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The Unexamined Frontier: Dewey, Pragmatism, and America Enlarged

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In the wake of 9/11 and the contested war in Iraq, a public conversation has emerged as to whether and to what extent America is an imperial power. In the course of this discussion, it is striking how often people have adverted to America's wars in the "Orient" in trying to get a hold on the events of 9/11 and thereafter. Pearl Harbor, Japanese American internment, and especially Vietnam have become recurring tropes. Therefore, American conflict in Asia and racism against Asians have offered hermeneutical structures in our assessment of current events.[1]

Of course, these structures can themselves be objects of inquiry. In fact, press hard enough, and one finds that they are linked to still earlier American incursions into the Asia-Pacific. For example, U.S. businessmen led a *coup d'état* against Queen Liliuokalani of the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1893. In addition, one comes upon a geographical discovery, namely that Latin America shares this legacy of subjection. America's Monroe Doctrine of 1823, for instance, became a well-worn diplomatic path to the domination of Latin American countries. As it turns out, the U.S. has exercised since roughly the mid-19th century various kinds of dominion in the American hemisphere, the Pacific, and Eastern Asia. Since some form of this hegemony persists to this day, the current Eurasian adventures of the U.S. nation-state overlap with a later stage of its ongoing "Amerasian" dominion.

This essay examines geopolitics and social thought at a time before, but not disconnected from, Iraq and Afghanistan, and Japan and Vietnam. It maps the rise and maturation of pragmatism as a distinctively American body of thought onto the large historical and geographical features of the U.S. nation-turned-empire. After the Civil War, America's most conspicuous act of national self-assertion was its short war with Spain in the Caribbean and in the Asia-Pacific. This was followed by the annexation of most of the Spanish colonies (e.g. Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam) and by a longer, bloodier, and more contested war with the Philippines. Born of the Civil War and coming of age in the Amerasian wars, where did pragmatism as a self-consciously American philosophy stand morally on these two markers of its development? As an American voice of progressive sentiment, how did pragmatism understand its principles

[1] Interestingly, two related events, dated after 9/11, have not received due attention in the mainstream media and in public forums: Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide's public claim that he was ousted by a CIA-backed *coup d'état*, and Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez's public claim that a CIA-backed *coup d'état* was prevented in his country. It seems that the Middle East has preoccupied the U.S. critique of imperialism, with Latin America mostly dropping out of the picture. And U.S.-Asia relations forms a hermeneutic for current U.S.-Middle East imperialism, with Latin America playing less of a role in that hermeneutic. These asymmetries are beyond the scope of this essay.

Another peculiarity beyond the bounds of this essay is the inclusion of North Korea in the "axis of evil" and the relative dearth of discussion about U.S. relations with the two Koreas.

and its nation in relation to black demands for equality and liberty and to various Amerasian demands for equality and national self-determination?

I offer a consideration of the latter question, focusing mostly on America's Asia-Pacific. Since little is known of America enlarged, the first section of the essay begins with reflection on the work of Louis Menand and the more familiar Civil War context of American politics and philosophy. Robert Brandom's response to Menand [in the previous chapter] is then used to sharpen the conceptual and historical issues at stake. Brandom's critical framework, which on my reading puts pragmatism on trial, as it were, is extended in the second section of this essay where I discuss America's imperial self-assertion during post-Civil War reconstruction. In the third section, I consider the work of the pragmatist most identified with democratic theory, John Dewey, who largely escapes critical attention in Brandom's critique. I shall argue that Dewey's work reveals a structured absence of reflection on the expansion of American racial hegemony, in spite of the fact that he was engaged seriously with the Orient and Orientals so-called and, to a lesser extent, with U.S. imperialism in Mexico. The configuration of this absence can be traced to his anti-democratic philosophical rendering of the classic frontier chronology of the U.S. nation-state. Insofar as Dewey's philosophy was formative of pragmatism, a critique of pragmatism more generally is not far removed from the concerns of this essay. But, returning to the pressing issues of race and democracy, I noted earlier that the Asia-hermeneutic in current use is significant both as a reminder of certain events and peoples of the American past and as a lasting symptom of America's geopolitical location. As the nation uses a severely truncated version of its imperial history to understand its current hegemonic projects, it remains to be seen whether pragmatism maintains a flawed Deweyan vision or whether it really opens a path to "creative democracy."

The Price of America Reunified

Social detachment as a description or as an ideal of philosophy has had few more eloquent or persistent critics than John Dewey. He opposed, as he famously put it, the "dogma of immaculate conception of philosophical systems."[2] And his challenge came with a corollary, namely that societies in turn are not purified of philosophy, that changes in philosophy, an active and self-conscious part of culture itself, will generate changes in civilization. Both aspects of Dewey's metaphilosophy converge in the following passage:

> Philosophy … is a conversion of such culture as exists into consciousness ... But this conversion is itself a further movement of civilization; it is not something performed upon the body of habits and tendencies from without, that is, miraculously.[3]

In his marvelous book, *The Metaphysical Club*, Louis Menand follows Dewey's insights and reveals how pragmatism was a conversion of post-bellum culture into a distinctively aspirational consciousness and how this transpired from within the inmost chambers of the body politic. As he tells the story, the pre-history of pragmatism must be

[2] Dewey, LW 6:17, "Context and Thought"
[3] Dewey, LW 6:10, "Context and Thought"

anchored to a catastrophic moral struggle, the Civil War. But the crucible within which this philosophical innovation matured was a later transitional period: the historical moment when trauma from the war opened upon an ominous new industrial age, the point when a stultifying Unionist compromise met the developing threat of a new social conflagration. As it turned out, the working out of Civil War trauma became increasingly shaped by what looked to be a growing class war. Correspondingly, pragmatism became tasked in effect with the prevention of another catastrophe. Menand even asserts that, "In a time when the chance of another civil war did not seem remote, a philosophy that warned against the idolatry of ideas was possibly the only philosophy on which a progressive politics could have been successfully mounted."[4] But the preemptive social forces that helped select pragmatism over its contenders also gave rise to and effectively consolidated racial apartheid in the U.S., for "the price of reform in the United States between 1898 and 1917 was the removal of the issue of race from the table." [5]

Now, if the "price of reform," the great Unionist compromise, had the dual effect of aiding pragmatism and consolidating apartheid, what were some links between the two effects themselves? Woven throughout Menand's narrative, sometimes in subdued fashion, is the theme of race. And, of course, how could it be otherwise? Central events in the story, like the Civil War and its civic and social aftermath, become unintelligible without reference to slavery, race ideology, lynchings, legal apartheid, the "whitening" of new European immigrants, and black nationalism. Yet pragmatists mostly evaded public conversation on these remarkable political events and forces. They certainly focused on important social matters, but, from the standpoint of democracy and community, these matters taken collectively still remained incomplete without sustained treatment of the race question. Thus, to return to Dewey on consciousness and philosophy, Menand explains how a post-bellum, mass-industrialized, Jim Crow culture was converted into a fallibilist, prospective, race-blind consciousness, and how this consciousness impacted that culture.[6]

