utopian philosophy that is able, like European Nietzscheanism, to reject the Enlightenment's metaphysical baggage of foundationalism and representationalism, and yet unlike its European older cousin, it does not jettison the promise of the Enlightenment's political project. It does, however, substitute a local, historical and contingent sense of self for the transhistorical metaphysical subject of philosophical liberalism. Indeed, Rorty sees no connection between the philosophical and political strands of the Enlightenment. The success of the "American experiment of self-creation" (Rorty, 1998: 23), unlike its European counterparts, does not depend upon or require any philosophical assurance or justification; philosophy, like poetry, is to be regarded simply as another means of self-expression. On this view, it is up to intellectuals and artists to tell inspiring stories and to create symbols of greatness about the nation's past as the means of competing for political leadership. Narratives of national self-creation ought to be oriented to what the nation can try to become, rather than how it has come to be. And, perhaps, this is the crucial difference of culture and style between Rorty and the European post-Nietzscheans: he believes in the narrative celebration of his nation's past as the best means to inspire hope about its future, rather than a 'working through' of its troublesome or shameful episodes.

Yet America has shameful episodes in its history which it has barely begun to acknowledge—the Ameri-Indian genocides connected with colonization and the history of broken treaties, the Black slave plantation capitalism, the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and the napalm ecoside of Vietnam to mention some prominent examples. The problem is that Rorty narrative depends upon a situated epistemology: historically verifiable stories are dependent on the place and time of the story-teller and their subjective experience. The

problem is that white philosophers have some difficulty telling the story of Black philosophy or the rise of Black consciousness.

While the end of metaphysics is "the final stage in the secularisation of culture," (Rorty in Borradori, 1994: 106) and philosophy, radically detranscendentized and deprofessionalized, becomes just one form of "cultural criticism" among others which deprived of any privileged status or definitive vocabulary, must operate with historical and socially contextual criteria in the same way as the humanities and the social sciences, it is still the case that consciousness, experience and subjectivity are situated and radically context and person-dependent. Rorty's hope at the beginning of this decade was that "English-speaking philosophy in the twenty-first century will have put the representational problematic behind it, as most French-or German-speaking philosophy already has" (1991: 12). This should have put Rorty in the position of the other able to tell the story of philosophy from the position of the exclusion of Black thought. His only concern is that the academic left no longer participates in the "American experiment of self-creation" (p. 23): it has "no vision of a country to be achieved by building a consensus on the need for specific reforms" (p. 15), and it has no program that can deal effectively with the immiseration produced by the globalization of the labor market. In short, the cultural left, by focusing upon issues of race, ethnicity, and gender has steered towards identity politics and away from economic politics, thus fragmenting the left and destroying the possibility of a progressive alliance. But then he repeats the mistakes on the traditional Left by ignoring the question of race in America and the fact that it cannot be explained simply in terms of class even in the Obama era.

Cavell also has sought to wean philosophy off the search for essences in a way that emphasizes a kind of Wittgensteinian therapy which can no longer be seen as foundational in any sense. Cavell certainly recognizes this critical project and believes that by turning to the

history of philosophy we can learn something important about ourselves (Cavell, 1969, p. xviii). Mathieu Duplay (2004) is one of the few who recognizes that Cavell and Rorty use similar strategies to resituate philosophy as cultural history or criticism after Wittgenstein.

In *The Senses of Walden*, Stanley Cavell provocatively states that "America [has] never expressed itself philosophically," save "in the metaphysical riot of its greatest literature". A similar insight has prompted Richard Rorty to proclaim that philosophy can no longer sustain its old territorial claims, and that its sole remaining purpose is to supervise the "conversation" between non-philosophical discourses and forms of knowledge. Cavell counters this argument by pointing out that philosophy actually comes into its own when it loses its traditional privileges: if the mission of philosophical conversation is to question the legitimacy of territorial appropriation in the name of a common quest for justice, as it has been since Plato's Republic, then American literature may be better equipped to carry it out than academic philosophy, with its recognized "field" and carefully guarded boundaries.

