CRITICAL WHITENESS STUDIES AND AMERICAN PRAGMATISM IN DIALOGUE:
A JANE ADDAMS CASE STUDY
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A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Social Science
Social Sciences Program
2018
This thesis for the Master of Social Science degree by

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Social Sciences Program

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Date: July 28, 2018
When Far-Right Donald Trump won the United States presidential election in 2016, a plethora of think pieces regarding the state of the “American Left” emerged. While many pointed to “identity politics” as the source of the Left’s woes, many others cited a speech given by Richard Rorty almost two decades before. In his talk, which later turned into a book called *Achieving Our Country*, Rorty predicted the uprising of a fascist “strongman” that would capitalize on the weaknesses of the Left and the rising economic insecurity of the shrinking working and middle-class. Moreover, Rorty distinguished between two “Lefts” -- the “Reformist Left” of the late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century and the “Cultural Left” that formed during the Civil Rights Era and continues until today. Rorty argued that the “Cultural Left,” which focuses on social identity and power, should be complimented by the “Reformist Left,” which focuses on economic inequality and piecemeal reform, in order to be successful in the twenty-first century.

Using Rorty as a framework, I situate two hermeneutics in interdisciplinary social justice scholarship that I believe represent these two Lefts: critical whiteness studies and American pragmatism. I use them both to analyze a prominent progressive figure, Jane Addams. Then, I extract strengths and weaknesses from both hermeneutics, using them to elucidate Rorty’s distinction between the “Reformist” and “Cultural” Lefts. I conclude with reflections on larger hermeneutics in interdisciplinary social justice scholarship: critical
theory and American Pragmatism, broadly construed. Following Rorty’s contention that Leftist intellectuals frame Leftist praxis, I contend that reconciling critical theory and American pragmatism within academia will help to form a critical, yet pragmatic, American Left beyond it.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1997, Richard Rorty gave a series of lectures about the state of the American Left that were soon published into a book called *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*. He argued that the American Left, what he called the progressives—people committed to social justice and egalitarianism—suffered from a deep weakness. This weakness would, he predicted, eventually result in a “bottom-up populist revolt,” followed by the election of a right-wing “strongman” who would speak to the interests of both the world’s superrich and the newly-dispossessed American working class.¹ Although nobody could quite predict the breadth of the national and global consequences of the election of such a leader, Rorty contended that the results would be dire:

One thing that is very likely to happen is that the gains made in the past forty years by black and brown Americans, and by homosexuals, will be wiped out. Jocular contempt for women will come back into fashion. The words “nigger” and “kike” will once again be heard in the workplace….He will quickly make his peace with the international superrich….He will invoke the glorious memory of the Gulf War to provoke military adventure which will generate short-term prosperity. He will be a disaster for the country and the world.²

This leader would reverse the social and political achievements of society’s most subjugated members: African-Americans, women, LGBTQ folk, and others. Further, he would merge his interests with the global 1%, waging wars to fill their pockets. This would all be achieved by promising his electorate that his actions were in their best interest, that he cared about the unemployed and poverty-stricken as much as he cared about his global empire.

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² Ibid, 90-91.
Rorty’s critique was twofold. First, he argued that the Left had transformed from a pre-sixties “Reformist Left” to a post-sixties “Cultural Left.”³ The Reformist Left, which Rorty identifies as the “old alliance” between the intellectuals and the unions and that was responsible for the New Deal and Progressive Era legislation, dominated the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. It focused largely on economic inequality and the selfishness and greed imbedded in laissez-faire capitalism. It worked to improve the conditions of American workers and, though it largely ignored the interests of other oppressed groups, such as women and people of color, it assumed that “as economic inequality and security decreased, prejudice would gradually disappear.”⁴ It was the practice of piecemeal reform, government regulation, and the implementation of protective labor laws. Some of its political and cultural leaders were Theodore Roosevelt, Jane Addams, John Dewey, Upton Sinclair, and John Steinbeck.

On the other hand, the Cultural Left that came out of the civil rights movements of the Sixties and continues until today, differs significantly. Unlike the Reformist Left, the Cultural Left specializes in the “politics of difference” or “of identity” or “of recognition.”⁵ That is, rather than an exclusive focus on economic inequality, it focuses on stigma and subjugation due to one’s social identity such as gender, race, ethnicity, or sexuality. Further, instead of piecemeal reform and modifying existing laws, it prioritizes naming and changing “the system,” such as capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, etc.⁶ As it does this, academic members of the Left have founded new disciplines such as women’s studies, African-
American studies, and sexuality studies to help their students “recognize otherness.” As Rorty explains, “Its principle enemy is a mind-set rather than a set of economic arrangements--a way of thinking which is, supposedly, at the root of both selfishness and sadism.” It talks much more about “deep and hidden psychosexual motivations” and much less about “shallow and evident greed.”

Rorty contends that the Cultural Left has greatly improved the way that people treat each other, helping America become “a far more civilized society than it was thirty years ago.” Overtly racist and sexist comments are, at least in most spaces, considered inappropriate. Flocks of angry citizens no longer chase African-Americans away from the voting booths to the lynching post. And that infamous image of young African-American woman Anne Mooty, getting harassed by a horde of white men for simply sitting at a “Whites Only” counter, no longer speaks to innumerable similar incidents across the United States. While hate and discrimination still exist, most race scholars agree that they operate more covertly and illusively than outright. Despite this progress, Rorty contends that the contemporary Left has largely ceased focusing on economic inequality, and in doing so has abandoned another group of subjugated people: the working and newly-dispossessed middle class. This group, hit hard by globalization, outsourcing of manufacturing, and a new information economy, has felt ignored by the Left. Thus, a Right-wing politician like Rorty’s “strongman,” promising to put “America First,” would seem like a promising option.

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7 Ibid, 79.
8 Ibid, 79.
9 Ibid, 77.
10 Ibid, 81.
Like most academic work, Rorty’s speeches were heard, read and critiqued by other academics, students and well-read citizens. His book sat on professors’ bookshelves along with Rorty’s other philosophical and sociopolitical works. His warning for the Left and his alarming prediction was left largely unappreciated by the general public. Then, for many, the unthinkable happened.

In November 2016, Donald Trump was elected as the 45th President of the United States. Suddenly, major magazines and news outlets began circulating Rorty’s critique, arguing for the similarities between his imagined “strongman” and the very real Mr. Trump. A plethora of think pieces circulated, arguing, like Rorty, that the Left’s focus on cultural issues had failed and fascism was on the rise. The New York Times created an entire subsection of its Opinion Pages devoted to critiquing “identity politics” and exploring the unforeseen consequences (or not) of “political correctness,” pejorative hallmarks of the Cultural Left.12 Clearly, the American public, not just academics, were starting to make the connection between fascism, a failing Left, and the progressive preference for discussing identity over economics.

Thus, in this climate, I call attention to Rorty’s critique once again. As a graduate student in a program committed to social justice, I have seen and experienced the inner-workings of the Cultural Left. I have also deeply felt its weaknesses, such as its struggle to propose any feasible policy changes and its preference for dense, theoretical descriptions of the way things “really are.” In class and in conversations with friends and colleagues, I have urged the importance of Black Lives Matter, of never blaming a victim of sexual assault, and of fluid definitions of gender and sexuality. I have argued that immigrants are people, too,

that no human is illegal, that it’s immoral to rip families apart. Yet, I have stayed blissfully
unaware of national or local politics and of the laws that help or harm groups of people.
Through many of my classes, I have become much, much better at articulating the problem.
Yet, at times, I have become so bogged down in dense theoretical descriptions that any
practical solutions become illusive.

In an interdisciplinary program, I have also experienced different philosophical
paradigms created to explain, and sometimes propose solutions, to social problems. Some
have fit Rorty’s description of the Cultural Left more than others. For instance, women and
gender studies and critical race theory courses have encouraged naming systems--to be
overthrown by cultural changes--more than others. Public administration, critical history and
legal studies, on the other hand, have focused more on laws that need to be changed and the
horrors of economic inequality. Like Rorty, I deeply value what I have learned in my cultural
studies or identity-based classes; I believe that they have given me private courage and
intellectual strength. However, like Rorty, I recognize their weaknesses. I worry that I have
put all my faith in my own self-creation and in the overthrowing of a mystical system rather
than in participating in gradual, tangible attempts to transform the political and economic
systems that we already have. I have begun to see the question that Rorty articulates and that
politicians like Bernie Sanders are starting to raise in public discourse.13 Are we unable to
talk about racism, sexism and bigotry at the same time that we talk about economic
inequality, national politics and greed? In Rorty’s words, is engaging in “cultural politics”
impeding our ability to engage in “real politics?”14

14 Ibid, 14.
Like most political questions, the answer is not clear. The results of political elections are not easily explained by “isms” and finger-pointing. Terms like “Cultural Left,” “Reformist Left,” “cultural politics,” or “real politics” are notably oversimplified. Yet, in great Rorty fashion, these terms can help us get the conversation started. What are the weaknesses of social identity theories? What are their strengths? What are the risks of a purely-economic Leftist agenda? What might be its benefits?

Like Rorty, I assert that universities be centers of progress and protest, and “[i]f American universities every cease to be such centers, they will lose both their self-respect and the respect of the learned world.”\(^\text{15}\) I also agree with him that “the academy,” that is, professors, administrators and students in higher education, have a moral responsibility to resist needless suffering and exploitation of oppressed individuals, and in fulfilling this obligation they have played a significant role in shaping progressive politics. What we can deduce from Rorty’s argument is this: if the Left is failing, the academy has much to do with it, or at least, can do something about it.

Thus, using Rorty as a springboard, I pose my question: What can academics learn from Rorty’s critique? Rather than arguing over how we can connect our work with the “outside world,” what if we assumed it was already there? That students really are listening? That Black Lives Matter, the movement for marriage equality, and anti-racist grassroots organizations were informed, in part, by our theorizing? That the roles we play as researchers have consequences. That our epistemologies matter. That our theories do more than enlighten our students; they actually give them tools for addressing real-world problems? Once we acknowledge the power academic institutions already have to enact change, then we can ask

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 82.
the question: Which disciplines, and more specifically, which theoretical frameworks, do it better?

**Statement of the Question**

In *Achieving Our Country*, Rorty distinguishes between what he calls the “Cultural Left” and the “Reformist Left.” Both of these Lefts are represented in academia to varying degrees. The “Reformist Left” refers to the coalition between the intellectuals and the unions in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. The “Cultural Left” refers to post-Civil Rights academics and their tendency to prioritize issues of identity and power over more overtly “political” issues like laws and policies. Rorty’s most substantial concern is that academia does not utilize the strengths of both; we cannot (or will not) critique identity and power while at the same time addressing economic inequality and political reform. He acknowledges the success of the “Cultural Left” while also worrying that, without the strengths of the “Reformist Left,” intellectuals will have no way to effectively engage in national politics.

Utilizing Rorty’s framework, I will put two bodies of literature in conversation that I believe exemplify these two Lefts: critical whiteness studies (CWS) and American pragmatism (AP). For the purposes of my argument, critical whiteness studies will represent the academic “Cultural Left” and pragmatism will represent the academic “Reformist Left.” I chose these hermeneutics in particular for three reasons: first, they are both socially and politically ameliorative, attempting to *improve* the world rather than simply describe it; second, they belong to a broader category of interdisciplinary social justice scholarship that maintains a commitment to progressive political engagement; third, they include an ethos of practicality in that they intend to engage with an actual, human, experienced world and
propose realistic solutions to social problems. They are also two hermeneutics with which I have previously come into extensive contact. Putting these frameworks into conversation, I hope to reveal their strengths, weaknesses, and unintended consequences.

Another goal of my thesis is to flesh out Rorty’s charge that the academy’s commitment to certain modes of theorizing has weakened the once invaluable role that intellectuals played in national politics. While Rorty’s critique is predominantly interpreted as being towards postmodernism, I believe that much of critical theory, particularly the postmodern varieties, is guilty of many of the same charges. Thus, I situate CWS and AP within their corresponding larger bodies of work: critical theory (CT) and American pragmatism (AP), broadly construed. By doing this, I hope to begin building a theoretical model for CT and AP to be utilized concurrently within the context of interdisciplinary social justice scholarship (ISJS). I hope that this project will not only reveal challenges within Leftist academic work, but also shed light on some issues in Leftist politics outside of academia.