Robert Brandom [this volume] offers a compelling perspective by which to sharpen our consideration of Menand's narrative. After summarizing and critically revising the main tenets of pragmatism, he asks us to consider two lacunae in conjunction. First, Menand's account of pragmatism is nearly entirely retrospective when the philosophy under examination is marked by its consequential rather than genealogical semantics. And second, pragmatism was sorely lacking in anti-racism in spite of its democratic sympathies. Putting these ideas together, Brandom enjoins us to consider the practical, in particular the political, consequences of a philosophy that regarded its commitment to flexibility, contingency, and futurity as requiring the endorsement of the Unionist compromise, which is to say a philosophy that sanctioned in effect, if not intent,

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[4] Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), p.374

[5] Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, p.374

[6] The rise of pragmatism and apartheid were dual effects of the Unionist compromise. The discussion here is about how pragmatism related itself to apartheid, or failed to do so. For reasons of space, no discussion can be given here about links going in the other direction, in particular of how opponents of apartheid conceptualized or used pragmatism for their ends. Such an account would need to discuss W.E.B. Du Bois' partial pragmatist outlook, Alain Locke's overt pragmatism, and the rise of mid-century black (and Asian) social theorists, like E. Franklin Frazier, who were influenced by pragmatism through the Chicago School of Sociology and other such academic venues.

reticence on the abolition of white supremacy. And he places the discussion here into a devastating framework: the consequences of this compromise, which held sway well into the 20th century, arguably generated "as much damage to race relations in the United States as slavery itself had done."[7] As Brandom sees it, the aftermath of the Civil War witnessed the struggle between principles of democracy (the necessity of conflict amelioration) and of human rights (intolerance of grave human suppression), and the victory of the former over the latter with little pragmatist protest. And the resulting severity and longevity of racial apartheid requires pragmatism to question (1) whether it rightly drew a Unionist conclusion from its philosophical principles, or, more fundamentally, (2) whether, by entailing that conclusion, one or another of its central principles helped generate or at least permitted this tragedy and hence needed to be abandoned. [8]

Brandom's account is sufficient to place pragmatism on trial, as it were. But, as demanding as his case may be, I contend that it does not go far enough, and perhaps this shortfall is inherited from Menand's narrative. In the next section of this essay, I offer a brief account of the geographical expansion of America's racial nationalism into the Asia-Pacific. With this expanded portrait, we can see that the Unionist compromise helped generate not only racial apartheid in the domestic scene but racial imperialism on the international front. As it turned out, pragmatism was mostly silent on this emerging condition. In its (Deweyan) role as social critic, pragmatism failed far more extensively than Menand or Brandom clarify. And so the question that Brandom puts before us is all the more pressing.

The Price of America Enlarged

After the short and relatively bloodless Spanish-American War (1898), the acclaimed author Rudyard Kipling delivered an infamous literary gift to a victorious America, the poem, "The White Man's Burden." Shortly afterward, the poem's moral exhortation to heroic colonialism would be heeded on the battlefield because the Philippines would declare independence and wage a war of national liberation against its American occupiers. As it turned out, the Philippine-American War (1899-1902) produced the opening salvoes of a series of U.S. wars in the Orient. And many conservative voices conveyed premonitions of this movement of violence and devastation across the Pacific Ocean, the new expanding racial frontier.[9]

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[7] Robert Brandom, "When Philosophy Paints its Blue on Grey: Irony and the Pragmatist Enlightenment," *boundary 2*, vol.29, n.2 (2002), 1-28, p.28. This article is reprinted as chapter one of this volume.

[8] Ibid, p.27-28. On p.375 of his book, Menand addresses, perhaps at a few steps removed, some of the ideas that generate Brandom's concerns. There, he questions how pragmatism can adjudicate between the very interests that generate the focus of pragmatist analysis, that is, consequences.

[9] The idea of the Pacific as a racial frontier has received a good deal of excellent discussion. See Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building* (New York: Schocken Books, 1990); Arif Dirlik, ed., *What is in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993); Gary Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994); Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); David Palumbo-Lui, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999);

In 1900, military strategy was added to poetry in the emerging canon of U.S. imperialism. Alfred Thayer Mahan, author of the classic military text, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the World*, contended in a sequel text entitled, *The Problem of Asia*, that

> Sea power is … but the handmaid of expansion, its begetter and preserver; it is not itself expansion, nor did the advocates of the latter foresee room for advance beyond the Pacific. Their vision reached not past Hawaii, which also, as touching the United States, they regarded from the point of view of defense rather than as a stepping-stone to any farther influence in the world.[10]

This passage is intriguing because it calls for a wholesale perspectival change. It starkly opposes the common idea that California is the end of the American frontier and, hence, that Hawaii is an outer satellite by which to defend the nation's perimeter from, say, the British empire in Asia or an increasingly industrialized and belligerent Japan. In place of this centrifugal outlook, Mahan calls upon America to imagine its West as having expanded considerably and remaining open for the taking.[11] The Pacific Ocean – the final ocean – is no longer a barrier but a wide conduit along which America can move into new lands and possibilities. Clearly, by the time Mahan wrote *The Problem of Asia*, Hawaii had become a "stepping stone" to farther influence--a military depot en route to the conflagration spread across the Philippine Islands.

A more general conceptual and historical rubric may be helpful to consider here. Manifest Destiny was, of course, one of the most important conceptions undergirding America's forceful incorporation of the Asia-Pacific. It served as the massive ideological tracks along which the impetus of white nation-building pushed the U.S. to leave its exclusively Atlantic position to become, eventually, the greatest Pacific power to date. We know that before reaching the other shore, some of the most egregious crimes were perpetrated, including the Atlantic slave trade, slavery itself, and the displacement and genocide of American Indians and Mexicans. Once the nation-state arrived at the far shore, we might say that the so-called Orient or Far East had become, through Manifest Destiny, the Far West. But, as the racial frontier moved across the Pacific, invasion, colonization, and the formal expansion of the nation-state followed. As we know, large-scale violence continued to sweep across the region in the decades to follow: the Pacific theater of WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and recently the "Eurasian wars."

It is important to recognize, however, that America *still* remains *spatially* in the Asia-Pacific. Guam, American Samoa, and various islands of what was formerly called "Oceania," remain formal colonies. Moreover, America has retained military bases, sometimes on a massive scale, in Japan, South Korea, Okinawa, various of the Pacific islands, and for many decades the Philippines, to form a military perimeter surrounding

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and Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[10] Alfred T. Mahan, *The Problem of Asia and its Effects upon International Politics* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1900), p.7

[11] Mahan, therefore, stands in a tradition of frontier thinking that includes Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Frederick Jackson Turner, and, as we shall see, Dewey himself. For a sobering account of much of this tradition, see Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).