Rorty (1981), in one of the few pieces that directly engages with Cavell takes him to task for treating 'our' cultural history in a cavalier manner:

Cavell switches with insouciance from the narrow and professional identification of "philosophy" with epistemology to a large sense in which one cannot escape philosophy by criticizing it, simply because any criticism of culture is to be called "philosophy." To resolve this ambiguity, Cavell would have to convince us that skepticism in the narrow sense, the sense used in ritual interchanges between philosophy professors (Green and Bain, Bradley and Moore, Austin and Ayer), is important for an understanding of skepticism in some deep and romantic sense. He would have to show us that "skepticism" is a good name for the impulse which leads grownups to try to educate themselves, cultures to try to criticize themselves. Then he would have to connect this broad sense with the narrow "technical" sense. My main complaint about his book is that Cavell doesn't argue for such a connection, but takes it for granted. He doesn't help us see people like Moore and Austin as important thinkers. Rather,

he answers the transcendental *quaestio juris*—how *could* they, appearances perhaps to the contrary, be important?—while begging the *quaestio facti* (pp. 762-3)

The question does not concern whose response to our cultural history is more real, but rather how cultural history as philosophy, or philosophy as cultural history, turns on the positionality, race and gender of the narrator. Neither Rorty nor Cavell provide a recognition of the very obvious exclusion of histories and philosophies based on race and on the status of ‘white philosophy’ in America.

The judgment of Steve Fuller (2008) that Rorty in some ways also supports this view. He argues that Rorty articulated a distinctive voice of American philosophy by repositioning the pragmatists and did what Hegel and Heidegger did for Germany, making America the final resting place for philosophy but sublimating America’s world-historic self-understanding as a place suspicious of foreigners unless they are willing to blend into the ‘melting pot’. Fuller argues that Rorty’s thought reflects wider cultural shifts that analytic philosophers are hard pressed to admit and that Rorty successfully and single-handedly turned America into the world’s dominant philosophical power. He distinguishes between Cavell and Rorty in the following terms:

To understand Rorty’s significance, it is worth distinguishing *American Exceptionalism*, which can be found in the original pragmatists and in our time has been best exemplified in the work of Stanley Cavell, from *American Triumphalism*, which was Rorty’s unique contribution.

Rorty’s capacity to create narratives in the history of philosophy enabled him to recast both James and Dewey as public philosophers of the American inheritance while also repositioning the leaders of American philosophers in the analytic tradition—W.V.O. Quine, Wilfred Sellars, and Donald Davidson—redefining their relation to him, to pragmatism and to the future of American philosophy in ways that worried his fellow American philosophers deeply. Attempts to unseat his work by taking issues with the details of his interpretations of thinkers like Wittgenstein, Dewey and Heidegger did not faze him and

even risked misunderstanding his method as Rorty began to generate a list of alternative vocabularies that provided different and more inclusive descriptions aligning him with a host of figures in the history of philosophy and privileging the American canon at the same time. In *Philosophy and Social Hope* Rorty (1999) describes the philosopher (and himself) as one who ‘remaps culture’, who ‘suggests a new and promising way for us to think about the relation among large areas of human activity’.

Narratives of ‘White Philosophy’

I use the term ‘white philosophy’ to designate the notion of color-blind philosophy which has special application to American philosophy for its extraordinary capacity to ignore questions of race and for its incapacity to recognize the centrality of the empirical fact of blackness and whiteness in American society and as part of the American deep unconscious structuring politics, economics and education. The term that I have neologized for the purpose of this essay comes from critical race studies and is a direct application of whiteness studies.

One of the strongest attacks on ‘white philosophy’ comes George Yancy, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Duquesne University, who in terms of his own self-description describes himself as working:

primarily in the areas of critical race theory, critical whiteness studies, and philosophy and the Black experience. He is particularly interested in the formation of African-American philosophical thought as articulated within the social context and historical space of anti-Black racism, African-American agency, and identity formation. His current philosophical project explores the theme of racial embodiment, particularly in terms of how white bodies live their whiteness unreflectively vis-à-vis the interpellation and deformation not only of the black body, but the white body, the philosophical identity formation of whites, and questions of white privilege and power formation.