The organization of this project will be as follows: Chapter Two will provide a comprehensive literature review of critical whiteness studies and pragmatism. For most of this thesis, “pragmatism” will largely refer to Jane Addams’s and John Dewey’s pragmatism, as I believe it best represents what Rorty calls the “Reformist Left.” In Chapter Three, I will conduct a critical whiteness critique of Jane Addams. Here, I will use critical whiteness literature and a critical whiteness studies ethos to analyze Jane Addams’s theoretical and applied work. I will do my best to portray accurately the critical whiteness studies spirit in order to produce what I believe is a typical example of critical whiteness scholarship. In Chapter Four, I will use pragmatism, particularly the work of pragmatist Jane Addams
scholars, to analyze her work from a pragmatist standpoint. This chapter will not respond
directly to the critical whiteness chapter; rather, it will represent an example of a typical
pragmatist analysis of Jane Addams. In Chapter Five, I will extract lessons from Chapters
Three and Four. First, I will decipher the strengths of both a critical whiteness and pragmatist
analysis of Jane Addams. Then, I will place critical whiteness studies and Addams/Dewey
pragmatism into the larger context of CT and AP. Finally, I will propose the arenas within
which critical theory and American pragmatism can best be utilized. In doing so, I hope to
propose a theoretical model in which the “Academic Left” can be both critical and
pragmatic. I hope that this thesis serves as a starting point for future work to address the
challenges of using CT and AP concurrently. I also hope that it can begin a reconciliation
process between CT and AP so that they can both contribute to ISJS.

Methodological and Theoretical Statement

Like much social justice scholarship, my journey into this question began through
personal experience and is, in some respect, an attempt to sort through my emotional and
intellectual reactions to these experiences. 16 Halfway through an interdisciplinary master’s
program, I enrolled in a critical whiteness studies course through the school of education.
Concurrently, I enrolled in a classical pragmatism course in the philosophy department. I had
been exposed to critical race theory (the origin of critical whiteness studies) previously, as
well as to some pragmatism, but this was the first time that I was being trained in the
theoretical foundations of both. As I delved into the literature, I would constantly propose
connections between the two theories to my professors. For example, I would suggest that
William James’s theory of truth, that “truth happens to an idea” or that the verity of an idea is

16 Swartz, Campbell, and Pestana, Creative Democracy, 62.
determined by its “cash-value” in experience, would be a useful epistemological tool for the social scientific study of subjugated populations.\(^\text{17}\) For instance, if white researchers are studying the “problems” within black or brown communities, their theoretical explanations for these problems need to correspond with the actual experiences of the people living in these communities. If an idea (e.g., black men are inherently violent and thus should be incarcerated at higher rates) does not align with the testimonies or experiences of the group being studied, the idea has low truth value.

Another connection, which morphed into the original topic for this thesis, was that critical whiteness studies seemed a useful tool for analyzing the successes and shortcomings of white, liberal, anti-racist activists like Jane Addams. An outspoken advocate for non-white immigrants and African-Americans, and a philosopher who is increasingly recognized for her influence on John Dewey and classical pragmatism, the blueprints for my original thesis became clear: I would use a critical whiteness theoretical framework to critique Jane Addams, a pragmatist. Thus, I constructed a proposal, wrote a chapter, and presented it at conferences and to numerous groups on campus for feedback. The feedback I received from these presentations ultimately sowed the seeds for this final thesis.

The first time I presented my paper was to a research-oriented critical whiteness studies group. I was the only white person in a room full of scholars and activists of color. Hoping to be self-critical, I announced that their feedback and criticism was freely welcomed and encouraged. Further, I told my audience that my work ultimately had to answer to their aims, as effective subversive work must correspond with the aims of the oppressed.\(^\text{18}\) (In this case, “the oppressed” were my audience of people of color). I gave them free reign to critique

\(^{17}\) James, *Pragmatism*, 88.
me. Hence, quickly into my presentation, they told me that my criticisms of Jane Addams were not harsh enough. Because of my white skin, they told me I had the freedom within the university to be much harder on her, and that I should be. They insisted that a critical whiteness critique of Jane Addams brazenly illuminate the flaws in her theorizing and the harm in her actions. It should tread lightly on her accomplishments and never too-freely assume good intentions.

With mixed feelings of discouragement, enlightenment and hope, I prepared for my next presentation at a women and gender studies research colloquium. In this room, I was in the racial majority. I perceived my audience as three white women, a white man, and one woman of color. Like my previous presentation, I asked for feedback and criticism. Unlike my last presentation, I did not state that the quality of my work depended on its alignment with my audience’s values. The man in the room, a scholar with extensive background in American pragmatism, warned me that my language sounded a bit too dogmatic; one female professor wearing a notably unnerved expression told me that my analysis was a bit anachronistic and that Jane Addams was only a “woman of her time.” Their reactions and feedback could be summarized as this: I was being too harsh on Jane Addams and I needed to mitigate my critiques.

While it is common for academic disciplines to disagree over research questions, methodologies, and theoretical approaches, I was surprised by just how strongly these two groups reacted. I also thought that their responses were intellectually interesting: why did a pragmatism scholar think that critical whiteness language was so dogmatic and essentialist that it was almost unreadable? Why did a white women’s studies professor seem so deeply offended by a well-meaning critique of a well-known feminist and activist? Why did the
critical whiteness studies group tell me the exact opposite of what I was hearing from everyone else – that I should be more aggressive and more uncompromising?

I spent weeks considering these questions and gathering critiques from every academic circle of which I was a part. Taking the advice of the pragmatist scholar--my thesis chair--I attempted to revise my language. I tried to moderate my assertions and make my critiques of Jane Addams more generous without compromising my critical whiteness theoretical framework. I tried to maintain some resemblance of a pragmatist mindset, that is, presumably the mindset with which Addams worked, while I analyzed her. While writing and revising academic papers is never easy, the roadblocks were insurmountable: using these two frameworks simultaneously to accomplish the same goal--to decipher Addams’s anti-racist successes and learn from her mistakes--was proving almost impossible. The two theoretical frameworks that, weeks before I had thought would speak so nicely to each other, seemed completely at odds.

While I toiled over this question, the 2016 presidential election approached its last days. Donald Trump, a right-wing political novice was declared winner over the more seasoned and moderate Hillary Clinton. My country, which I had assumed to be on a continual arch of progress, had just elected a leader that represented everything that I (and the intellectuals that surrounded me) had worked so hard to reject. Suddenly, the inability for progressive intellectuals to work together, particularly in response to right-wing fascism, seemed even more precarious. If we all wanted the same thing--equality and social justice for all--why were we so quick to dismiss each other? Could it be that there was something within the theories themselves that required us to reject or demean other modes of thinking? I
wondered—did our own intellectual battles have anything to do with the rest of the country’s inability to find common ground?

These experiences and their resulting questions led to this thesis. Importantly, this thesis represents what can be loosely called a “naturalistic inquiry.”¹⁹ A naturalistic inquiry is defined as “research that focuses on how people behave when absorbed in genuine life experiences in natural settings.”²⁰ Following this method, I immerse myself in the experience of using these hermeneutics in order to draw conclusions from them. In other words, my critiques of Jane Addams are not my attempts to propose my own, nuanced analyses. They are, instead, a focused effort to analyze Jane Addams in the way that the two hermeneutics require. In other words, I do my best to produce a critical whiteness critique of Jane Addams, and after, I do my best to produce a pragmatist analysis of her. As in a scientific experiment, I treat each hermeneutic as my independent variable, and the intellectual work that is produced by using that hermeneutic is the dependent variable that will lead me to my conclusions. I chose Jane Addams as my object of inquiry because, being a pragmatist herself, there is already significant pragmatist literature examining her work. She is also a perfect object of examination for critical whiteness studies, as she was a white woman advocating for non-white people. I will draw my conclusions in the final two chapters where my own voice will be strongest.

**Thesis Statement**

I contend that both CWS and AP add value to an intellectual analysis of Jane Addams. Likewise, CT and AP (broadly construed) play invaluable roles in ISJS. However, CT’s effort to be “political” has produced weak Leftist theory and has negatively impacted

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¹⁹ Frey et al., *Investigating Communication.*
²⁰ Ibid.
Leftist praxis outside of academia. This can be remedied by clearly distinguishing between the practical uses of CT and AP within the context of ISJS.

CT and AP serve distinctly different purposes in ISJS. Critical theory is best suited for *cultural critique*. American pragmatism is best for producing *political praxis*. Utilizing an interdisciplinary method, critical theory can compose *theories* to be implemented through *education* to produce cultural change. Likewise, American pragmatism can suggest changes to various *policies* to be implemented through *democratic institutions* to produce political change. These distinctions are not ontologically pure, absolute, nor complete. They are intended to lay the groundwork for further reconciliation between CT and AP in ISJS. They also aim to help Leftist intellectuals reclaim their role in the public sphere and for academia to revitalize its role in national politics.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following chapter, I will explicate the history, theoretical foundations, and methodological assumptions of CWS and AP. First, I describe AP, focusing almost exclusively on Addams and Dewey. While limited to these two thinkers, the discussion is not exhaustive and reflects only a portion of their sociopolitical and philosophical thought. Second, I describe CWS, focusing primarily on the ontological distinction present in much CWS scholarship--the abolitionists and the reconstructionists. Finally, I briefly review other bodies of literature consulted for this thesis, including literature addressing immigrants’ assimilation to whiteness and current cross-disciplinary work that utilizes AP to inform CWS.

Pragmatism

Within recent decades philosophers in the American tradition have deciphered the philosophical roots of Jane Addams’s written work, activism, and engaged life. Because she lived in a time when women were rarely, if ever, recognized as professional philosophers, scholars like Charlene Haddock Siegfried, Marilyn Fischer, Maurice Hamington, Shannon Sullivan and others have worked to excavate the pragmatic roots in her thought. Addams has increasingly become recognized as having personal and professional influence on John Dewey, developing a distinctly feminist version of pragmatism, and contributing significantly to the field of ethics with her notion of “sympathetic knowledge” which, as Maurice Hamington explains, is “an inclusive approach to morality that reassesses the
relationship between knowledge and ethics.”21 Her designation as a pragmatist and her influence on the tradition as a whole, while once debated, is now rarely contested.

One interpretation of Addams’s and Dewey’s relationship by Barbara Stengel nominates Addams to the role of “poet” to Dewey’s “philosopher.”22 She and her co-authors contend that Dewey’s continued relevance to contemporary issues in large part comes from his willingness to become “a student again” when interacting with intelligent women, community leaders, and even social outcasts.23 They further argue, “Dewey is able to speak eloquently to us today--as much as a century after he formulated his ideas--precisely because of his willingness to listen, to closely attend to those we might categorize as women and weirdos.”24 Jane Addams, trained in theology rather than traditional philosophy, became for Dewey an organic representation of many of his ideas regarding democracy, social ethics, “pragmatic experimentalism,” and “the relational nature of the self.”25 In other words, she might be seen as an active, living example of his philosophies.

Another analysis of Addams’s and Dewey’s relationship by Charlene Haddock Siegfried recognizes the influence Addams had on Dewey’s pragmatism. She contends that Jane Addams and the women of Hull House are largely responsible for pragmatism’s “emancipatory emphasis,” or its focus on the experiences of marginalized groups such as women, people of color, immigrants and sexual minorities.26 She also argues that Addams developed a “model of social democracy” which helped inspire the “pragmatist shift” from a “detached theory of knowing to an engaged theory of understanding.”27 In other words,

23 Ibid, 27.
24 Ibid, 27.
27 Ibid, 207.
rather than simply embodying a “natural” representation of Dewey’s reasoning, Addams’s theorizing intellectually contributed to pragmatist philosophy and shaped it for years to come.

Seigfried’s interpretation of Addams aligns more closely with this thesis than Stengel’s interpretation, which recognizes Addams’s theoretical contributions as well as her practical ones. It recognizes Addams fully as a pragmatist philosopher with contributions to moral theory, political theory, feminist theory and others. While the causal nature of her intellectual relationship with John Dewey remains debated, this thesis avoids the question of “who influenced who.” Rather, it understands their relationship as circular and interactive, and not fully knowable in an age when women’s participation outside the home was severely limited.

Social Moral Theory

Addams and Dewey wrote their major works on moral theory in response to changing political, social, and economic environments. Active at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, both witnessed the vast changes in labor and widespread inequality resulting from the industrial revolution, as well as the expansive technological advances spurred by breakthroughs in medicine and natural science. In his retrospective introduction to a revised edition of *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, written twenty-five years after the original publication date, Dewey cites the “scientific revolution,” “industrial revolution” and the “political revolution of the last few hundred years” as reason for the continued urgency of philosophical reconstruction. Likewise, in her autobiography *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, Addams recalls her visit to the impoverished neighborhoods of London as the final catalyst in her deciding to open Hull House in the industrial neighborhoods of Chicago. Both
philosophers wrote to respond to the vast and urgent problems they saw in their countries and their neighborhoods.

Along with the many dire social problems resulting from the Industrial Revolution, Addams proposed another reason for a new moral theory. Citizens, she argues, on all levels of the industrial scale were bored, unsatisfied, and lacking a deeper purpose in life:

All about us are men and women who have become unhappy in regard to their attitude toward the social order itself; toward the dreary round of uninteresting work, the pleasures narrowed down to those of appetite, the declining consciousness of brain power, and the lack of mental food which characterizes the lot of the large proportion of their fellow citizens. These men and women have caught a moral challenge raised by the exigencies of contemporaneous life; some are bewildered, others who are denied the relief which sturdy action brings are even seeking an escape, but all are increasingly anxious concerning their actual relations to the basic organization of society.28

To Addams, most Americans, whether working on the factory line or caring for an inherited family mansion (as Addams was herself), were feeling disconnected from their communities. Working on one small portion of a final product, factory workers lacked an understanding of the role they played in the production of goods and the economy as a whole. More economically privileged members of society, now with unprecedented levels of material wealth, felt a lack of social worth as they reaped the benefits of industry without contributing much to its success.