China. Mahan spoke of Hawaii as "touching" the U.S. Now, we see that something similar could be said of the great arc of Asia-Pacific nations used as an American defense perimeter. As Mahan strategized and Kipling eulogized, the Orient as Far West has become the Orient as Near West and is even in part a literal territorial constituent of America enlarged. Put another way, America is the only Pacific Rim country on both sides of the Pacific and within it as well. So it is with little exaggeration that some have called the Pacific Ocean an American lake. Typically, Asian America is viewed diasporically: Asian peoples migrated to the U.S. to form various kinds of communities. What I have suggested is that we also view Asian America geopolitically, imperialistically, or centripetally to see that America itself migrated across the Pacific and has for over 100 hundred years and counting resided *in* Asia and the Pacific.[12]

The dynamics of imperialism are more evident in periods of peace, because in times of relative stability, the conditions of economic exploitation ripen.[13] By now, many left-liberals and virtually all radicals agree that imperialism can obtain without formal dominative civic connections between two countries. In an age of global capitalism, an economic power that avails itself of the right sorts of international economic matrices can acquire informal political domination of another country. This is arguably true of the U.S. currently and historically. But, as discussed earlier , "old school" imperialism, expressed in formal even if indirect political control, has also been one of America's lasting structures of international politics. As an aspect of foreign policy, this type of imperialism is actually codified in memos, treaties, and the like, not to mention in some highly troubling Supreme Court rulings called the "Insular Cases."[14]

This last area of codification has some personal connection to pragmatism. Much to his credit, Dewey recognized and condemned economic imperialism.[15] Curiously, he did not speak out in any serious way against America's formal political imperialism and its justification by the Supreme Court, in spite of the profound problem posed by constitutionally justified colonialism. And it was not as if there was an absence of discussion of the matter. For example, James Bradley Thayer, one of the best legal minds of the late 19th century, argued famously for the allowance of colonies and for an amendment to the constitution that would eliminate for these colonies any legal route to statehood on grounds of preserving a white Union. As it turned out, of course, colonies remain and no amendment was passed. This legal proponent of U.S. imperialism was a traveling companion of Emerson, an employer of Oliver Wendell Holmes, a friend of philosopher Chauncey Wright, and, thus, one of the many prominent satellites that fell

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[12] I offer a more detailed examination of this idea, including discussion of U.S. imperialism in Latin America, in "Empire's Entrails and the Imperial Geography of 'Amerasia'," *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action*, Vol.8, no.1, April 2004, p.57-88.

[13] Moreover, wars are sometimes not so much expressions of an already existing imperialism as they are a part of the exigencies by which imperialism is established in the first place.

[14] Although space does not permit anything like an adequate discussion of the codifications of U.S. empire, consider that in a series of legal decrees, called the *Insular Cases*, the Supreme Court developed across the first half of the 20th century the conceptual space for a state/colony asymmetry and the acceptability of both kinds of constituents of the nation-state. This constitutional embrace of formal political imperialism in Puerto Rico and later in the Asia-Pacific remains intact to this day. Further elaboration is given in the excellent anthology, Christine D. Barnett and Burke Marshall, eds., *Foreign in a Domestic Sense*, and my "Empire's Entrails and the Imperial geography of 'Amerasia'."

[15] See his "Imperialism is Easy," retitled from "Our Monroe Doctrine," in John Dewey, *Impressions of Soviet Russia and the Revolutionary World* (New York: New Republic, Inc., 1929), p.181-194.

into and out of the orbit of the Metaphysical Club, that network out of which pragmatist thought developed.[16] He apparently saw no argument of the abolitionist Holmes as applying to his vision of the segregation of races on the international front. Nor did he find convincing any of William James' attacks on U.S. conquest and control of the Philippines. Yet, somehow, he moved comfortably in pragmatist spaces, and apparently, to an extent, so did the idea of constitutionally justified colonialism.

In 1905, shortly after the spate of annexations and some of the early imperialist Supreme Court rulings, the world witnessed an international conflict that was widely regarded to be a race war in which Japan defeated Russia. Several months before the Russo-Japanese peace treaty was signed, America and Japan had concluded secret negotiations issuing in the Taft-Katsura Memorandum to ensure that their respective imperial interests would be preserved in the post-war negotiations to come. The agreement specified that Japan would have sovereignty over Korea, and American sovereignty over the Philippines would be left unmolested by Japan. Basically, Japan and the U.S. aimed to divvy up some of the "available" territory in the Asia-Pacific.

This negotiation heralded a more sweeping agreement at the onset of a more strained period in U.S.-Japan relations. In 1908, the Root-Takahira Agreement was signed. Its basic normative structure involved an expansion of the Monroe Doctrine (which obtained in U.S. dominion over Latin America) to the Asia-Pacific. Through this diplomatic measure, the terms of the Taft-Katsura Memorandum and inter-imperial stability were maintained. In hindsight, we can see this piece of diplomacy ultimately failed to prevent a war – a racial and inter-imperial war.[17]

There is more here, and it has not to do with war itself or even imperialist diplomacy or economic exploitation before or afterward. The deterioration of U.S.-Japan relations was accompanied by America's progressive desensitization to the ongoing realities of U.S. imperialism (a phenomenon that as we shall see characterized Dewey's political outlook as well).[18] This is evident in an interesting way in the case of U.S. patriotism regarding Pearl Harbor. Even now, as then, our civic culture regards America as the victim of an unprovoked, brazen, and perhaps cowardly attack on its main naval base in Hawaii. Roughly 2000 soldiers died and the Pacific fleet was nearly submerged or incapacitated. The 7th of December, the day of the attack, has become bedrock for

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[16] For more on Thayer and the *Insular Cases*, see Christina D. Burnett and Burke Marshall, "Between the Foreign and the Domestic: The Doctrine of Territorial Incorporation, Invented and Reinvented," and Brook Thomas, "A Constitution led by the Flag: The *Insular Cases* and the Metaphor of Incorporation," both in Christina D. Burnett and Burke Marshall, *Foreign in a Domestic Sense*. Chapter 9 of Menand's *The Metaphysical Club* offers some context for the personal relations noted above.

[17] For our purposes, we can regard this failure as an episode in a series of imperialist state actions, sometimes codified, which continued long after the annexations discussed above. The history of a nation's imperialism exceeds the focus on direct empire-colony relations. Rivalry between empires seems just as significant, even if that rivalry is depicted by historians as merely inter-state, as opposed to inter-imperial, conflicts. For more on the racial and imperialist aspects of the Pacific front of WWII, see John Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), and Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations Throughout History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

[18] The American conscience would of course be resensitized by the 1960s. See Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Gary Gerstle, *The American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Nikhil Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

patriotic solemnity, perhaps with a kind of meaningfulness absent in the more crassly commercialized Fourth of July. Almost nowhere, however, do we hear the deeper truth that faults *both* America and Japan.

As noted earlier, Hawaii was a colony of the U.S. So when Japan roughly simultaneously attacked the Pearl Harbor naval base in Hawaii and Clark Air Base in the Philippines, two of the most important colonial military outposts of the Pacific region of America's Amerasian empire became the frontlines of the more savage half of WWII. But neither the U.S. nor Japan had any rightful claim to Hawaii (or the Philippines), even if it is true that Japan ought not to have attacked America. So Pearl Harbor was the site of inter-imperial combat. Yet somehow the idea of Pearl Harbor serves up an illusion of American democracy: "we have been unjustly attacked by a nation that ruthlessly seeks to dominate its region, and in the name of freedom we will defeat it as we will Germany." So at the same moment in which democracy is glorified upon the blood of Pearl Harbor martyrs, genuine democracy is denied. Hawaii did not become a state of the U.S. until 1959, 18 years after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and this occurred along a colonial trajectory beginning with a U.S. business-led *coup d'état*. And now we have a civic culture in which Pearl Harbor cannot be seen as anything other than Freedom's Sacrifice or the Cost of Liberty.