<http://www.duq.edu/philosophy/faculty-and-staff/george-yancy.cfm>

Yancy (1998) edited *African-American Philosophers: 17 Conversations*, and critical readers on Cornel West (2001) and bell hooks, (2010) as well as *The Center Must Not Hold: White Women Philosophers on the Whiteness of Philosophy* (2010) and *What White Looks Like: African American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question* (2004). In 'Fragments of a Social Ontology of Whiteness' his introduction to *What White Looks Like*, he begins:

Whites have a way of speaking from a center that they often appear to forget forms the white ideological fulcrum upon which what they say (or do not say) and see (or do not see) hinges. In short, whites frequently lie to themselves (p. 1)

He goes to say:

Philosophy is always performed by bodies that are sexed, gendered, and cultural coded in some fashion, and is already always shaped by prior assumptions, interests, concerns, and goals that are historically bounded and pragmatically contextual (p. 1).

Without specific naming 'white philosophy' he names its source and hidden normativity: 'The only real philosophy is done by *white men*; the only real wisdom is *white male wisdom*'. He goes on to argue that whiteness 'fails to see itself as alien'. To see itself whiteness would have to 'deny its own imperial epistemological and ontological base'. By refusing the risk of finding itself in exile 'it denies its own potential to be Other... to see through the web of white meaning it has spun' (p. 13). In 'Whiting Up and Blacking Out' with Tracey Ann Ryser he addresses the question of 'Naming Whiteness' extending this line of thought:

Under the influence of European travelogues and colonial films, white philosophers, ethnographers, and fiction writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the West came to understand nonwhites as inferior Others. More specifically, the construction of the concept of race functioned epistemologically and ontologically as a prism through which the Other was constructed and rendered subhuman. The Other was deemed as inferior in virtually every way—intellectually, morally and culturally. The Other was constructed as savage, barbaric, evil, lustful, *different* and *deviant*, in comparison to whites. Whiteness, on this score, served as a metanarrative in terms of which nonwhites

functioned as 'things' to be exploited and used in the service of white people (Yancy & Ryser, 2008: 1).

In 'Situated Black Women's Voices in/on the Profession of Philosophy' the introduction to a special issue of *Hypatia* devoted to the issue Yancy (2008) come closest to defining the essence of 'white philosophy' as an escape from its own historicism.

Doing philosophy is an activity. Like all activities, philosophy is situated. As a situated activity, philosophy is shaped according to various norms, assumptions, intuitions, and ways of thinking and feeling about the world. Fundamentally, philosophy is a form of engagement; it is always already a process in *medias res*. Despite their pretensions to the contrary, philosophers are unable to brush off the dust of history and begin doing philosophy *ex nihilo*. Hence, to do philosophy is to be ensconced in history. More specifically, philosophizing is an embodied activity that begins within and grows out of diverse *lived* contexts; philosophizing takes place within the fray of the everyday. On this score, philosophizing is a plural and diverse form of activity. In their attempt to escape the social, to defy history, and to reject the body, many philosophers have pretensions of being godlike. They attempt to defy the confluent social forces that shape their historicity and particularity. They see themselves as detached from the often inchoate, existential traffic of life and the background assumptions that are constitutive of a particular horizon of understanding. It is then that philosophy becomes a site of bad faith, presuming to reside in the realm of the static and the disembodied. Having "departed" from life, having rejected the force of "effective history," philosophy is just as well dead, devoid of relevance, devoid of particularity, and escapist.