Focusing on this problem of discontent, Addams continues to address the boredom and disillusionment felt by the more economically privileged members of society. She writes, "They fail to be content with the fulfillment of their family and personal obligations, and find themselves striving to respond to a new demand involving a social obligation; they have become conscious of another requirement, and the contribution they would make is toward a

code of social ethics.” To Addams, the moral demands of her time were twofold: the notable suffering felt by society’s least advantaged members, and the general malaise felt by its more advantaged members and their unwillingness or inability to act.

While Dewey also noticed the negative consequences of the rapid advances of the period, his call for a new morality rested on another observation: the failure of philosophy itself to adequately address the social and political needs of his time. In his seminal text *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Dewey writes:

In philosophy today there are not many who exhibit confidence about its ability to deal competently with the serious issues of the day…the withdrawal from the present scene, increasingly evident in philosophy, is itself a sign of the extent of the disturbance and unse ttlement that now marks the other aspects of man’s life. Indeed, we may go farther and say that such withdrawal is one manifestation of just those defects of past systems that render them of little value for the troubled affairs of the present.

In other words, Dewey indicted traditional Western philosophy, particularly those schools of thought which sought for one “fixed and certain end” in which to find “secure refuge,” as being unable to address the ever-changing, complex realities of actual life. He includes chapters for the pragmatist “reconstruction” of moral concepts, social philosophy, conceptions of experience and reason, and logic.

While Addams’s and Dewey’s starting points may have differed, their destination is largely the same: a new conception of morality that challenges the notion of a morally isolated self and works to integrate the conception of one’s self into the context of one’s relationships, social environment, and institutional affiliations. For Dewey, this means understanding the self as constantly forming and irrevocably connected to one’s actions. He

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29 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
writes, “a correct theory of morality is recognition of the essential unity of the self and its acts…errors in theory arise as soon as the self and acts (and their consequences) are separated from each other, and moral worth is attributed to one more than the other.” Thus, with this new conception of the self, there is no such thing as an independent, isolated moral act because one’s self is always connected to one’s actions and their corresponding consequences. Further, the quality of one’s choices matter, as the content of one’s self is shaped by one’s actions. As Dewey explains, “every such choice sustains a double relation to the self. It reveals the existing self and it forms the future self.” Thus, one can never quite distinguish one’s self from one’s environment, since each choice one makes in relation to her environment has a lasting effect on the self.

Beyond this new integration of the self, acts and consequences, Dewey further urges that a self cannot exist apart from one’s social groups. Since human beings rarely act in isolation and more often make choices within social settings, the self also has a double-relation with one’s social environment. In other words, one’s social environment informs and shapes the self and vice versa. As he observes, “regard for the self and regard for others are both of them secondary phases of a more normal and complete interest: regard for the welfare and integrity of the social groups of which we form a part.”

Further, to Dewey, there is no such thing as a completely selfish interest or a completely selfless interest. Since we are inextricable from our social groups, our self-interests and group-interests are one and the same:

To suppose that social interest is incompatible with concern for one’s own health, learning, advancement, power of judgement, etc., is, literally, nonsensical. Since each one of us is a member of social groups and since the latter have no existence apart from the former, it is impossible to limit the scope of our social interest to the self. Dewey, however, was not the first to recognize this fact. It was recognized by the ancient Greeks, and it has been recognized by all thoughtful men ever since.

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33 Ibid, 286.
34 Ibid, 299.
from the selves who compose them, there can be no effective social interest unless there is at the same time an intelligent regard for our own well-being and development.\textsuperscript{35}

His purpose in this passage is not to urge members of social groups to care for their own wellbeing, but to acknowledge that one’s wellbeing is inseparable from one’s social environment. Thus, to care for both, and to stop thinking of them as separate entities, is essential.

While Addams’s articulation of social morality relies less on philosophical concepts like “the self,” “motive,” and “ends,” it nonetheless urges something similar: “individual” morality is not enough and an examination of one’s moral relation to larger social groups and institutions is needed. She begins by examining what she calls “personal righteousness,” a limited notion of morality that requires individuals to care for themselves, their families, and an immediate group of friends. It also includes a set of expectations for conduct that are so well-incorporated into custom that they have become habit. She writes:

\begin{quote}
It is easy for most of us to keep from stealing our dinners as it is to digest them, and there is quite as much voluntary morality involved in one process as in the other…. To steal would be for us to fall sadly below the standard of habit and expectation which makes virtue easy. In the same way we have been carefully reared to a sense of family obligation, to be kindly and considerate to the members of our own households, and to feel responsible for their well-being. As the rules of conduct have become established in regard to our self-development and our families, so they have been in regard to limited circles of friends.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

To Addams, “personal righteousness” is a manifestation of morality that requires little thought or effort. It also limits one’s virtuous behavior to a small number of people. This type of morality, she urges, is inadequate for addressing the complex needs of her time.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 300.
\textsuperscript{36} Addams, \textit{Democracy and Social Ethics}, 5.
Individuals are now connected by institutions that extend beyond the scope of one’s immediate neighborhood. Thus, morality must be equally expansive.

In place of individual morality, Addams prompts an adjustment to “social morality,” or a recognition of one’s moral obligations in the context of wider society:

To attain individual morality in an age demanding social morality, to pride one’s self on the results of personal effort when the time demands social adjustment, is utterly to fail to apprehend the situation…The stern questions are not in regard to personal and family relations but did ye visit the poor, the criminal, the sick, and did ye feed the hungry? 37

The poor, the criminal, the sick, and the hungry may all be groups outside of one’s immediate social circle, family or friends. Yet, to Addams, tending to their needs solve both the boredom and discontentment of the privileged and the great miseries of subjugated groups, what she calls the moral obligation of her time.

Addams’s primary work on social morality, Democracy and Social Ethics, and one of Dewey’s formative works, Ethics, lay the foundations for a pragmatic conception of social morality that will be utilized throughout the remainder of this thesis. This thesis defines social morality as follows: a conception of morality which recognizes the interconnectedness of the individual with social groups and institutions and a moral obligation for individuals to improve the conditions of these groups. The primary method for beginning this process, for both Addams and Dewey, is experience.

Experience

For Dewey, experience is the means by which one arrives at an understanding of the moral needs of one’s environment. Like Addams, he is unconcerned with traditional notions of morality that construct the individual as isolated from her greater social environment. He

37 Ibid, 6.
also seeks to develop a conception of morality that expands beyond religious or habitual shortcuts to moral behavior. In fact, his definition of a moral situation requires uncertainty and reflective deliberation. Hildebrand explains that, to Dewey, “what characterizes morality, per se, is the existence of a situation saturated by conflicting elements which demands that engaged agents determine reflectively what to value and what ends to pursue…A moral situation obtains when one is unable to choose between ends.” 

A situation is moral when the direction of action is uncertain.

Further, one finds herself in a moral situation by interacting with one’s environment through curiosity and reflection. Dewey writes, “Moral conceptions and processes grow naturally out of the very conditions of human life….The fundamental conceptions of morals are, therefore, neither arbitrary nor artificial. They are not imposed upon human nature from without but develop out of its own operations and needs.” This approach to ethics places him in contrast with much of Western philosophy, which stipulates morality as either an outward imperative or an inner self-evident truth for one to simply decipher and find.

Like Dewey, Addams situates experience as the locus of moral thought and action. Social experience, or interaction with individuals or groups outside of one’s immediate or familiar territory, is how one develops a conception of the failures or needs of one’s greater community:

We are learning that a standard of social ethics is not attained by travelling a sequestered byway, but by missing on the thronged and common road where all must turn out for one another, and at least see the size of one another’s burdens…much of the insensibility and hardness of the world is due to the lack of imagination which prevents a realization of the experiences of other people.

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40 Anderson, “Peirce and Cartesian Rationalism.”
41 Addams, Democracy and Social Ethics, 7-8.
Social experience, in other words, is how one arrives at a conception of social morality. Without it, one would have no awareness, or no inclination to sympathize with, the struggles or suffering of other people.

**Democracy**

Building on her notion of experience, Addams suggests democracy as both a moral attitude and a way of living which embraces the experiences of other people. She explains, “To follow the path of social morality results perforce in the temper if not the practice of the democratic spirit, for it implies that diversified human experience and resultant sympathy which are the foundation and guarantee of democracy.”\(^{42}\) To Addams, democracy encompasses an eagerness to investigate the lives of others and use those experiences to guide future ameliorative action. Guided with the hope of improving the lives of all, democracy is “not merely…a sentiment which desires the well-being of all men [but] a rule of living as well as a test of faith.”\(^{43}\)

Similarly, Dewey’s conception of democracy stretches beyond its traditional definition of a representative political system. To Dewey, democracy is a benevolent attitude and a habitual way of living which seeks to transform the moral dimension of social relationships and institutions. For Dewey, “democracy is a way of life, one that “signifies the possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all his relations of life.”\(^{44}\) Like Addams, Dewey sees democracy as an habitual approach to life informed by hope and a belief in human progress.

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\(^{42}\) Ibid, 7.
\(^{43}\) Ibid.
Democracy also has an emancipatory, or social justice dimension, in that one’s social identity or status does not deem one unworthy of sympathy or exempt from social responsibility:

Belief in the Common Man is a familiar article in the democratic creed. That belief is without basis and significance save as it means faith in the potentialities of human nature as that nature is exhibited in every human being irrespective of race, color, sex, birth and family, of material or cultural wealth….The democratic faith in human equality is belief that every human being…has the right to equal opportunity with every other person for development of whatever gifts he has.\(^4\)

Democracy, then, is the development of an ethos among individuals and communities that is participatory, active, and social. However, it recognizes that some groups face more obstacles in the realization of their potential than others, and it works to dismantle those barriers so as to produce social, political and economic equality.

**Charity and Justice**

Both Addams and Dewey wrote extensively on the distinction between charity and justice, acknowledging the difference between the two concepts and exploring the potential relevance of each. While Addams’s work on the subject is vast, this section will focus exclusively on her essay “Charity and Social Justice.” I will decipher the similarities and differences between this essay and Dewey’s approach to the subject in *Ethics*.

In “Charity and Social Justice,” Addams discusses two groups whom she calls “the Charitable,” who are “moved to action by ‘pity for the poor,’” and “the Radicals,” who are impassioned by a “hatred of injustice.”\(^4\) She argues that these groups were finally uniting in a common cause for “juster social conditions,” and that their coalescence was largely a result of each group’s ability to move past its original biases.\(^4\) “The Charitable,” who tended to

\(^4\) Addams, “Charity and Social Justice,” 68.
\(^4\) Ibid.
focus on the individual, were forced to acknowledge that the poverty and suffering which they constantly encountered were due to unequal economic and industrial conditions. “The Radicals,” who tended to rely on abstract theories, realized that if they were to sway public opinion, they would have to utilize “carefully collected data as to the conditions of the poor and criminal.” That is, their theories needed the support of concrete human experiences. Well-reasoned arguments would not be enough. Addams explains, “It is as if the Charitable had been brought through the care of the individual to a contemplation of social causes, and as if the Radical had been forced to test his social doctrine by a sympathetic observation of actual people.”

While Addams recognizes the contributions of both groups, she largely grants the charitable group with the great successes in alleviating suffering and the potential to prevent it in the future. She reasons that, while their intellect and abstract reasoning may be weak compared to the radicals, it is their interactive experience with actual human suffering that makes their approach strong. Citing “sympathetic knowledge” as the magic ingredient to their success, she writes, “After all, sympathetic knowledge is the only way of approach to any human problem, and the line of least resistance into the jungle of human wretchedness must always be through that region which is most thoroughly explored, not only by the information of the statistician, but by sympathetic understanding.” In other words, sympathetic knowledge, what Maurice Hamington defines as “actively knowing other people for the purpose of understanding them with some degree of depth…[and] entails openness to the possibility of caring for others,” is, to Addams, the most adequate starting point for

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid, 70.
addressing social maladies. The strategies of the radicals, often rooted in disconnected moral commitments, are ineffective without this crucial component.

Further, Addams commends the charity worker’s ability to transform her sympathy into policy changes and direct action. Charity workers achieved political reform by utilizing previously unfamiliar resources like “statistical information” and “popular agitation” when testifying for new laws or mobilizing for reforms. She also commends the charity workers’ pragmatic methods, crediting them for pushing reforms whose success was ultimately tested by its “propitious reaction upon the poor.” The charity-driven were successful in making tangible improvements in policies and regulations that directly affect the lives of the poor, and this would ultimately prove the best strategy for the eliminating of poverty:

[T]he part America shall take in this international crusade of the compassionate, in this standing army of humanity’s self-pity suddenly mobilized for a new conquest, it lies largely with the Charitable to determine, for it is probably that out of the most persistent and intelligent efforts to alleviate poverty will arise the most successful efforts to eradicate poverty.