Returning to Brandom's concern, we can ask again, now with a fuller context before us, whether pragmatism rightly drew from its principles the Unionist conclusion, or whether it drew that wrongful conclusion aright and, therefore, must reject one or another of its deep principles. In 1959, as noted, Hawaii attained statehood; in 1946, the Philippines achieved independence; and Puerto Rico currently remains a territory. These are three different trajectories out of the pragmatist period of U.S. empire.[19] But they are morally unified by the shared experience of suppression, displacement, vulnerability, and poverty, that have no accidental relation to U.S. imperialism.

What is additionally distinctive here is that America does not yet have the civic culture even to recognize this condition. Geographic expansion has been coupled with a constriction of the U.S. moral imagination across the 20th century. I think most Americans would find claims for indigenous Hawaiian reparations and sovereignty, Philippines reparations and freedom from neocolonialism, and Puerto Rican reparations and autonomy, not so much right or wrong, but confusing, unfamiliar, and perhaps unintelligible.[20] An early tolerance of America enlarged has now born fruit in the unknowing of its underside.[21]

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[19] The problem is more expansive, but for reasons of space I focus on these three cases.

[20] Currently, a native Hawaiian sovereignty movement has gathered strength and has insisted on independence and thereby voiced a rejection of statehood. The Philippines, in spite of its wealth of resources, lies at the economic underside of the world, with a GNP that is substantially supplied by Filipinos living and working *outside* of their own country. Puerto Rico has stood at a crossroads for some time, with Hawaii and the Philippines as alternative scenarios. As Gregory Trianosky y Velazquez has described it for me: if Puerto Rico were to become the 51st state, it could very well be the poorest state of the union. If it became independent, would it follow the path of the Philippines and fall into a neocolonial subjection?

[21] This would be another and important example of the colonial epistemology discussed by Enrique Dussel (*The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, and Taylor and the Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Eduardo Mendieta (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996)) and the "epistemology of ignorance" described by Charles Mills (*Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997)).

I have described, too briefly, some significant ideas and events during America's most important self-assertion after the Civil War. They coincide with the failure of Reconstruction and the consolidation of an anti-black polity, and, as noted, they take shape at the same time as the rise of American pragmatism. Their relations, however, are not accidental or remote. Through Jim Crow, a hierarchy of citizens (within a polity) and, through Amerasian imperialism, a hierarchy of polities (within an empire) combined in the late 19th century and created an expansive form of American white supremacy. Compromise and tolerance helped generate and certainly helped consolidate this condition. Throughout, pragmatism, itself partly a product of such compromise, largely permitted or ignored this enlarged America and its disastrous consequences. I must conclude that pragmatism wrongly favored compromise and tolerance. The horrible conditions of Jim Crow and indigenous displacement already confirm this in my view – easily in fact. And when we consider the terrible consequences of white supremacy internationalized, the confirmation is all the more overwhelming. But, significantly, the dimensions of this pragmatist error require us to consider again whether the problem lies in a faulty inference or in a suspect theory. I offer no direct response to this with respect to pragmatism as a whole. But a more limited response is given below. With the foregoing context in mind, I focus on the work of pragmatism's main social and political philosopher, John Dewey, and consider how deep the problem goes in his paradigmatic version of pragmatism.

Dewey and the Frontiers of Democracy and Philosophy

In discussing pragmatism and democracy, Dewey is obviously an appropriate focal point. I contend that his account is in need of serious reconstruction. As I shall argue, his view on race and democracy involves contradiction and expresses willful neglect. So my thesis is more extreme than what is typically found in the secondary literature, which criticizes him mostly for a lack in his political practice or incompleteness in his theory. But, to be clear, my position does not entail that we have nothing to learn from him, for that would be manifestly false.[22] Dewey's account of democracy is not only rich and textured, but its centrality to his way of thinking considerably deepens his philosophy more generally. But it is also true that his anti-democratic philosophical rendering of the frontier myth is central, consequential, and disfiguring. In what follows, I consider Dewey on the relations between democracy, philosophy, and the frontier, before turning to some criticisms.

A full account of Dewey's social philosophy would explain how democracy is connected to: experience and education, the distinction between community and individuality, meliorism and the matching of means to aims, metaphysical contingency and epistemic fallibility, utopian and regulative ideals, and still other ideas.[23] But I will

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[22] See, for example, the use of Dewey in anti-racist philosophy in Eddie Glaude, Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), and Shannon Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of White Privilege* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).

[23] For more on Deweyan Democracy, see Richard Rorty, *The Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) and *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*

only discuss some aspects of how Deweyan democracy is linked to the historical context and internal structure of human living. One of the most important features of Dewey's theory of democracy is his political rendering of the psyche and his existential rendering of politics. He was at pains to clarify that ultimately democracy is not an institution or mechanism of governance. At bottom, democracy is about experience, which is understood as a liberating attunement to the world, one that provides personal meaning, increases knowledge, realizes potential, and opens the path to further experience so conceived.[24] Democracy ensures that experience grows in "ordered richness." It is, then, a condition internal to a certain structure of human living, not something applied from without. And so a genuinely participatory democratic government exists only because for the majority of the citizens democracy is already a way of life.

One of the many important elaborations of this view can be found in his later essay "Creative Democracy – The Task Before Us" (1939). Recognizing the utopian and regulative nature of an ideal like democracy, he characterizes the democratic way of life in terms of faith in three areas: the self-directive powers and possibilities of human nature, regardless of natural endowment or social position; intelligence and action, fortified by a world-opening education; and everyday cooperation and shared endeavor, which by its nature precludes violence and cultivates fraternity. Importantly, however, faith in human possibility, genuine agency, and real community is taken to have a special urgency, reflecting a distinctive historical and economic consciousness in Dewey. Specifically, he contends that democracy so conceived has become more difficult to achieve in 20th century America because an earlier democracy-facilitating environment has been replaced by a socially-deadening political economy.[25] As a result, the creativity of democratic people must be equal to the difficulty of the times. Democracy in America, then, has a deeply diachronic and ecological nature. And any theory of democracy, not just with respect to America, must have a narrative that contextualizes this mode of human living. For Dewey, such a story is about structures of causation as well as meaning.

In America, Dewey contends, people faced a vast, open, untrammeled frontier; they were fundamentally pioneers, whatever their specific vocations.[26] The inviting conditions of this form of life by their very structure encouraged democratic living. The omnipresent task of converting nature into human forms powerfully united people in a common cause and community. So the experience of the frontier produced not only a

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(Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), ch.3; Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); John J. Stuhr, ed., *Philosophy and the Reconstruction of Culture: Pragmatic Essays after Dewey* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993); Charlene Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Larry Hickman, ed., *Reading Dewey: Interpretations for a Postmodern Generation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Michael Eldridge, *Transforming Experience: John Dewey's Cultural Instrumentalism* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998); and Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*.

[24] LW 14: 224-230, "Creative Democracy – The Task Before Us"

[25] We see here some of the inspiration for Menand's narrative.

[26] Perhaps Dewey's earlier work on transposed psychological templates filled the backdrop of this pioneer narrative. He argued in "Interpretation of Savage Mind" [MW 2:39-52] that a hunting mentality is common to the so-called savage mind and that it persists, in variously changed forms, as the society in question becomes more civilized, as it were. In his own day, Dewey claimed, transmuted aspects of the hunter perspective were evident.

valuing of exertion, vigor, and propagation, as commonly supposed, but also the attributes of generosity, fellow-feeling, and respect. On Dewey's view, this latter set of traits is the deeper effect of America as frontier.