In this Yancy follows the contours of argument provided by feminist thinkers and also seeks an alliance with them. For instance, Alison Bailey and Jacquelin N. Zita (2007) writing for the same journal provide a set of reflections on whiteness in the United States showing that it has been a long-standing practice in slave folklore and in

Mexican resistance to colonialism, Asian American struggles against exploitation and containment, and Native American stories of contact with European colonizers. They chart the emergence of 'critical whiteness' scholarship in the past two decades among a small number of philosophers, critical race theorists, postcolonial theorists, social historians, and cultural studies scholars who now 'focus on historical studies of racial formation and the deconstruction of whiteness as an unmarked privilege-granting category and system of dominance' (p. vii). Bailey and Zita (2007) argues that this body of scholarship identifies 'whiteness as a cultural disposition and ideology held in place by specific political, social, moral, aesthetic, epistemic, metaphysical, economic, legal, and historical conditions, crafted to preserve white identity and relations of white supremacy' (p. vii).

The Hope of American Pragmatism

As a New Zealander of European descent who has worked with Maori (especially Ngapui), the indigenous inhabitants of Aotearoa (New Zealand), over many years, I came to work in an American mid-west university with some sensitivity to issues of race of a person of mixed English-Italian ancestry living in a post-white settler British society². I was surprised that philosophy courses I took as a student in New Zealand had nothing to say about race and in fact Maori studies had great difficulty asserting itself against the white professoriat to establish itself (Walker, 1999). The philosophy courses seemed to reflect a curriculum that was not historicist or reflexively sensitive to the local, with some exceptions (e.g., Oddie & Perret, 1993). But nothing prepared me for the situation I faced in the US or in Illinois even though I had been present for some years before the election of

² Working with Professor James Marshall of Auckland University I collaborated on a series of project located in the north of New Zealand (*Tai Tokerau*) to examine questions around the maintenance and control of Maori language (*te reo*) in school exam practices and the drop out problem of Maori children. This work is perhaps best illustrated in Peters & Marshall (1988) but see also Peters & Marshall (1990).

Barack Obama as the first black US president-- not only the deep structural racism that exists in US society despite Obama's talk of 'post-racial politics' or the thinly disguised racism of the tea-party movement but also the way identity politics in universities prevents constructive dialogue across theory lines.

I became interested in the philosophy of race while in New Zealand and began rereading the pragmatist canon in terms of the absence of race, learning for instance, that John Dewey (1985) avoided race except for one polite essay on 'race relations' to the NAACP. It is also reported that some of his letters are anti-Semitic. I mentioned this fact about Dewey some years ago in passing to my HOD, James Anderson, the distinguished black historian of education, who said to me: 'Be careful they don't shoot the messenger'.³

Paul C. Taylor (2004) comments on Dewey's 'silence' in his introductory response to Claude McKay's⁴ *Selected Poems*. As he comments: 'whiteness consists in occupying a social location of structural privilege in the right kind of racialized society (p. 229). Given Dewey's contextualism, Taylor reads Dewey's silence as a refusal reflecting the moral psychology of race that helps explains lacunae in his career and in particular, no references to the Dyer Bill which made lynching a federal crime in the US. Clearly Dewey was unaware of his own whiteness that colored his views of education,

³ See Dewey (1985 orig. 1932) and for commentary see Sullivan (2004), Stack (2009) and Fallace (2010).

⁴ McKay was a Jamaican poet who traveled to the US in 1917 and used the sonnet form to record his responses to the injustices of black life in America. His poem 'Enslaved' gives a flavor of his style: Oh when I think of my long-suffering race,/For weary centuries despised, oppressed,/Enslaved and lynched, denied a human place/In the great life line of the Christian West;/And in the Black Land disinherited,/Robbed in the ancient country of its birth,/My heart grows sick with hate, becomes as lead,/For this my race that has no home on earth./Then from the dark depths of my soul I cry/To the avenging angel to consume/The white man's world of wonders utterly;/Let it be swallowed up in earth's vast womb,/Or upward roll as sacrificial smoke/To liberate my people from its yoke!