While Dewey acknowledges the accomplishments of charity workers and the power of sympathy to incite action, he is much wearier of one’s reliance on sympathy for lasting social change. In Ethics, Dewey warns of the potential dangers of relying too heavily on sympathetic motivation. He cautions, “Compassion ranks ordinarily as a social motive-force. But one who consciously cultivates the emotion may find, if he will but consider the results, that he is weakening the character of others, and, while helping them superficially, is harming them fundamentally.” One example Dewey gives of this paradox is a situation

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51 Hamington, The Social Philosophy of Jane Addams, 8.
53 Ibid, 72.
54 Ibid, 81.
where one is so motivated by sympathy for the victim of a crime that he supports a useless, even socially-harmful, punishment for the offender. On the contrary, Dewey suggests that we do not suppress our emotions of pity, but temper them with reflection and guide them toward thoughtfully-directed action:

To give way without thought to a kindly feeling is easy; to suppress it is easy for many persons; the difficult but needed thing is to retain it in all its pristine intensity while directing it, as a precondition of action, into channels of thought. A union of benevolent impulse and intelligent reflection is the interest most likely to result in conduct that is good. But in this union the role of thoughtful inquiry is quite as important as that of sympathetic affection.  

For Dewey, sympathy is important insofar as it is a natural impulse that can draw our attention to wrong. However, it is insufficient as a moral guide and must be supplemented by an in depth inquiry into larger relationships and consequences.

Dewey’s second hesitation in overvaluing charity is rooted in the possibility of it becoming justification for maintaining unjust laws or policies:

The theory which erects charity in and of itself into a supreme excellence is a survival of a feudally stratified society….The objection to this conception of charity is that it too readily becomes an excuse for maintaining laws and social arrangements which ought themselves to be changed in the interest of fair play and justice. ‘Charity’ may even be used as a means for administering a sop to one’s social conscience while at the same time it buys off the resentment which might otherwise grow up in those who suffer from social injustice. Magnificent philanthropy may be employed to cover up brutal economic exploitation. Gifts to libraries, hospitals, missions, schools may be employed as a means of rendering existing institutions more tolerable, and of inducing immunity against social change.

Dewey cautions that a privileging of charity over other forms of social change my lead to unfavorable consequences. First, charity itself may be offered as a grounds for maintaining unequal social conditions, such as severely low wages, inadequate housing, or substandard healthcare. While social, political and economic policies may daily reproduce these

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56 Ibid, 298.
conditions, charity may be used as a way to mitigate their effects and render them more tolerable. This could detract from efforts to change the policies that produce these conditions in the first place. Second, charitable giving may be used by socioeconomically privileged individuals who, rather than pushing for structural changes that could defeat poverty and suffering at the source, would use it as a way to alleviate their own guilt for contributing to unjust systems.

While Addams and Dewey may seem to have differing viewpoints on charity, I contend that their approaches contain more similarities than differences and can contribute to a pragmatic conception of charity versus justice. Addams, now well-known among scholars for her feminist approach to ethics, her contributions to the ethics of care, and her development of the concept of sympathetic knowledge, added credence to the emotive elements of morality. Among traditional Western philosophy wherein lie many proponents of mind-body dualism and the downplaying of emotions, her contributions were sorely needed.

Dewey also acknowledges the importance of emotional responses and sympathetic understanding, particularly when urging that one’s emotions not be repressed, but instead guided toward critical reflection and thoughtful action. Just as Addams credited the charity workers’ success to their ability to direct their sympathies toward social action and political reform, Dewey agrees that sympathy transformed into thoughtful action is a great source of moral progress. They both see eminent potential in merging emotion and thought, compassion and logic. And they both agree that the ultimate goal of social progress is not to quell our own guilt or temporarily mitigate someone’s suffering, but to adjust social arrangements in government, industry and other forms of association so as to prevent the injuries in the first place.
Critical Whiteness Studies

Much newer to the academic scene than Jane Addams, John Dewey or pragmatist philosophy, critical whiteness studies is an academic venture with its official beginnings in the early 1990s. As described by Zeus Leonardo, CWS is designated as a “white-led race intervention” and came onto the academic scene with three scholarly publications written “about, but not exclusively for, white people”: “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh (1989), Wages of Whiteness by David Roediger (1991), and White Women, Race Matters by Ruth Frankenberg (1993). Each of these writers self-identifies as white.

Leonardo describes critical whiteness studies as both a “conceptual engagement and a racial strategy;” that is, it maintains political as well as intellectual aims. Doane writes:

[T]he field of whiteness studies…is as much political project as critical paradigm. By focusing upon the oft-hidden aspects of whiteness and by taking a critical perspective, practitioners of whiteness studies hope to force whites to confront issues of race, to make white dominance problematic….Beyond the academic realm, confronting ‘whiteness’ has also become a core task for antiracist activists.

Like most critical theories such as Marxism, feminist studies, critical race theories, or diaspora studies, critical whiteness studies developed in response to sociopolitical concerns regarding inequality between people of various identities or social localities. Further, it hopes to provide intellectual as well as practical tools to alleviate the suffering and improve the experiences of actual people in their lived experiences. Its academic dimension “poses

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58 Leonardo, Race, Whiteness, and Education, 91.
59 While CWS as a formal hermeneutic can be traced to these authors, it is important to note that authors who are people of color have been examining whiteness for much longer, e.g. W.E.B. Du Bois.
60 Leonardo, Race, Whiteness, and Education, 91.
critical questions about the history, meaning, and ontological status of whiteness,” or “the structural valuation of skin color.” On the other hand, its political dimension poses strategies for eradicating racial inequality in daily life. These who engage the political, or strategic dimension, fall largely into two categories: white reconstructionists and white abolitionists. The two camps attempt to address this question: “What do whites become after undoing these said privileges? Do they become new subjects of whiteness or do they obliterate a racial category beyond recognition when they commit…race treason?”

White Abolition

The first strategic camp in critical whiteness studies is the white abolitionists. This group places whiteness at the “center of the ‘race problem’” and contends that “[a]s long as whiteness exists, little racial progress will be made.” In other words, the valuation of skin color with whiteness at the pinnacle is the central problem of racial inequality. The social, political and economic mechanisms that recognize groups of individuals as “white” are the machinery that keep racial oppression in tact.

Further, abolitionists argue that, while race is “real” in a social sense, it is not real in an “actual sense.” Leonardo writes, “Races are not real in an objective and ontological sense and therefore whites, for example, are not real either.” Whiteness, blackness, brownness, or any other form of racial identity are not “real” because they lack any form of ontological foundation. Physical science refutes the existence of separate races; thus, any argument for

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63 Ibid.
64 Ibid, 93.
65 Ibid, 92.
66 Ibid, 92.
the “social reality” of races falls short in convincing abolitionists that race is a concept that should continue to be used.67

To dissolve racial oppression, abolitionists argue that whites must betray whiteness and the white race. They urge whites to “disidentify with whiteness, leading to the eventual abolition of whiteness.”68 Ignatiev and Garvey give one example of betraying whiteness in their book *Race Traitor*. One of the editors had recently moved to New York City, made an illegal right turn on a red light in his car, and was pulled over by two police officers. The officers examined his license and registration and, after a warning, let him go. In order to become a race traitor, Ignatiev and Garvey argue that the white man could have cursed the police or displayed a bumper sticker that said “Avenge Rodney King.”69 These small acts in which one does not “act white,” committed by enough individuals, would contribute to the disintegration of the white race because those in power would no longer know who was white and who was not. Acts of race rebellion by whites, no matter how small, would also encourage other whites to test the “rules” of white supremacy and create a movement of individuals who no longer accept the benefits of whiteness:

But if enough of those who looked white broke the rules of the club to make the cops doubt their ability to recognize a white person merely by looking at him or her, how would it affect the cops’ behavior? And if the police, the courts and the authorities in general were to start spreading around indiscriminately the treatment they normally reserve for people of color, how would the rest of the so-called whites react?

Ignatiev and Garvey suggest that, sometimes, all it takes is one individual to start a revolution.

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67 MacMullan, “Beyond the Pale.”
68 Leonardo, *Race, Whiteness, and Education*, 93.
69 Ignatiev and Garvey, “Abolish the White Race,” 12.
Ignatiev and Garvey, often credited with establishing the abolitionist approach with *Race Traitor*, describe the abolitionist movement as one committed to lawlessness and even outright violence. In response to an anti-militia poster shared by a leftist anti-hate group, Ignatiev and Garvey write

> The flyer advises us, “The key to protecting the rights and civil liberties of all Americans does not lie in forming armed paramilitary groups who want to take the law into their own hands.” We can think of no better way.

Ignatiev and Garvey insist that a nonviolent, lawful resistance to white supremacy and racial inequality is doomed to fail, and effective leftist groups must be prepared to form a fierce rebellion of their own to counter the armed militias of the white supremacist groups and the omnipotent power of the federal government. They note that what gives them “hope for the future of this country” is its “deeply ingrained tradition of lawlessness.”

The abolitionist’s type of critical theory can be understood as what Swartz, Campbell and Pestana call “foundationalist critical theory.” As in Marxist theory, foundationalist critical theories assume that “it is possible to discover authentic descriptions of social reality that are free from ideology, descriptions that can be found through social scientific methods and the use of reason.” In other words, as the abolitionists argue that race is not ontologically *real* because it is not rooted in physical factors that can be measured via scientific method, Marxists have argued that workers can discover the “true” nature of economic relations and thus free themselves from its binds. Various social theories follow this model, articulating social relations as either “true” or “false” and encouraging oppressed

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70 Ignatiev and Garvey, “Aux Armes!” 94.
71 Ibid.
72 Swartz et al., *Neo-Pragmatism*, 66.
73 Ibid.
populations to “free their minds” from oppressive ideologies, discover the “reality” of their positions,” and work with others to end their subjugation “once and for all.”

Another element of foundationalist critical theory is the “tragic frame.” Swartz et al. explain, “In situations of social conflict, the tragic frame represents a lack of hope in a redemption of the ‘enemy,’ and approaches social change as only being able to occur through a ‘death.’ In other words, social transformation is only viewed as possible by ritualistically killing the enemy.” In abolitionist critical whiteness studies, “the enemy” is whiteness embedded in whites and some non-whites. For abolitionists, whiteness is the “false consciousness” embodied in the hearts, minds and bodies of whites. In order for racial oppression to end, whites (and some people of color) must recognize the false whiteness that occupies them, systematically rid themselves of it, and then commit their lives to expunging the whiteness from all other places it resides, e.g., popular culture, public and private spaces, institutions, family, and friends, etc.

**White Reconstruction**

The other side of the strategic coin is white reconstruction. White reconstructionists do not follow a tragic frame and instead attempt to “rehabilitate whiteness” so as to instill a “critical hope in whites.” They do this by proposing a “remade, revisioned, and resignified” white identity that is “not ensnared by racist logic” and can work diligently to dismantle racist institutions. They can also re-create their identities as anti-racist whites rather than whites entrenched in oppressive “whiteness” and racist ideologies. Reconstructionists differ

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74 Ibid.
75 Burke, *Attitudes Towards History*.
76 Swartz et al., *Neo-Pragmatism*, 66.
77 Leonardo, *Race, Whiteness, and Education*, 92-93.
78 Ibid, 93.
from the abolitionists because they maintain a hope in whites to redefine whiteness to include a racial justice component.

Reconstructionists argue that abolitionist rhetoric is divisive and shaming and, taken to its full extent, will not result in antiracism among whites but, rather, a newly-impassioned, brazen racism among whites. Leonardo writes that, to reconstructionists,

The discourse of white abolition will only lead to white defensiveness and retrenchment and does not represent much hope for even progressive or anti-racist whites. To the reconstructionists, abolitionism is tantamount to promoting a certain self-hatred and shame among whites, guilting them into accepting a movement that does not recognize their complexity.  

Rather than encouraging a total execution of white identity, reconstructionists argue that whites can reshape it. Further, unlike the abolitionists, reconstructionists do not argue against race as an ontological concept because they recognize that, while it may be lacking in scientific validity, its social use gives it some ontological grounding.

Race and Class

While much critical whiteness studies scholarship privileges critiques of race over class, gender, sexuality or other forms of identity, there are a few scholars who have emphasized the intersections between race and class specifically, providing nuanced descriptions of whiteness, white identity, racial oppression and class exploitation. These scholars, Ricky Lee Allen, Thandeka, and Roediger, while writing separately and often using unique language to their projects, articulate very similar descriptions of the development of white hegemony over time.