Since the mid to late 19th century, however, the land has been filled and the resources claimed. The new age is ominously industrial. Its developing economic lines of configuration divide people against each other in a way unknown in the days of the open expanse but frighteningly familiar in Europe. And even the state's coercive power is "pale in contrast with that exercised by concentrated and organized property interests."[27] But, even so, the former way of life did not disappear with the end of expansion. The frontier was simply too deep a feature of American life. And this staying power of the pioneering orientation provides hope in the face of an emerging social crisis. Specifically, the lingering dispositions toward solidarity and mutual respect, if supported by education that reclaims the values of this past, will ensure that American democracy prevails against economic subjection. As Dewey puts it in his essay, "Nationalizing Education" (1916): "The virtues of mutual esteem, of human forbearance and well-wishing which in our earlier days were the unconscious products of circumstances must now be the conscious fruit of an education which forms the deepest springs of character."[28]

In the essay on the three democratic faiths, Dewey elaborates upon how the pioneer orientation was modified by the new economic period. He contends that pioneering as a mode of living was so deeply ensconced in the American psyche that it continued to shape American beliefs. But, in the face of a changed landscape, the frontier persisted in a specifically metaphorical form in the collective outlook of mid to late 19th century America: land was replaced by resources, and opportunities now concerned monetary acquisition.[29] Interestingly, Dewey goes on to suggest a still newer phase of the modification of the frontier. There is some unclarity as to whether his account is really meant to be descriptive.

> At the present time, the frontier is moral, not physical. The period of free lands that seemed boundless in extent has vanished. Unused resources are now human rather than material. They are found in the waste of grown men and women who are without the chance to work, and in the young men and young women who find doors closed where there was once opportunity.[30]

Here he seems to contend that the political economy has generated a new analogue to open spaces and unclaimed goods, namely a huge unemployed or suppressed work force and hence an enormous reserve of untapped human resources. The manner of his articulation suggests he is describing an emerging consensus about a new phase of the American frontier. But he gives no reason for thinking a consensus exists. So given his castigation of the political economy that generated this beleaguered army of workers, he could be read, and more plausibly should be read, here as *prescribing* an extension of the earlier democratic outlook to the conditions of this new crisis, with the hope that it will

[27] LW 11:41-65, "Renascent Liberalism"
[28] MW 10:202-10, "Nationalizing Education"
[29] LW 14: 224-5, "Creative Democracy – The Task Before Us"
[30] LW 14: 224-5, "Creative Democracy – The Task Before Us"

reproduce in some form that positive pioneering orientation toward the new masses of America. Such an extension, and finding a way of rallying people around it, demands, as he notes, a new social and political imagination.

According to Dewey, the pioneering orientation also generated a distinctive form of philosophy, pragmatism of course. Like democracy, indeed as a potential instrument of it, philosophy too has a history and geography that the frontier permeates and transforms. Nearly all of the philosophical systems inherited from Europe deferred to an exterior authority of some kind and correlatively a pre-designed and hence normatively pre-completed universe. Even though modern European philosophy shed explicit divinity, it was still heir to a "metaphysics of feudalism."[31] And even philosophy in America sometimes reverts to this metaphysics in one or another subtle guise. Pragmatism, however, constitutes a profound break from this tradition.

> A philosophy animated, be it unconsciously or consciously, by the strivings of men to achieve democracy will construe liberty as meaning a universe in which there is real uncertainty and contingency, a world which is not all in, and never will be, a world which in some respect is incomplete and in the making, and which in these respects may be made this way or that according as men judge, prize, love and labor.[32]

Dewey claims that a philosophy infused with democratic aspirations finds not only its moral theory but its entire worldview transformed. Pragmatism, therefore, involves a metaphysics of the frontier, a democratic ontology and normative theory. Being constituted by the conditions of the frontier, pragmatism is the philosophical rendering of the pioneering ethos.[33] And this ethos, as noted earlier, involves not simply an action- and prospectively-oriented disposition but a sanctification of community. So rather than looking to an agency higher than or at least external to humanity, pragmatism in some sense makes divinity immanent within human connection and endeavor. One of our most important contemporary interpreters of pragmatism describes this philosophy as "romantic polytheism."[34]

I think it goes without saying that one of the hallmarks of pragmatism is its insights on philosophy as both a barometer of culture and an instrument of its provocation. In section one of this essay, I mentioned Dewey's claim that philosophy converts culture into consciousness and, in doing so, changes culture immanently. So

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[31] MW 11:51, "Philosophy and Democracy"
[32] MW11:50, "Philosophy and Democracy"
[33] In a response to Lewis Mumford's criticism of pragmatism, especially of William James, Dewey's rejoinder offers more by which to consider pragmatism as a "metaphysics of the frontier." Specifically, he contends that the many distinctive features of James' philosophy – e.g. radical empiricism, pluralism, etc. – reveal the permeation of the pioneering orientation. On this basis, Dewey denies Mumford's claim that James and pragmatism merely reflect and acquiesce to what is prevalent in society. A frontier-constituted philosophy departs from Europe's feudalistic metaphysic, and it values an ethos that challenges the emerging status quo, particularly narrow individualism and class divisions. See Dewey's "The Pragmatic Acquiescence" [LW 3:145-51].
[34] Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," in Morris Dickstein, ed., *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p.21-36.

how does this conversion and subsequent change in culture take place? According to Dewey, philosophy is criticism that examines the foundational beliefs of a culture and "terminates, whether so intended or not, in a projection of them into a new perspective which leads to new surveys of possibilities."[35]

On this account, philosophy guides the movement from culture to consciousness by means of criticism, where this is understood in a distinctly extended and propulsive sense. Of course, it involves a multi-directional and multi-dimensional investigation of a culture's basic beliefs: the process of distilling, tracing, contextualizing, making coherent, and critically evaluating the doxastic organization of a society. But, as cited in the passage, such an analysis invariably leads not simply to new facts, ideas, inferences, and the like, but a new *perspective*. The new outlook or framework in turn lights up new *paths to the future*. So insofar as fresh perspectives and novel senses of possibility produce new and perhaps also new *kinds* of action, philosophy changes culture within the terms, now extended, of its own self-understanding. Philosophy, then, is a transformative vision.

A significant feature of philosophical analysis and vision is its inductive approach, one born of a real appreciation for the diverse particulars out of which philosophy produces judgments of some generality. At one point, Dewey likens philosophy to cosmopolitan philanthropy. The latter is discredited when it is "not rooted in neighborly friendliness." Analogously, the former is suspect when its general claims are built up without a "profound respect for the significant features and outcomes of human experience" in its many and various media.[36] Possibly, the distinctively a posteriori character of biology, which deeply shaped Dewey's outlook, looms in the backdrop as much as the more moral considerations of respect for individual particularity.