philosophy and America. It is almost as though nothing has been learnt by American mainstream philosophy since Dewey although two recent collections on pragmatism and race, *Pragmatism and the Problem of Race* (2004) and *Pragmatism Nation, and Race: Community in the Age of Empire* (2009), though standing in the long shadow of Cornel West's (1989) *The American Evasion of Philosophy* go some way towards addressing these concerns. Both books indicate that pragmatism in its classical phase and thereafter has made important contributions to the study of race and racism—its social construction was central to Alain L. Locke's 1915-16 lectures on *Race Contacts*, James Dewey and Addams railed against metaphysics and promoted the view of the ontological integrity of social groups. West himself names Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Dewey as those philosophers who set us free from the confines of a spurious universalism based on a European projection of its own self-image.

My major operating presumption that became a position I adopted with students was based on an affirmative response to the question 'Does Euro-American modernity, the Western tradition in philosophy, have the intellectual resources to overcome its own institutional racism?' Today I would add 'and whiteness'. My answer is an optimistic 'yes' even if imperfectly and over the long haul. If I had the space I would argue, for instance, that while contemporary western philosophy in its analytic suit of armor reduced ethics and politics to nonsense and rubble, the Continental driven Hegelian-inspired phenomenology first informed Fanon's existential psychiatry (even though it was marginalized in the Left tradition) and Du Bois' pragmatism (even if he was only recently included as part of a reconstructed canon), and then what West names as the historicist moment in philosophy—Wittgenstein's 'cultural turn', Heidegger's *destruction* of western metaphysics, Derrida's *deconstruction*, Rorty's *demythologization*, Foucault's *genealogy* that all provided 'resources for how we understand, analyze and enact our representational practices' (West, 1993: 21). What

impresses me greatly is just how recent the rise of black philosophical consciousness is and its contradictory sources of inspiration in the black liberation church, phenomenology and black existentialism, often first registered in forms of poetic and narrative resistance. West's thought really only began to crystallize in the late 1980s with *The Evasion of American Philosophy* (1989) to mature in the 1990s with works such as *Race Matters* (1993) and *Keeping Faith* (1994), to become accepted and anthologized in the 2000s (*The Cornel West Reader*, 2001).

In charting the birth, decline and resurgence of American pragmatism West views it as 'a specific historical and cultural product of American civilization, a particular set of social practices that articulate certain American desires, values, and responses that are elaborated in institutional apparatuses principally controlled by a significant slice of the American middle class' (pp. 4-5). He pictures American pragmatism as distinctive philosophy based on its 'anticolonial heritage' and rebelliousness -- 'a future-oriented instrumentalism that deploys thought as a weapon to enable more effective action—that is more akin to a form of 'cultural criticism in which the meaning of America is put forward by intellectuals in response to distinct social and cultural crises' (p. 5).

I think West is too kind to American pragmatism and too quick to see it exclusively as an American philosophy—he like Rorty and Cavell is too much of an American patriot. West's black American pragmatism needs to get outside itself to explore its affinities with Africa, not only the tradition of *Négritude* initiated by Césaire, Fanon and Senghor in the French tradition (as well as its inspiration in the Harlem renaissance) that inaugurates the tradition of post-colonial criticism but to investigate the traditions of African indigenous thought, the African diaspora, and the expanding and encyclopedic expansions of Africana philosophy as 'as a metaphilosophical organizing concept of intellectual praxes' to makes sense of *philosophizing* persons and

peoples African and of African descent (Outlaw, 2010). By doing so it would help academic philosophy understand its own cultural and historical trajectory and shape a more democratic approach to the contingencies of 'race' and the role it has played in the construction of modernity and the modern state system. The emergence of Africana consciousness first in the Afro-Arabic world in the Middle Ages, its hybridization in the conflicts

between Islam and Christianity, its historical ties to racism, enslavement, and colonialism, and its emergence to reason and liberation (Gordon, 2008) is the basis for a recognition of its potential for becoming a truly global philosophy by coming to terms with specific forms of contemporary black racism in Brazil, China and India, as the west declines and the 'rest' rises.

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