First, in one of the foundational articles of critical whiteness studies, “What About Poor White People?” Allen constructs a theoretical representation of the internal organization

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79 Ibid.
80 Leonardo, Race, Whiteness, and Education.
of the white race.\textsuperscript{81} He argues that, instead of understanding whites as a monolithic group with identical racial and class interests, it is beneficial to recognize the white race as stratified by class with different groups holding various stakes in the system of white supremacy. By separating whites into the groups “poor whites” and “nonpoor whites,” Allen argues that an internal mechanism called the “hegemonic alliance” keeps the white race intact and insures the continued oppression of people of color.\textsuperscript{82} Allen describes the hegemonic alliance as an internal hierarchy in the white race in which “those at the bottom of this hierarchy must be willing to submit to the authority of those on the top.”\textsuperscript{83}

In Allen’s depiction of the white race, poor whites, who occupy the lowest socioeconomic position, and nonpoor whites, who occupy all other socioeconomic levels, must maintain a sociopolitical alliance in order to keep the white race in tact. Poor whites, who may have much more in common with people of color than with the richest whites, tend to personally identify with nonpoor whites despite having very little in common with them. They do this in order to maintain their membership in an opportunistic white supremacist social order. In other words, while they may lose economically to nonpoor whites, they benefit racially, receiving what DuBois calls “the public and psychological wages of whiteness.”\textsuperscript{84}

Allen continues, while poor whites occupy a dual social place in which they are the oppressed (by nonpoor whites) and the oppressors (of people of color), they are often portrayed as more racist than nonpoor whites. He writes:

> The fact that White politicians, business people, educators, and policymakers from mostly nonpoor backgrounds have been the primary perpetrators of institutional and

\textsuperscript{81} Allen, “What About Poor White People,” 211.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Du Bois, Black Reconstruction.
structural racism gets obscured. Poor Whites are hated more, even though they do not have as much institution and economic power as nonpoor Whites. The point is that nonpoor White Southerners require a distortion of the image of poor White Southerners in order to distort their own image. In other words, they need a White “Other” in order to justify their sense of superiority. I am suggesting that the same is true for all nonpoor Whites. They necessitate an image of the racist poor White to pass themselves off as nonracist.\textsuperscript{85}

In other words, nonpoor whites, those whites with significant socioeconomic power compared to poor whites, need a scapegoat. Since they are in positions of leadership on all institutional levels, nonpoor whites hold more responsibility for racist structures than poor whites do. Yet, in order to justify white supremacy and release themselves from responsibility, nonpoor whites point to poor whites as the “real” perpetrators of racism. Fearful of losing the benefits of whiteness, poor whites respond by asserting their place in the white group, sometimes adopting the nonpoor whites’ image of themselves and hating themselves or believing themselves superior to people of color. The hegemonic “yet unequal alliance among poor and nonpoor whites” makes “the stronghold of the White racial polity over social and economic life in the United States that much greater” because instead of forming alliances with people of color who share many of their socioeconomic interests, poor whites choose loyalty to nonpoor whites instead.\textsuperscript{86}

Thandeka also explores the wedge between economically disadvantaged whites and people of color in her book \textit{Learning to be White}. Starting by analyzing seventeenth and eighteen century colonial Virginia, Thandeka contends that slave-owning whites had an interest in driving a wedge between poor whites (often indentured servants) and black slaves. This is because, seemingly lacking in racial prejudice, poor or enslaved whites and enslaved blacks often had a natural affinity for each other that threatened their masters.

\textsuperscript{85} Allen, “What About Poor White People,” 215.
\textsuperscript{86} Allen, “What About Poor White People,” 219.
There is much evidence that indentured servants, poor whites and blacks often intermingled, attended pubs and dances together, married each other, and even formed rebellions together.\(^7\) Describing the situation for white servants, Thandeka writes, “When their masters began to place people of another color in the fields besides them, the unfamiliar appearance of the newcomers may well have struck them as only skin deep. There are hints that the two despised groups initially saw each other as sharing the same predicament.”\(^8\) This natural comradery between enslaved whites and blacks posed a problem for the slaveholding whites, as a class-wide revolt could pose a significant threat to their authority.

Thus, in order to protect their interests, slaveholding whites instituted some of the first race-based laws in the United States, granting racial privileges to all people designated as “white,” regardless of economic or other social status. In 1670, they forbade free blacks and Indians from owning white servants.\(^9\) In the same year, “all property” such as “horses, cattle, and hogs” was taken from slaves and sold “for the benefit of poor whites.”\(^10\) Notably, the status of white servants was raised compared to blacks by requiring masters “to provide white servants at the end of their indenturship with corn, money, a gun, clothing, and--at the insistence of the English government--fifty acres of land.”\(^11\) According to Thandeka, the increase in the “legal, political, emotional, social, and financial status” of whites was “directly related” to the “degradation of Indians and Negroes.”\(^12\)

Just as Allen’s “hegemonic alliance” separated poor whites from people of color by offering poor whites racial benefits, these laws formed some of the first institutional

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\(^7\) Thandeka, *Learning to Be White.*
\(^8\) Ibid, 44.
\(^9\) Ibid, 42.
\(^10\) Ibid, 43.
\(^11\) Ibid, 43.
\(^12\) Ibid, 43.
privileges for whites, regardless of their economic position and often at the expense of blacks. Thandeka explains how these laws served to prevent any alliance between all races of the lower class:

Racial contempt would function as a wall between poor whites and black protecting masters and their slave-producing wealth from both lower-class whites and slaves. At the same time, the new laws led the poor whites to identify with the ruling elite, an identification with an objective basis in fact—otherwise this divide-and-conquer class strategy would not have worked. The Virginia assembly gave the white servant a number of class privileges associated with the elite…Such laws engendered a psychological allegiance to the elite. 93

Laws providing privileges to poor whites formed an alliance between poor whites and their wealthier counterparts. The results of these laws, Thandeka argues, continue until today, as economically disadvantaged whites continue to remain loyal to a white, upper-class elite at the expense of forming a more formidable alliance with people of color.

The final critical whiteness studies work on race and class that I will utilize is David Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. In this book, Roediger acknowledges much of Thandeka and Allen’s critiques of white hegemony. He agrees that upper-class whites maintain most of the racial and socioeconomic power and that poor whites often act against their own economic interests when they maintain allegiance to whiteness. However, his book is an attempt to complicate the topic, as he accuses many writers like Thandeka and Allen of renouncing poor whites of accountability for white racism. He contends that poor whites had a hand in the formulation of white racial privileges and when given them, readily accepted the advantages of whiteness. Thus, poor and working class whites must be held accountable for the role they played in upholding white supremacist structures.

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93 Ibid, 46.
Roediger’s book compliments Allen and Thandeka’s work because it provides nuance to what seem like a simple solution to the problem of racism in the United States. Rather than assuming poor whites should simply realize their true economic interests and the “trick” elite whites are playing on them, Roediger helps his readers understand just how powerful racial privilege is and the many reasons poor whites have chosen loyalty to elite whites over camaraderie with people of color. Further, he expands the discussion from “poor whites” to “working class whites,” a notably larger group that includes poor whites and helps one apply Thandeka and Allen’s interpretations to the vaster social realities of today.

**Whiteness and Immigrants**

In critical whiteness studies literature, there is a sub-section of work analyzing the racial experience of the “new immigrants” of the early twentieth century. These books largely argue that these immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were not considered white when they arrived in the United States. Instead, they were considered “inbetween peoples,” lower in racial status than northern and western Europeans, but notably higher in status than blacks, Hispanics, Asian-Americans and Indians. One exception to this is Thomas A. Guglielmo’s book *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color and Power in Chicago 1890-1945*, in which he argues that the new immigrants were designated “white on arrival” in the U.S. and thus received immediate social benefits due to their whiteness.

One major work that documents the new immigrants’ racial transformation from racial “in between-ness” to whiteness is *David Roediger’s Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White*. Here, he argues that various social, political and economic forces eventually resulted in the immigrants being viewed by Anglo-Saxons as

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94 Irvin, *The History of White People*. 

whites. The immigrants also came to view themselves as white over the first half of the twentieth century. Some important political factors in this transformation were the New Deal, which excluded blacks but included the immigrants, and post-World War II skepticism of European racism. Further, the ability for immigrants to be included in housing covenants that barred African Americans from certain neighborhoods solidified their designation as racially superior. Thus, the immigrants’ denigration of and social distancing from African Americans played an important role in their transformation.

Other important works that examine the “whitening” of America’s immigrants include Karen Brodkin’s How Jews Became White Folks; How the Irish Became White by Noel Ignatiev; The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity by Eric L. Goldstein; The History of White People by Nell Irvin Painter; and “How White People Became White” by James E. Barrett and David Roediger. Likewise, Rivka Shpak Lissak’s Pluralism and Progressives, while not using CWS terminology, argues that the Settlement House Movement, and Hull-House in particular, functioned primarily to assimilate the immigrants to Anglo-Saxon culture and values. Using her work within a CWS framework, it is reasonable to use Lissak’s work to substantiate the claim that the new immigrants “became white” over the course of the twentieth century as they were assimilated to Anglo-Saxon culture.

Habits of Whiteness

At this point, there is very limited overlap between the two heuristics critical whiteness studies and pragmatism. Pragmatism is generally studied in philosophy departments, but it is also used in other disciplines like political science, communication, and interdisciplinary studies. Critical whiteness studies, on the other hand, has its roots in
education, history, women and gender studies, and ethnic studies. Relatively little has been written that ties pragmatism specifically to the study of whiteness or white hegemony, save two books that explicitly connect critical whiteness studies and pragmatism. These books, written by pragmatist philosophers, are Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege by Shannon Sullivan and Habits of Whiteness: A Pragmatist Reconstruction by Terrance MacMullan.  

Both of these books situate whiteness as the center of critique. In Habits of Whiteness, MacMullan writes, “[O]ur problems concerning race still deny us fully fair and democratic communities largely because of the failure of white people – that is, people like me who live and are seen as white – to recognize, understand, and reconstruct our habits of race.” MacMullan argues that white people must moderate their “habits of whiteness” in order to undermine white supremacy.

Likewise, Sullivan focuses on white privilege and how habits of privilege affect whites and people of color differently as they interact within their environments. She explores what she called “unconscious habit” among whites and its relation to racial oppression, utilizing pragmatic concepts of habit, embodiment, and transaction. Her five-step model for understanding white privilege as unconscious habit is an artful coalescence of pragmatist and critical whiteness concepts used to explain and deconstruct white supremacy and white domination.

Although these books are excellent examples of critical whiteness studies and pragmatism in dialogue, they will not be utilized in this thesis. Sullivan and MacMullan use pragmatist concepts, particularly that of habit, to analyze whiteness, white domination, and

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96 MacMullan, Habits of Whiteness, 1.
white privilege in a new light. It uses pragmatism to reconstruct critical whiteness studies’ foundational concepts. While Sullivan and MacMullan’s work is valuable, this thesis hopes to avoid using one hermeneutic holistically to “inform” the other in order to critique each hermeneutic equally.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of CWS and Addams’s and Dewey’s AP. In the first section, I illuminate those parts of Addams’s and Dewey’s AP that most overlap and that are most practically useful for this thesis. In the second section, I explicate the two primary ontological and methodological approaches to CWS: abolitionism and reconstructionism. Both of these sections are significantly limited. First, Addams and Dewey’s social philosophies encompass many more ideas than those listed here. Second, my discussion of the primary distinction in CWS literature is primarily guided by Zeus Leonardo and could benefit from further exploration and analysis. Finally, my section on literature regarding the immigrants’ assimilation to whiteness could benefit from further summary and analysis.
Within the past few decades, critical race scholars have argued for a new understanding of racism in the United States, one that accounts for its continued significance despite the progressive accomplishments of the second half of the twentieth century. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, for instance, argues that following the Civil Rights Movement, and specifically after the election of Barack Obama, there has been an assumption among whites that the United States is a post-racial society. Coining the term “color-blind racism,” he argues that whites use an armory of coded language to justify and reinforce racial inequalities.\(^{97}\) Similarly, in her popular book *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander argues that white supremacy did not disappear with the abolition of slavery. Rather, it has been redesigned, and mass incarceration has replaced *de jure* slavery as the predominant tool of racial oppression.\(^{98}\) Finally, at the 2016 Summer Institute in American Philosophy, an annual meeting for the Society for Advancement of American Philosophy, education scholar Jerry Rosiak proposed that philosophers begin to consider that racism *itself* may assume a form of agency.\(^{99}\) Since so many anti-racist measures, such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), have failed in producing and sustaining racial equality, he argues that perhaps it is not social, political or economic structures that are the problem. Rather, we should start to deconstruct racism as an idea in itself.

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\(^{97}\) Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*.

\(^{98}\) Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*.

Continuing the conversation that Bonilla-Silva, Alexander, and Rosiak have started, I, too, reflect on the long term effects of progressive accomplishments in American history. How often do we celebrate an anti-racist law, leader or historical moment to only realize, decades later, that they did very little to end racism in the long term? One contemporary example of a progressive achievement was the election of the nation’s first black president, Barack Obama. The persistence of racism following his presidency sideswiped many as the overtly-racist Donald Trump was elected as his successor.

One progressive figure in American history who I believe deserves particular attention is Jane Addams, the co-founder of Hull House in Chicago, social activist, public intellectual and newly-recognized American Pragmatist. Addams dedicated her life to improving the lives of immigrants in late 19th and early 20th century Chicago. She was a founder of the NAACP and an early leader of the Chicago branch. Whether or not Addams would have assumed the label of anti-racist herself, her work undoubtedly attempted to address the violence and harm inflicted on people of color in Chicago and beyond.