This analytical method poses a possible problem for the Deweyan philosopher: How can one truly maintain this sort of "profound respect," this genuinely inductive approach, if one acknowledges the obvious truth that many kinds of lives, in their rich particularities, are significantly different from those of the investigating philosopher and hence constitute opaque or easily mischaracterized entities in the analysis? Dewey replies that empirical immersion combined with "sympathetic intercommunication" with different kinds of people can increase knowledge and correct biases.[37] He also contends that one implication of the situated character of experience and, hence, of criticism, is that a community of experience, for example women, may upon having the right opportunities, generate a novel form of philosophy bearing the marks of their collective particularity.[38]

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[35] LW 6:19, "Context and Thought"
[36] LW 6:21, "Context and Thought"
[37] LW 6:21, "Context and Thought"
[38] Ibid. Of course, Dewey and others repeatedly commented upon and tried to explain regional or nationalistic differences in philosophy, like German v. American philosophy. So what makes his comment on women's philosophy striking is the background concern about democracy. As a proponent of various kinds of women's rights, he was of course aware of gender hierarchy. One expression of his challenge to this hierarchy, at least in some of its aspects, can be found in precisely this acknowledgement of the potential of women's philosophy. For more on Dewey's treatment of gender (and race), its limits and prospects, see Charlene H. Seigfried, "John Dewey's Pragmatist Feminism," in Larry Hickman, ed., *Reading John Dewey*, ch.10, and her *Pragmatism and Feminism*. A very different contribution to this

In light of the foregoing, we can see the kind of role played by the frontier concept. The frontier concept is neither abstractly philosophical, nor simply factually descriptive. It is an empirically based *perspective*. As such, it both organizes relevant factual claims into a cohering whole and bridges the descriptive whole to abstract and to normative philosophical claims. Here, this connective concept mobilizes a certain understanding of the general causal trajectory of American habits, beliefs, social criticism, and collective organization. "High theory" may consign such a concept to the merely auxiliary with others of its empirical ilk. But, then, pragmatism might see such a separation as further evidence of the holdover of a "metaphysics of feudalism" since presumably only a preformed metaphysics would be averse to the openness and sense of contingency involved in an empirical stance.

Having briefly discussed Dewey on democracy, philosophy, and the frontier, we can evaluate his political philosophy. The small secondary literature on Dewey's views on race has developed a consensus. Specifically, he had little to say about race and did little to directly help anti-racist movements. In virtue of this paucity of anti-racist work, scholarly attention has been confined mostly to three essays by Dewey: a 1909 NAACP speech that rejects biological racialism, a 1922 China lecture that explains racial prejudice, and a 1932 NAACP speech that condemns racism as a kind of class exploitation.[39] In a nation profoundly configured by racial hierarchy, with obviously violent enforcement (i.e. lynchings and legal laxity about it), the relatively little writing and acting in the service of anti-racism are quite serious omissions for a leading democratic theorist and social critic. But pragmatist contributors to the secondary literature go on to assert a further claim that takes some of the sting out of Dewey's surprising reticence on race matters. They contend that whatever flaws or omissions there may be in Dewey's work, his general social and political philosophy can both aid and accommodate the best insights of recent work on race theory.[40] Consequently, there is no *deep* problem for Deweyan political theory as such.

If we consider, however, Dewey's frontier idea, serious tensions within his theory rise to the surface. This part of Dewey's work has not been given due attention in the assessment of his views on race and democracy. I have already considered at some length his account of the frontier. So it is worth emphasizing some aspects of its importance for Dewey's outlook. First, as discussed, one of its features is the crucial context-giving role it plays in his theories of democracy, philosophy, and political economy, where each of these for analytical purposes can be taken individually. Second,

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discussion is Richard Rorty, "Feminism and Pragmatism," in *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers, vol.3* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), ch.11.

[39] I think the general judgment that Dewey wrote little on race needs to be emended. If we consider his various writings on China and the Orient, we find that he had more to say about race than what is confined in the three essays that most scholars tend to reference.

[40] See, for example, Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philsophy*, ch.3; Charlene H. Seigfried, "John Dewey's Pragmatist Feminism," in Larry Hickman, ed., *Reading John Dewey*, ch.10; George Pappas, "Dewey's Philosophical Approach to Racial Prejudice," in Tommy Lott and Julie Ward, eds., *Philosophers on Race* (Malden: Blackwell Press, 2002), ch.15; Michael Eldridge, "Dewey on Race and Social Change," in Bill E. Lawson and Donald F. Koch, eds., *Pragmatism and the Problem of Race* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), ch.1; and Shannon Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness*, and "From the Foreign to the Familiar: Confronting Dewey Confronting Racial Prejudice," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* vol.18, no.3, 2004. Among these, Sullivan's work seems to most clearly address the depth of the race problem in Dewey's philosophy.

a point that follows upon the former is how the frontier concept is significantly ramified or articulated through his normative theory generally since his views on democracy, philosophy, and political economy, collectively, comprise a sizeable portion of his normative theory as such. Third, the normative inroads made by the frontier account can be found in appeals to it in establishing a new imperative for education and for creative politics and hence for his meliorist outlook. The frontier partly constitutes the American future, or so Dewey hopes. Fourth, the frontier concept contributes in an importantly empirical perspectival capacity for a philosophy defined by its centering of social criticism and the "problems of men." Finally, the frontier concept is configured by a distorted normative logic. As will be discussed shortly, it wrongly brings a context of innocence to assessments of wrongdoing. An important implication of all this is that quite unlike the content of the three race essays noted earlier (i.e. the two NAACP speeches and the China lecture), the frontier concept is not a philosophical area to which a preexisting normative theory is applied, as it is a conceptual structure already, from the beginning, suffused throughout much of the normative theory. Consequently, a further implication is that problems with the frontier concept are more internal to the Deweyan outlook than problems in the theoretically subsequent, applied areas.

The foregoing may help clarify how the frontier vision is living tissue internally moored throughout the body of Dewey's philosophy. In light of it, how does Dewey's philosophy fare with respect to the issue of race and democracy? It is difficult to respond delicately. As history or chronology, Dewey's frontier idea is simply wrong. In its normative role, it is *deeply* anti-democratic. And in its effects, it has been potentially collusive with an expansive white supremacy. I discuss these in turn.

Regarding the historical aspect of its empirical role, there are various ways in which the frontier idea is flawed. First, it completely erases the fact that the continent was already occupied by self-governing peoples; the U.S. was not once upon a time a "large unoccupied continent" with "unused and unappropriated resources," as he described it. In our day, the literature in critical American studies makes such an error seriously inappropriate. But there was little room for excuse even in Dewey's day when genocide, displacement, social quarantining, and all manner of exclusions were leveled against the indigenous in highly public ways.[41] So the sheer basic falsity of Dewey's frontier presupposition cannot be overstated.

Second, the magnitude of the error requires consideration. Dewey's conception of the Westward vision was purely intracontinental, from Atlantic to Pacific. As I have described in section two of this essay, however, this is a factually false description of the actual longitude and latitude of U.S. expansion. In accord with Manifest Destiny, the expansion moved southward throughout Latin America and across the Pacific to the eastern side of Asia. Moreover, the Amerasian expansion was highly public and many of the culture-makers involved were well-known to the American intelligentsia or personally acquainted with Dewey himself. As noted in section two, Rudyard Kipling, Alfred Mahan, and James Thayer – poet, strategist, and judge – all converged in proclaiming the significance of America enlarged and working through their various means to shape the internationalized white nationalism of their day. As we know, and far

[41] In a related vein, indigenous thought actually influenced pragmatism, even if this has gone unrecognized. See Scott Pratt, *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002).

less vividly than Dewey's generation, this extracontinental expansion extended the longstanding violence and cruelty of intracontinental expansion. Whatever else may be true of Dewey's frontier, that stretch from Plymouth to Manila was inhabited with peoples and, later, also apparitions.[42] And the frontier experience of the *underside* of American expansion could not have been more different from what we find in the nationalistic lore of John Dewey. Dewey's frontier was largely a colonial landscape, and the pioneer very often an invader or occupier.

Now, at this point, one might think that my claims go too far, even if it seems clear that Dewey goes wrong somehow. Perhaps it might be claimed that the political netherworld I have depicted must be *complemented* by Dewey's positive vision of America. [43] There is a sense, it might be argued, in which pluses and minuses, pros and cons, should be evenly tallied up and perhaps "cancel each other out" in some way. I think this type of normative collation might be acceptable for many kinds of social wrongs and rights, but not the sort under investigation here. War, genocide, and lasting structures of subordination are by their very nature antithetical to the peaceable acquisitive activity postulated of the Deweyan pioneer. Individually, they involve a notable severity of harm and heinousness. And collectively, they form a variegated and punishing structure of racial oppression. So Dewey's problem here is not a mere gap or hole that leaves his account incomplete. It is a hole in a shape-maintaining or lode-bearing structure, and so its existence leads to the deformation of much else in the account. Correspondingly, its rectification is not filling in the gap, but a more wholesale renovation in perspective.

And there is more. If, as Menand and others discuss, the Civil War, its social aftermath, and the onset of a new industrial age formed the crucible of pragmatism's gestation, why is there no discussion of slavery in the frontier narrative? Even if we assume for the sake of argument that America was a "large unoccupied continent" with "unused and unappropriated resources," it would still be true that enslaved Africans were forced to occupy the continent to help white pioneers use and appropriate the available resources for themselves. At least this much *must* be conceded by Dewey. Abolition, Union, war, Reconstruction – how could he or anyone of his generation forget slavery and racial caste? Of course, nobody did. So if the frontier experience is postulated as a general causal structure explaining some part of the nation's democratic inspirations, we can turn the tables on Dewey and ask whether the experience of slavery and Northern racial caste did not also play a causal role, one that counteracted or mitigated the democratizing impulse of pioneering. If we consider the great narrative of the African

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[42] The Philippines demands for independence was met by a massive consensus of American white supremacy denying Filipinos the ability and right of self-governance. The ensuing war was genocidal. Moorfield Storey smuggled a photo of the slaughter at Mt. Dajo from the killing fields to the American media. As a result, Dewey's generation could not ignore the massacres splashed across their newspapers, and ours perhaps might look upon them with the eerie horror that often attends the observation of the black and white photos of large Holocaust graves filled with cadavers. For more on U.S.-Philippine relations and the war that initiated the relationship, see Angel Velasco Shaw and Luis Francia, eds., *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream, 1899-1999* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

[43] Dewey himself might object to my framing of the matter, as seen in his style of tallying the pros and cons of American society in his essay "A Critique of American Civilization." My comments here then are as much a response to that essay as to the imagined interlocutor.

American experience during this time, we come upon the story of the Exodus.[44] Dewey's paradigm is the pioneer chopping down trees, digging wells, riding across the landscape. The African American paradigm is the slave chopping down trees for a master, digging wells for a master, but in time shattering the master's manacles. None of this, however, is discussed, let alone mentioned, by Dewey. So as a purely descriptive matter, Dewey's account of the frontier is false, and because it has a perspectival structure, the error is seriously problematic. There are further relevant considerations here. I have yet to talk about the normative structure and some of the consequences of his account. So I turn to them now.

As discussed, race and empire are everywhere in the frontier, yet nowhere in Dewey's vision of it. It could well be said that for Dewey early America was the unexamined frontier. And yet the ignored facts were so obvious to Dewey's generation that one must ask why so much is pushed out of the horizon of his vision and how this ignoring is built into the conceptual structure. Ignoring, as an activity, requires us to question the aims involved, and, correspondingly, an affected conceptual structure requires us to ask whether its normative orientation has been skewed in relation to democracy. Regarding the first of these, I have no real answer. Given all that has been said, I do not know for certain what compelled Dewey to see the anti-democratic frontier as a well-spring of American democracy and of the democratic aspirations of American philosophy. Of course, someone might point out that he was a child of his times, and everyone who was anyone normalized the frontier idea in some positive form or other. Perhaps this is so, but note that such a response does little to save Dewey and much to indict the general community, Dewey included.

Regarding conceptual structure, the frontier concept plays an anti-democratic normative role. A pragmatist theory of democracy is fundamentally a tool for ameliorating conditions contrary to human growth. The totalistic erasure in Dewey's frontier vision, however, not only fails to solve problems in democracy, but actually exacerbates them. And, to be clear, the issue here is not simply the factual inaccuracy of the Deweyan story, which any decent history book can correct, but normative interpretation. When racial oppression is systemic and historically protracted, a historically grounded normative context will not simply offer an informational penumbra around the condemnation of racism but will permeate and qualitatively change the condemnation itself.[45] However, Dewey's frontier vision, evacuated of historical reality, provides a kind of prelapsarian normativity, whereby America is perpetually innocent, always flush with its democratic youth. He can denounce racism repeatedly, but each denouncement is unmoored from the actual historical context and thereby involves misapprehension. Specifically, racism will be seen as a serious problem because it is *serially extensive*, rather than because it is also qualitatively deep. There is a sense in which each act of racism is *normatively new*, even if it is recognized, descriptively, to be a further instance of an established pattern.

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[44] For a superb examination of this idea, see Eddie Glaude, Jr., *Exodus!*

[45] For example, is a particular episode of racial injustice an aberration of the social order? Or is it perhaps a part of the normal infrastructure of a society's day-to-day life? The same act, say the racist denial of a job to a candidate, can be read very differently depending on the wider normative context brought to bear in the examination. What is *not* at issue is the description of the job denial itself as some form of racism.

Relatedly, the legacies or enduring impact of earlier forms of racism may not be recognized for what they are. So, for example, if one were to look upon poverty in, say, the Philippines or Puerto Rico, one might only see tragic deprivation and governmental corruption or inefficiency, rather than the causal connections these have with U.S. imperialism. As a result, philanthropy, rather than reparations and the preemption of further imperialism, take center stage on the agenda of reform. Now, if Dewey's theory of democracy is meant to be a problem-solving device, it must make forays into this deeper aspect of social transformation, into reparations and prevention more than piecemeal patchwork. But the prelapsarian frontier vision, so suffused throughout his normative theory, prevents these democratic advances in thinking. In fact, it could be seen as a potential tool of imperialism in virtue of its trivializing qualities. On a final note, consider that democracy is aspirational for Dewey and not yet a fully accurate description of any society. What Dewey's frontier vision offers us, then, is hope without history, rather than hope forged in the face of apparent hopelessness.[46] Consequently, it conduces to democratic faith made shallow. Worse, it raises the specter that perhaps moral recovery from the awful past really is hopeless and that there is no future without its erasure. Could this be the motive of Dewey's dedicated ignoring?