Thus, following the continuing significance of her most popular books, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902) and *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910), and the recent adoption of her work by feminist pragmatists such as Charlene Siegfried and Marilyn Fischer, I propose that we begin to flush out Addams’s engagement with race using contemporary theoretical anti-racist literature. Though her life embodied a commitment to the interplay between theory and practice, I focus this chapter on her theoretical writings: her treatise on ethics, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, and two essays, “The Objective Value of a Social Settlement”

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100 Fischer, “Cultural Pluralism,” 38.
and “The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements,” originally published in *Twenty Years at Hull-House*.

My theoretical lens will be critical whiteness studies, an interdisciplinary project which draws from diverse fields such as sociology, legal studies, philosophy, education, political theory and history. Born from critical race theory, critical whiteness studies offers a particularly useful perspective in analyzing anti-racist activities, particularly those enacted by whites for the benefit of non-whites. Doane writes that whiteness studies “reverses the traditional focus of research on race relations by concentrating attention upon the socially constructed nature of white identity and the impact of whiteness upon intergroup relations…[it] makes problematic the identity and practices of the dominant group.” Thus, because Jane Addams was a white woman engaging in anti-racist activities, a whiteness critique can help us understand the underlying assumptions in her thinking and, potentially, the lasting consequences of her work. In this chapter, I argue that the new immigrants were subjugated along intersecting lines of race and class, yet Addams, utilizing a “colorblind” strategy, neglects to explicitly address the racism impacting the new immigrants. Further, her use of social evolutionary theory, as articulated by Addams scholar Marilyn Fischer, implicitly endorses a white supremacist ideology. In the last section, using historian Rivka Rhpak Lissak’s critique of Jane Addams’s “one-way assimilationist model,” I argue that Addams helped to assimilate the new immigrants to whiteness, rather than toward what Lissak calls “the dominant Anglo-American culture.”

**Historical Context**

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101 Doane, “Rethinking Whiteness Studies,” 3.
102 Ibid.
103 Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives*.
Jane Addams and the women of Hull House worked with immigrants from mostly southern and eastern Europe. Italians, Greeks, Germans, Poles, Slaves, Russians, Turks, Jews and Arabs flocked to Chicago, hoping to find factory work following the surge in wage labor after the Industrial Revolution. While they arrived hopeful, the immigrants were quickly relocated to urban slums and worked extremely long hours for poverty wages. Many lived in ethnic enclaves which limited their social exposure to the “older” immigrants, or white Americans living outside the slums. Living conditions were described as “abominable”: overcrowded, dirty, and full of sickness and disease.\(^{104}\)

While the immigrants were undoubtedly subjugated by class, culture and language, it is important to highlight that at this time, the new immigrants were also subjugated by race. Barrett and Roediger write, “A whole range of evidence…suggests that the native born and older immigrants often placed the new immigrants not only above African- and Asian-Americans, for example, but also below ‘white’ people.”\(^{105}\) The scientific literature of the time was particularly influential in establishing the new immigrants’ non-white identities. One book published in 1899 called *The Races of Europe: A Sociological Study* asserted that there were three distinct European races: “Tentonic” (Nordic), “Alpine” and “Mediterranean.”\(^{106}\) Some southern immigrants’ features were likened to African-Americans. For instance, in describing Italians, the text reads, “the broad and open form of nose, extremely developed in the negro race, becomes more common.”\(^{107}\) Slavs and Germans were differentiated from the “pure blond” or “Tentonic” type by the “shortness of the head.”\(^{108}\)

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\(^{104}\) Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnics*, 58.


\(^{106}\) Ripley, *The Races of Europe*, 66.

\(^{107}\) Ibid, 122-123.

\(^{108}\) Ibid, 123.
another book published by Princeton University Press in 1923, the residents of each European country were assigned an estimate of the proportion of blood from each European race. ¹⁰⁹

At the same time that science was supplying credence to the idea that the immigrants were of different, non-white races, images from popular culture demonstrate the anti-immigrant sentiment growing among native-born Americans. A cartoon from the Saturday Evening Post shows the inflation of communism with the arrival of the new immigrants and the use of the Red Scare to incite fear of low wage workers. It features a literal wave of immigration and an unknowing “employer of cheap labor” and his “sentimentalist” wife leaping foolishly into its depths. What lays behind the wave is “lowered standards,” “race degeneration,” “bolshevism” and “disease.”¹¹⁰ The only figure in the cartoon who understands the peril that lay behind immigration is a little white boy, crying fearful tears for the future of America.

From the 1880s to 1920s, the United States experienced a Euro-American nativist movement that combined anti-Communism, pseudoscience, and fear of newcomers to justify the harsh living conditions of the new European immigrants.¹¹¹ The immigrants were deeply subjugated due to the very low pay and long hours of industrial capitalism. And, as in slavery, racist ideologies were used to justify their situations and keep them there. Feagin writes, “The new immigrants were often needed to meet the labor needs of U.S. employers, and many native-born Americans profited from the economic impact of immigration. At the same time, many Americans viewed the new immigrants as a major threat to the nation’s

¹⁰⁹ Painter, The History of White People, 292.
¹¹⁰ Painter, The History of White People, 292.
Anglo culture and institutions.”

It is clear that the new immigrants faced many challenges related to their economic class. However, their class subjugation was made possible through racist ideological mechanisms. To ignore the racial dimension would be to tell only half of the story.

**Jane Addams’s Colorblindness**

Addams published *Democracy and Social Ethics*, her most theoretical work, in 1902. In it, she argued for a “shift” from individual to social ethics. Individual ethics, which require one to tend to the needs of one’s family, friends and immediate neighbors, could not adequately address the moral problems of her time. Instead, social ethics would require individuals to look past their immediate circles to consider the well-being of others. “Did ye visit the poor, the criminal, the sick, and did ye feed the hungry” would be situated as the central moral questions.

Further, *Democracy and Social Ethics* was written to an upper-class and presumably white audience. It is a theoretical text regarding her ideas for democracy and a well-lived life, ideas meant to connect with an educated audience. Addams’s book is also written about non-whites, the poor, African-Americans, immigrants and other oppressed populations.

The chapter “Filial Relations,” which examines the situation of white, upper-class women, communicates their need to surpass the responsibilities of their family and consider tending to the greater needs of those less fortunate:

> The modern woman finds herself educated to recognize a stress of social obligation which her family did not in the least anticipate when they sent her to college. She finds herself, in addition, under an impulse to act her part as a citizen of the world. She accepts her family inheritance with loyalty and affection, but she has entered into a wider inheritance as well, which…we call the social claim.

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112 Ibid, 350.
114 Ibid, 85.
Writing directly to upper-class women, Addams’s book can be read as an argument to those in privileged positions to care for the situations of others. What Addams calls “the social claim” is one’s responsibility to care for individuals beyond one’s immediate social circle. In industrial Chicago, these were often poor, non-white immigrants manning the city’s factories and residing in the city’s slums.

Because Addams published *Democracy and Social Ethics* almost ten years after founding Hull-House, a social service hub and settlement house for new immigrants in Chicago, it is important to consider what she wrote in light of the new immigrants specifically. While racism, nativism and xenophobia were all central issues of her time, Addams does little to explicitly address the racism impacting the new immigrants. In fact, the central premise of her argument is that industrial capitalism alone has produced dismal economic conditions for the lowest classes. She writes, “[O]nly families who apply for aid to the charitable agencies are those who have come to grief on the industrial side; it may be through sickness, through loss of work, or for other guiltless and inevitable reasons, but the fact remains that they are industrially ailing and must be bolstered and helped into industrial health.” According to Addams, the immigrants’ struggles are due exclusively to class oppression; struggles due to racism are not mentioned. Further, in “The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements,” she restates that the purpose of Hull House is to alleviate suffering caused by one’s class position. She writes, “The settlement, then is an experimental effort to aid in the solution of the social and industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of life in a great city.” Addams sees the immigrants’ struggles as caused by

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115 Ibid, 12.
their class position within the new industrial economy rather than as any product of race, racism or white supremacy.

Beyond simply omitting a discussion of the racism that was facing the new immigrants, Addams suggests that settlement workers intentionally ignore differences in regard to race:

The Settlement…must be grounded in a philosophy whose foundation is on the solidarity of the human race…. Their neighbors are held apart by differences of race and language which the residents can more easily overcome….They are bound to regard the entire life of their city as organic, to make an effort to unify it, and to protest against its over-differentiation.\textsuperscript{117}

Here, Addams suggests that the immigrants’ many different ethnic, cultural, and racial identities pose a problem to solidarity. As Sullivan explains, the immigrants’ neighborhoods were often organized by ethnic identity, and the immigrants “self-segregated” by choosing homes within their own “ethnic enclaves.”\textsuperscript{118} To Addams, this segregation, whether imposed from above or chosen from below, was problematic because it fostered loyalties based on what she viewed as trivial differences. Here, Addams demonstrates that she regards racial and ethnic differences as obtrusive to human solidarity. Since she also sees economic exploitation as the immigrants’ main concerns, racial and ethnic differences are seen as needlessly divisive.

Here, critical whiteness studies can help us see the seemingly invisible. While critiquing the exaggeration of racial differences amongst the immigrants, Addams calls no attention to her own race. This is problematic because, as Sullivan explains, “colorblindness” is often used to erase non-white racial identities without applying the same policy to whiteness. Sullivan argues that well-intentioned white people “tend to deemphasize or even

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, 26.  
\textsuperscript{118} Sullivan, “Reciprocal Relations,” 45.
‘erase’” race. This has “the effect of promoting the domination of white people over people of color because, whether explicitly or implicitly, they both consider race (read: nonwhiteness) to be a bad thing.”\textsuperscript{119} Using Sullivan’s interpretation of colorblind racism, we now see that Addams views race as something only the immigrants have. Race equates to non-whiteness, and race is a problem. Whether Addams had the intention or not, her “colorblindness” was one-sided. While the immigrants’ race was to be overcome, her own race remained unexamined. If Addams was colorblind in her approach to her own whiteness, this approach may not have been a problem. However, the next section will show that Addams did indeed see whiteness. Utilizing social evolutionary theory, she employed a theoretical framework which placed whites at the pinnacle of human civilization, relegating all non-white groups to a social position below whites.

**“Social Evolutionary Theory” as Model for Hegemonic Whiteness**

Fischer argues that Addams worked within one of the dominant sociopolitical paradigms of her time: social evolutionary theory.\textsuperscript{120} Social evolutionary theory is a theoretical paradigm which attempted to “chart humanity’s progress from savagery to civilization.”\textsuperscript{121} It designated white Europeans and Americans as the acme of human progress and designated any variation from whiteness as less-developed or “primitive.” It underpinned much of the racial literature of the time, particularly that which sorted racial groups based on “blood” and exact percentages of non-whiteness. Because it equated non-whiteness with lack of civility, culture or respectability, it was often used to justify imperialism, slavery and other methods of systemic domination of non-white peoples. Fischer explains:

\textsuperscript{119} Sullivan, *Good White People*, 87.
\textsuperscript{120} Fischer, “Addams, Race, and Social Evolutionary Theory.”
\textsuperscript{121} Fischer, “Addams on Cultural Pluralism,” 39.
These theorists viewed human history as a progression from savagery to civilization. They thought Africans in Africa existed in a still-savage state; they characterized immigrants from southern and eastern Europe as “primitive”; and they considered white Europeans and Americans to be well-along civilizations path.\footnote{122}{Fischer, “Addams, Race, and Social Evolutionary Theory,”1-2.}

Depending on how far a group deviated from whiteness, that group was often dehumanized. One could use social evolutionary theory to justify either overtly violent or more “benign” methods of domination. It was used to justify slavery of Africans as well as fear or disgust of the new immigrants’ customs and habits.

Many scholars describe social evolutionary theory as an ethno-cultural framework, only acknowledging race as one component of its discriminatory mechanisms.\footnote{123}{Ibid.} A critical whiteness approach, however, requires us to place race at the forefront. In doing so, we can see how whiteness within the social evolutionary model serves as both an ideal and justification for violence toward other groups. It viewed whiteness as humanity’s ideal, and people or groups not considered white as “primitive,” “underdeveloped,” or “uncivilized.” Because social evolutionary theory suggests a racially-hierarchical polity, it is fair to suggest that it legitimizes white supremacy—a social, political and ideological system in which whites are considered morally superior to all other races. While Addams never explicitly says in her writing that whites are superior to non-whites, her use of the paradigm is problematic. Fischer confirms, “While the paradigm itself was not benign….Addams worked within it.”\footnote{124}{Fischer, “Addams on Cultural Pluralism,” 39.}

Within Addams’s writing, there are many examples of her use of social evolutionary theory to describe herself and the European immigrants. For instance, in the chapter “Charitable Effort” of Democracy and Social Ethics, she constructs a picture of “bourgeois”

\footnote{122}{Fischer, “Addams, Race, and Social Evolutionary Theory,”1-2.}
\footnote{123}{Ibid.}
\footnote{124}{Fischer, “Addams on Cultural Pluralism,” 39.}
and “primitive” values, in which the immigrants cannot understand a charity worker’s motivations:

They cannot comprehend why a person whose intellectual perceptions are stronger than his natural impulses, should go into charity work at all… We may say, of course, that it is a primitive view of life, which thus confuses intellectuality and business ability; but it is a view quite honestly held by many poor people who are obliged to receive charity from time to time.\(^\text{125}\)

Here, Addams explains to young charity workers that immigrants may not trust them because they “cannot comprehend” their motivations. Their “primitive” or undeveloped value systems tell them that only dangerous, mean-spirited people become wealthy or privileged. Individuals who are both wealthy and kindhearted, like the female settlement house workers, were incomprehensible to them because the immigrants equated wealth with mean-spiritedness. Though Addams’s intent here is to help the charity workers better understand the immigrants, she nonetheless maintains that the immigrants’ values are not as developed as those of the charity workers. The immigrants’ weariness was due to ignorance rather than a valid concern for their own wellbeing or a comprehensible weariness of strangers with more privilege and power.