Finally, I would like to consider, perhaps in good pragmatist fashion, a possible consequence of Dewey's frontier vision, namely collusion with U.S. imperialism. Bertrand Russell famously accused pragmatism of being a philosophy of ironclads and maxim guns. I do not think this is true. But there is certainly the worry that pragmatism might in some version, or possibly more generally, aid imperialism through a structure of allowances, permissions, or trivializations. In the case of Dewey, our evaluation must be ambivalent because seen as a nexus of potential causal forces his account is contradictory: His normative theory both hinders and aids imperialism. It rejects imperialism because it wonderfully supports a deep form of democracy, which I have described at some length. On the other hand, it is shot through with a frontier vision that trivializes imperialism and its legacies and thereby helps it move with less fetters than it would otherwise have. One way to draw this out is to consider Dewey's view of U.S.-Japan-China relations. A full discussion of Dewey's Asia is beyond the scope of this essay, but some aspects of his China and other travel writings show some concrete manifestations of how the frontier vision can serve as a kind of perpetual innocence-making machine, a wonderful device in the hands of imperialism.

In an essay entitled "Public Opinion in Japan" (1921), Dewey praises Japanese liberals, as he calls them, who had attempted to steer Japanese opinion away from further militarization, a psychology of bellicose nationalism, and imperialist tendencies.[47] He concludes soberly, however, that these liberals may ultimately be ineffectual since Japanese public opinion seems to be overly conditioned by the war-like social climate that formed the very precondition of Japan as a modern political unit. He worries as well about a possible "explosion in the Pacific" precipitated by the Japanese out of resentment against American exclusion of Asians. Even if Dewey gets wrong some of the details here, he arguably anticipates the "Day of Infamy" discussed in brief in section two of this essay. His prescience might be applauded because of his sensitivity to Japanese political

[46] See the essays in this volume by James Bohman, Max Pensky, and Mitchell Aboulafia, who use Mead to recapture history as a necessary component of democracy.
[47] MW 13:255-261, "Public Opinion in Japan"

and social conditions. But he does not direct these sensitivities to an understanding of his home country, even with the benefit of *hindsight*. Strikingly, at no point, and practically nowhere else in his China lectures, does Dewey seriously consider *American* militarization, *American* psychology of bellicose nationalism, and *America's actual*, not merely potential, imperialist and explosive incursions across the Pacific.[48] At the end of that lecture, Dewey does implore America to do the "square thing" and rid itself of international (and presumably also domestic) racism. But he does little to address the mechanisms of American empire I have noted above even as he addresses the mechanisms of Japanese empire.

In a later trip to Mexico, Dewey claims to have been convinced that imperialism can be developed mostly economically as seen in the dominative relation between the U.S. and Mexico. He does not, however, make any concessions to the idea that the U.S. has maintained explicitly political imperialism as well, nor to the idea that U.S. economic imperialism is pervasive in the areas where it in fact maintains political imperialism. Still later, he does begin to see some of the extensiveness of U.S. economic imperialism, especially in Latin America.

> Our economic policy in Nicaragua goes marching on with the support of marines; but there was a time when similar interventions (with apologies to our authorities for not calling them "interpositions") went almost without notice … Perception of great social changes usually lags far behind the changes themselves, so far behind that it is incapable of modifying their operation. But perception of the growth of economic imperialism is not perhaps so far behind the fact, and consequently so important, as had been the case in other matters.[49]

This signifies an important development in Dewey's anti-imperialism and correspondingly the working out of his democratic theory. The only problem is the vestiges of the frontier vision. Imperialism, as described here, is seen as relatively new and shallow, and its cessation relatively near.

An interesting confirmation of the continuing influence of the frontier vision can be found in a still later piece, an address by Dewey to the Chinese public during WWII.

> Your country and my country, China and the United States, are like in being countries that love peace and have no designs on other nations. … We are alike, your country and mine, in having a common end in this war we have been forced to enter in order to preserve our independence and freedom. …

[48] The omissions are absolutely glaring. The most Dewey can say about the roiling conditions and consequences of America enlarged is that America is not prepared to absorb a flood of Orientals, that as a result anti-Asian immigration law is regrettably justifiable, and that Japan may attack America out of resentment of its exclusion from America For Dewey's peculiar condonation of anti-Asian immigration law, see his classic essay on racial prejudice, "Racial Prejudice and Friction" MW 13:254.

[49] LW 3:133-134, "A Critique of American Civilization"

> The United Nations will win the whole war, and the United States and China will win against Japan. … In this new world you are assured the position of spiritual leadership of Eastern Asia … [50]

The shifting position of the U.S. here is fascinating. American innocence in the Asia-Pacific, both in regards to conquest and to dominative diplomacy, is clearly ludicrous, as shown in section two of this essay. But in virtually perfect conformity to his frontier vision, Dewey begins by aligning the U.S. with a more obviously innocent China. As he tells the future he desires, the U.S. with China will defeat the imperialist aggressor, Japan. And in the ensuing peace, China will become the rightful leader of eastern Asia. But, one cannot help but wonder, "What about the U.S.?" If the U.S. and China have been aligned thus far in this trajectory of the fight for democracy, then in the ensuing peace, will America become the leader of the Western world? Whatever leadership the U.S. holds in the new half of the century, according to Dewey, it will not be an empire, for its imperialism has not been deep or serious. And perhaps it will learn its lessons from the examples provided by Japan and Germany. Here again, then, the frontier reappears in the American future. By now, however, we are entitled to doubt whether that condition is democracy.

Possibly the Korean War and, had he lived long enough, certainly the Vietnam War would have dealt a serious blow to Dewey's view of American democracy. Unfortunately, still more has transpired. I began this essay with a note about current U.S. incursions into the Middle East, the addition of a Eurasian agenda to an earlier Amerasian empire. With the 20th century behind us and still more racism and imperialism ahead of us, I think we must expand the pressing issue that Brandom has raised and see that pragmatism's compromises have been far more disastrous than he or Menand have noted. If pragmatism wrongly drew its tolerating conclusions from a basically sound theory, then we can move forward with the hope that pragmatism will with the benefit of such hindsight choose more wisely in the future. However, if pragmatism rightly drew its tolerating conclusions with such terrible effects, then pragmatism itself is in jeopardy. My focus here has been on one paradigmatic pragmatist. But because Dewey was the leading theorist of democracy among the early pragmatists, pragmatism itself has not been far from the discussion. I have concluded that Dewey's account of democracy is seriously problematic, though not impossible to reconstruct. If my criticisms have been mostly valid, then we need to ask how Dewey's position would look once shorn of the frontier vision ramified throughout his normative theory. For example, what would happen if we replaced it with an Exodus narrative of the kind found in the black nationalist traditions. Or perhaps it should be replaced with nothing at all, with all the resulting holes sutured somehow. Either way, the position, if it remains Deweyan, will have been substantially renovated. And perhaps it will be some such renovated account that will provide a way out of pragmatism's empire. Ultimately, however, all this seems to me to be an instance of the "problems of men." And until pragmatism makes it one of its own urgent problems, I imagine that it will make itself largely obsolete in the underside of the world,

[50] LW 15: 369-70, "Message to the Chinese People"

where once it was Marxism that called people forward to faith and hope in transformation on a global level.[51]

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