Another section of the chapter describes a young charity worker and differentiates between her “cultivated” approach to clothes and cleanliness as compared to the immigrants’ approach. Addams writes, “The charity visitor has been rightly brought up to consider it vulgar to spend much money upon clothes, to care so much for ‘appearances.’ She realizes dimly that the care for personal decoration over that for one’s home or habitat is in some way primitive and undeveloped.”\(^\text{126}\) Here, Addams differentiates between the “correct” value of caring for one’s home and the “undeveloped” value of caring for one’s appearance. Addams

\(^{125}\) Addams, Democracy and Social Ethics, 15.

\(^{126}\) Ibid, 36.
continues this pattern throughout the chapter, comparing a hypothetical charity worker and her “civilized” ethics to the immigrants’ “primitive” ethics.

While superficially, it may seem that Addams was simply racist or mean-spirited, Addams’s intention was not to berate or condemn the immigrants’ values. The chapter “Charitable Effort” was written to young charity workers hoping to help the deeply impoverished immigrants. Her knowledge of the dynamics between the privileged and impoverished, in many ways, puts Addams ahead of her time. She utilized social evolutionary theory not to convince her readers of the immigrants’ inferiority, but to help charity workers understand their lifestyles and values so that they could better serve them. We see this in one example, where Addams discusses the immigrants’ approach to sharing and giving and how, if a charity worker is not careful, she can foster resentment or distrust within the immigrant community. Addams writes, “The charity visitor has broken through the natural rule of giving, which, in a primitive society, is bounded only by the need of the recipient and the resources of the giver; and she gets herself into untold trouble when she is judged by the ethics of that primitive society.” In other words, the immigrants view giving as deeply personal and bounded only by the material limitations of the giver. Charity, which is necessarily bureaucratic and restrictive, cannot meet these expectations, and an effective charity worker needs to understand where she may fail her clients’ expectations. Doing so will strengthen her relationship with those she serves and allow her to do her job more effectively.

Further, Addams urges sympathetic understanding of the immigrants’ choices, explaining to her reader that undesirable habits are more a result of the immigrants’

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127 Ibid, 18.
environments than personal shortcomings. For example, after critiquing the immigrants’ focus on personal style over hygiene, Addams acknowledges its “obvious need.” She explains that immigrants focus so highly on personal dress because they are attempting to replicate the clothes they see on the street. This is to help them bridge the obvious social gap between them and more privileged members of society.

In her forthcoming book, *Jane Addams’s Evolutionary Theorizing*, Marilyn Fischer argues that Addams’s use of social evolutionary theory was often strategic, rather than ideological. Situating Addams as a rhetorician as much as an activist, Fischer contends that much of Addams’s success in establishing a successful charitable organization like Hull-House was due to her use of the dominant ideological paradigm of her time. She used social evolutionary theory to convince wealthy or otherwise privileged members of society to understand and sympathize with the immigrants. She did not use it, like many others, to justify inhumane treatment of them. Put simply, she was successful because she “spoke the language” of her readers. As Fischer puts it, “While some used social evolutionary theorizing as a hammer of domination, Addams put it to work on behalf of the oppressed.” Her use of social evolutionary theory, then, was not necessarily malicious.

All that being said, intent is not the foremost concern of a critical whiteness critique. Addams utilized a theoretical paradigm that put whites at the highest level of moral consideration and nonwhites at the periphery. The final section will demonstrate that, whether Addams intended to cause harm or not, her theorizing had some deleterious consequences. At last, I argue that her shortsighted use of colorblindness combined with her

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129 Marilyn Fischer, Introduction to *Jane Addams’s Evolutionary Theorizing*, unpublished manuscript. Used with permission from the author.
use of white supremacist social evolutionary theory necessarily has one result – the erasure of the immigrants’ racial identities and their one-way assimilation toward whiteness.

**Assimilation to Whiteness**

Along with the growth of critical whiteness studies literature, there has been a recent surge in critical whiteness critiques of the new immigrants’ change in racial identity over time, particularly regarding their “becoming white.” For example, Roediger argues that a combination of New Deal and Post-War policies, as well as increasingly negative attitudes among immigrants toward blacks, helped them eventually become accepted as white in the 1940s and 1950s. Likewise, in “How Jews Became White Folks,” Ignatiev contends that a combination of class mobility and changing views of “who counted” as white led to assimilation into middle-class whiteness. He writes, “Anti-Semitism and anti-European racism lost respectability” at the same time that postwar economic prosperity “expanded need for professional, technical, and managerial labor.”\(^{130}\) The new immigrants, suddenly accepted as white, were eager to fill these roles and gain access to the middle class. Both Ignatiev and Roediger argue that the new immigrants’ racial identity changed from non-white to white over the course of the twentieth century.

While this growing body of literature helps us understand what economic and political forces allowed for non-white European immigrants to gradually be accepted as white, it falls short in explaining what ideological changes to the concept of whiteness itself made this shift possible. In other words, *whiteness* and *white supremacy* as concepts need to be examined to determine what shifted to allow some groups entrance into “the white club” and not others. Analyzing Jane Addams and other public figures can help us do that because

public figures undoubtedly impact the meaning of dominant ideologies. Likewise, it is necessary to consider how the immigrants’ own perceptions changed. How did they see their own positionality within white supremacy change so that they, too, eventually saw themselves as “white” rather than as “Poles,” “Slavs,” “Russians,” “Jews,” “Italians,” or “Arabs?”

As with any textual analysis, attempting to decipher the author’s intentions can be at best illusive and at worst misleading. Regardless of Addams’s intentions, it is clear that her theoretical writings played a significant role in shaping the dominant society’s attitudes toward immigrants. The settlement house movement was a social and political force that helped create some of the nation’s first labor laws. Settlement houses were some of the most effective means of alleviating the effects of extreme poverty in industrial urban neighborhoods. They are also considered to be the origin of contemporary social work and social services in general. Settlement houses, including Hull-House, played an essential role in the nation’s progressive movement. Thus, the ideological paradigms that grounded their work had significant impact on the methods of progressive reform and the nation’s attitude toward the new immigrants in general.

Assessing the movement’s aims as exemplified at Hull-House, Lissak argues that Addams’s work embodied a one-way assimilationist model toward a unified Anglo-American identity, with the ultimate goal of erasing the ethnic identities of the newcomers. She writes, “The Hull House group became convinced that, although the tendencies towards ethnic segregation seemed stronger than the forces leading towards the unification of American society according to their idea of community, the unifying forces would in the long

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131 Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives.*
run predominate.”  

One can see evidence for Addams’s goal to assimilate the immigrants in her criticisms of their strong racial and ethnic affiliations. It is also evident in her disapproval of the immigrants’ tendency toward self-segregation. In “Objective Value,” she writes, “There are Bohemians, Italians, Poles, Russians, Greeks, and Arabs in Chicago vainly trying to adjust their peasant life to the life of a large city, and coming in contact with only the most ignorant Americans in that city.” The “problem” she identifies here is that the immigrants were living in ethnic enclaves and their exposure to Anglo-Americans was limited or nonexistent. Her solution was to bring Anglo culture to them. She explains, “Hull House was opened…in the belief that the mere foothold of a house…situated in the midst of the large foreign colonies which so easily isolate themselves in American cities, would be itself a serviceable thing for Chicago.”

Lissak’s argument is convincing and can be reinforced with the help of critical whiteness scholarship. According to Lissak, Addams and the women of Hull-House worked to impose their narrow idea of American culture on the immigrants. However, through Addams’s writing, we see that whiteness, as understood through the social evolutionary framework, was the ideal for which they worked. If Addams and the women of Hull-House worked to erase only non-whites’ racial identities while reinforcing the righteousness of whiteness, my necessary conclusion was that they worked to assimilate the immigrants toward whiteness itself.

Supporting this theory, Feagin argues that immigrants have endured assaults on their racial or ethnic identities through the entire course of U.S. history. He writes:

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[W]e can see that the one-way assimilation to an Anglo-Protestant core culture…has been both the norm and the reality for new immigrants. Immigrants have been cajoled or forced into modelling themselves and their children on the norms of this core culture, which modelling has included accepting the “places” reserved for those defined as “whites” (a favored place) and for those defined as “non-whites” (a subordinate place).\textsuperscript{135}

While Addams’s intention may not have been to “whiten” the immigrants, a close examination of her theorizing leads to this conclusion. As history now shows us, over the course of the twentieth century, the new immigrants who once resided in a racial limbo did indeed “become white.”\textsuperscript{136}

**Conclusion**

It is without doubt that Addams’s work played a pivotal role in the period’s progressive movement. She informed the era’s dominant ideologies with her theoretical writing, and her practical work at Hull-House directly impacted the lives of thousands of immigrants.

Addams illustrates that to attempt to undo injustice from a privileged position is immensely challenging. She, like many of her time, could not (or would not) escape the oppressive ideologies of her time. Her theorizing maintained whiteness as the racial ideal by utilizing the social evolutionary paradigm. Simultaneously, she praised colorblindness when applied to the “other.” Her theoretical framework then, undergirded the erasure of their various racial identities and their eventual acceptance into whiteness. As Roediger, Feagin, and others show, the new immigrants did undergo the social, political, and economic process of “becoming white” over the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{135} Feagin, “Old Poison, 352.”
\textsuperscript{136} Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness.*
Importantly, critical whiteness studies helps us escape the debate regarding *intention* and instead focus attention on *impact*. The next chapter will utilize a pragmatic approach to critique Jane Addams from a different perspective. It will attempt to elaborate on, but not directly respond to, the allegations made in this chapter.
CHAPTER IV
A PRAGMATIST ANALYSIS OF JANE ADDAMS’S HANDLING OF RACE

When Jane Addams co-founded Hull House in 1889, she did so in the midst of a social, political, and economic environment unlike any the United States had seen. Almost overnight, cities had changed from underdeveloped agricultural hubs to bustling centers of commerce and industry. Factories powered by machines and steam scattered the horizon and polluted the streets with smog and waste. Tenement buildings and slums overflowed with new immigrants who had arrived with hope and found mostly destitute poverty. The once hopeful vision of the American rural landscape as open and ready to be conquered quickly became abandoned as the United States was transformed into an industrial, urbanized system.

In response to the Industrial Revolution, the largely agrarian economy of the Western world had been overtaken by an industrial capitalist one, and the effects of this wide-sweeping change were apparent. Hull-House, a settlement house and social service hub for new immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, would serve as the primary site through which Addams would illuminate the deep social inequalities and suffering embedded in this new way of life. Some examples of these ill effects were widespread disease, entire days’ worth of factory work for poverty wages, and lack of education for immigrant children. Industrial capitalism, while producing more wealth than the world had ever seen, had created even vaster levels of inequality whose effects were felt most by the most subjugated Americans. In the case of Chicago, where Hull-House was founded, the new immigrants who manned the factories and occupied the overcrowded slums were Addams’s main concern.

While Addams worked to illuminate and mitigate the suffering endured by the new immigrants, her work was unique in that it established a philosophical grounding for applied
social ethics as well as worked to realize tangible improvements in the immigrants’ everyday lives. To Addams, her philosophical ideas were intrinsically linked to her work in actual life, thus her work may be analyzed for its philosophical underpinnings as well as its concrete effects. Her two most cited works, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, a memoir, and *Democracy and Social Ethics*, a philosophical text, provide deep insight into her life and work. Both will be consulted in this chapter as I attempt to illuminate Addams’s engagement with race, power and privilege as a late twentieth century woman with considerable socioeconomic and racial privilege.

The organization of this chapter will be as follows. First, I will show that the primary philosophical aim of Addams’s work was to encourage her educated and largely privileged readers to develop a sense of social morality. Second, I will demonstrate that Addams’s explicit and implicit commentary on race was quite advanced for her time, even while regretfully utilizing the social evolutionary paradigm. Finally, I will utilize various American pragmatism scholars to demonstrate that Addams’s approach to power differences due to race was much more complex than a “one-way assimilationist model” and instead heavily critiqued “top-down” theories for social change.

**Social Morality**

One of the primary purposes of Addams’s work was to encourage individuals in privileged positions to expand their sense of morality from an individual obligation to a social one. In the opening pages of *Democracy and Social Ethics*, she explains:

To attain personal morality in an age demanding social morality, to pride one’s self upon the results of personal effort when the time demands social adjustment is utterly to fail to apprehend the situation….All about us are men and women who have become unhappy in regard to their attitude toward the social order itself….They
desire both a clearer definition of the code of morality applied to present day demands and part in its fulfilment, both a creed and practice of social morality.\textsuperscript{137}

To Addams, an individual code of ethics was useful, but it had become incapable of addressing contemporary social problems. Morality up until then had largely depended on how one related to one’s immediate social environment—how one treats one’s family, one’s friends and one’s immediate neighbors. In large part, honoring the Ten Commandments of the Christian faith ensured fulfilling one’s individual moral obligations: thou shalt not steal, murder, abuse your neighbor; thou shalt honor one’s mother and father, thou shalt honor God, and so forth.

A social code of ethics represented a new host of demands, ones that required reflecting on one’s position in larger social systems such as political institutions and economic arrangements. As John Dewey explains in \textit{Ethics}, most moral theory up until then had treated the individual as independent of his environment, and moral theory that failed to incorporate the analysis of social institutions was becoming inept:

In fact, ever since the latter half the eighteenth century the interesting and stirring human problems for intellectual inquiry as well as for practical application have arisen out of criticism of existing social arrangements and traditions, in State, government, law, church, family, industry, business, international relations. So far as moral theories have kept aloof from perplexities about social policies in these fields, so far as they have merely repeated commonplaces about personal conduct in isolation from social issues, they have become anemic and sterile.\textsuperscript{138}

In this section, Dewey gives Addams credit for encouraging her readers to examine their place in larger social relations and seconds her insistence that a “shift” in moral theory is

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\textsuperscript{137} Addams, \textit{Democracy and Social Ethics}, 5-6.

\textsuperscript{138} Dewey, \textit{The Later Works: Volume 7}, 315-316.
\end{flushright}
necessary. He continues, “At the present time, almost all important ethical problems arise out of the conditions of associated life.”

One aspect of Addams’s philosophical writing that is vital to understanding her handling of race is this: her work was written to persuade an educated and economically advantaged audience rather than to reveal a set reality about social relations. In other words, her theorizing did not primarily intend to reveal truths about power, inequality or race; it intended to illuminate for those in privileged positions the value of caring about those in less advantaged positions. She begins to do this by noting the general malaise sweeping socioeconomic advantaged people:

All about us are men and women who have become unhappy in regard to their attitude toward the social order itself; toward the dreary round of uninteresting work, the pleasures narrowed down to those of appetite, the declining consciousness of brainpower, and the lack of mental food which characterizes the lot of the large proportion of their fellow-citizens.

Those with privilege, she writes, are bored and lack meaning without the tools to address the growing social problems that surround them. She provides an example of an upper-class girl in Twenty Years who laments, “You do not know what life means when all the difficulties are removed! I am simply smothered and sickened with advantages. It is like eating a sweet dessert the first thing in the morning.” Here, one sees that industrial capitalism had created such deep inequalities that the upper classes, while escaping the extreme suffering of poverty, were experiencing a misery of their own: excessive privilege, meaningless pleasures, and stifling ease.

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139 Ibid, 318.
140 Marilyn Fischer, Introduction to Jane Addams’s Evolutionary Theorizing, unpublished manuscript. Used with permission from the author.
141 Addams, Democracy and Social Ethics, 6.
142 Addams, Twenty Years, 47.
Moreover, Addams often spoke implicitly to the situations of young, upper-class women. While never explicitly designating certain experiences as female, the situations she describes were often exclusively faced by women. For example, Addams wrote at a time when large numbers of women were obtaining university educations, yet often returned from these experiences with the same filial expectations forced upon them by their families. On these women’s families, she writes:

It was easy to understand that they permitted and even promoted her going to college, travelling in Europe, or any other means of self-improvement, because these merely meant the development and cultivation of one of its own members. When, however, she responded to her impulse to fulfill the social or democratic claim, she violated every tradition.\(^{143}\)

Families resisted allowing their newly educated daughters to apply their skills to public life, but Addams urges that an adjustment in “personal and family claims” is necessary.\(^{144}\)

Families must recognize public work as legitimate for their daughters, or young, educated women will continue to be unfulfilled and their talents unutilized. She concludes:

This, then, was the difficulty, this sweet dessert in the morning and the assumption that the sheltered, educated girl has nothing to do with the bitter poverty and the social maladjustment which is all about her, and which, after all, cannot be concealed, for it breaks through poetry and literature in a burning tide which overwhelms her; it peers at her in the form of heavy-laden market women and underpaid street laborers, giving her a sense of a uselessness.\(^{145}\)

Another way Addams speaks to the situations of upper-class, educated individuals is her insistence on the application of theory into socially-ameliorative practice. She writes that, despite being bestowed with advantages, educated individuals--particularly young people--sorely feel the urge to implement their moral convictions in real life. She addresses the topic significantly in *Twenty Years*, insisting that educated people are “lumbering our minds with

\(^{143}\) Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 36.
\(^{144}\) Ibid, 37.
\(^{145}\) Addams, *Twenty Years*, 47.
literature that only served to cloud the really vital situation spread before our eyes.” She continues, “Our young people feel nervously the need of putting theory into action, and respond quickly to the Settlement form of activity.” To Addams, education brings enlightenment and refinement yet, particularly for young women, ideas without a practical outlet foster discontent. She further saw the social ailments of cities like Chicago, and the settlement houses intended to address them, as perfect outlets for these restless, educated, and well-intentioned individuals.

In sum, Addams’s *Democracy and Social Ethics* and *Twenty Years at Hull-House* argued for a shift from what she called “individual morality” to “social morality.” Further, it is evident from these examples that she believed that this shift was most necessary for individuals with significant socioeconomic privilege. Her descriptions of the troubles facing advantaged people may have attempted to be objective, but her prescriptions for an applied social ethics were surely intended to persuade and inspire privileged individuals to act. The following section will begin to show how her theoretical handling of race and class were guided by her desire to persuade advantaged individuals to use their privilege for good.

**Informed Sympathy and Self-Reflection**

Addams lived during a time of extreme xenophobia and racism, directed most harshly toward African Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans, but also toward the new immigrants arriving from Southern and Eastern Europe. These immigrants were seen not only as “off-white” or “between races” of white and black, they also served as popular scapegoats for any type of social unrest. Examples from both intellectual and popular culture

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146 Ibid, 45.
147 Ibid, 80.
demonstrate the deep fear and contempt felt by many Anglo-Americans for the new arrivals. Anglo Americans blamed the new immigrants for social disturbances ranging from unionizing to growing sympathy for socialism. They also viewed the immigrants as morally inferior and dirty, often dehumanizing them in popular culture and everyday life. Addams, then, faced a daunting challenge in attempting to convince white, economically-advantaged Americans to care about their situations.

In *Democracy and Social Ethics*, the chapter called “Charitable Relations” offers a prime example of the philosophical underpinnings of Addams’s approach to race. This chapter, the first in her book, is written primarily to young, female charity workers. She begins by noting that the very existence of charity is evidence of inequality and an underdeveloped democracy:

> Probably there is no relation in life which our democracy is changing more rapidly than the charitable relation—that relation which obtains between benefactor and beneficiary; at the same time there is no point of contact in our modern experience which reveals so clearly the lack of that equality which democracy implies. We have reached the moment when democracy has made such inroads upon this relationship, that the complacency of the old-fashioned charitable man is gone forever; while, at the same time, the very need and existence of charity, denies us the consolation and freedom which democracy will at last give.

Here, she notes that democratic institutions and values have created a situation in which all men are viewed as equal, at least in formal documents or political creed. This is an improvement from older arrangements, where the official arrangements of society gave some men more worth than others, such as societies with kings, queens, monarchs or overlords. However, this change in formal political institutions is not enough. The reality surrounding Addams in early twentieth century Chicago was one of deep social, political and economic

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149 Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 11.
inequality. Thus, while acknowledging that democracy has made inroads on old forms of inequality, she admits that charity is still needed to mitigate the harmful effects of poverty and transfer some wealth from “benefactor” to “beneficiary.”

By making this statement up front, Addams makes clear that her intention is not to further the inequalities that produce the need for charity, or even take pride in being a “benefactor” that gives to those in need. Instead, her aim is more oriented toward fulfilling the aims of democracy, in producing a situation in which some classes are not entirely dependent on other classes for their livelihood. This contests the claim made that Addams enjoyed being a “savior” and had no interest in thoroughly doing away with the structures that produced the need for charity in the first place.

As Addams continues, she begins her task for the chapter: to shed light on the unique perspectives and experiences of the new immigrants so as to transform the charity worker’s attitude toward them. Whereas typical charity workers would look down upon the new immigrants, Addams shows them that, like the charity workers, the immigrants are products of their environment. Only by coming to understand the immigrants’ attitudes and moral standards could the charity worker avoid negative emotions like disgust, resentment, or contempt as she attempts to alleviate the deleterious effects of poverty.

Addams begins by describing the immigrants’ “ethical standards” and how they differ from the charity worker’s. She writes:

Let us take a neighborhood of poor people, and test their ethical standards by those of the charity visitor, who comes with the best desire in the world to help them out of their distress. A most striking incongruity, at once apparent, is the difference between the emotional kindness with which relief is given by one poor neighbor to another poor neighbor, and the guarded care with which relief is given by a charity visitor to a
charity recipient. The neighborhood mind is at once confronted not only by the difference of method, but by an absolute clashing of two ethical standards.\textsuperscript{150}

Here, Addams explains that the immigrants’ attitudes toward each other are deeply emotional and unrestricted. They help each other unapologetically, easily making sacrifices so that their neighbors may have food, a place to sleep, or some help in caring for a sick family member. They maintain no self-consciousness or emotional guard when tending to their neighbors’ needs:

There is the greatest willingness to lend or borrow anything, and all the residents of the given tenement know the most intimate family affairs of all the others. The fact that the economic condition of all alike is on a most precarious level makes the ready outflow of sympathy and material assistance the most natural thing in the world. There are numberless instances of self-sacrifice quite unknown in the circles where greater economic advantages make that kind of intimate knowledge of one’s neighbors possible.\textsuperscript{151}

Here, Addams argues that the immigrants display unbounded sympathy toward each other, exercising little or no restraint in helping their neighbors. They freely relinquish their possessions and make sacrifices in order to help each other. Addams further explains that charity workers, and people from higher socioeconomic positions in general, are often unfamiliar with this mode of behavior. With their economic advantage often comes distance from one’s wider neighborhood, and that emotional reserve often leads to suspicion and confusion when engaging with the new immigrants. These two moral outlooks may clash because immigrants may not understand the somewhat restrained and systematic aid given by charity workers. Charity workers, likewise, may not understand the expectations of those they serve--that aid be traded freely among neighbors, without restraint and without judgement.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid, 13.  
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid, 14.
Addams provides another example of charity workers’ ignorance of the needs and experiences of immigrants. She notes that charity workers are keen to urge the immigrants to save money, a value common in higher socioeconomic circles. However, saving is viewed very differently by the immigrants. She explains that saving, “which seems quite commendable in a comfortable part of town, appears almost criminal in a poorer quarter where the next-door neighbor needs food, even if the children of the family do not.”\(^{152}\) To the immigrants, saving, while sometimes possible, is not viewed as a virtue. It is seen as a form of selfishness where extra money is horded rather than used to help other families in need.

Addams continues this discussion by introducing her reader to the concept of privilege. Without actually using the term “privilege,” Addams explains how different experiences, including unearned advantages, can make one ignorant to the experiences of others in less advantaged situations. Addams explains that, while charity workers of the past might have wholeheartedly believed that thrift, “industry,” and “self-denial in youth” would “result in comfortable possessions for old age,” this new class of charity workers maintain some reservations.\(^{153}\) They may start to question the validity of their own beliefs and the rightness of imposing their beliefs on others. Quoting the charity worker, she writes:

“The reason why must I talk always of getting work and saving money, the things I know nothing about? If it were anything else I had to urge, I could do it; anything like Latin prose, which I had worried through myself, it would not be so hard.” But she finds it difficult to connect the experiences of her youth with the experiences of the visited family.”\(^{154}\)

Here, Addams shows that the charity workers, often upper-class, white women, were preaching values that they themselves did not follow. As women, they often avoided paid

\(^{152}\) Ibid, 18.
\(^{153}\) Ibid, 18.
\(^{154}\) Ibid, 18.
labor and most likely escaped the worry of handling their families’ money. Thus, not only were their self-purported values unlikely to resonate with the immigrants, the charity workers themselves did not practice them. This made their suggestions to the immigrants not only ineffective, but slightly hypocritical and immoral. By explaining the immigrants’ differing values and experiences, Addams hoped to educate the charity workers and transform their work from ignorant, ineffective, “top-down” charity to informed, self-reflective, and collaborate social change.

Finally, it is important to note that Addams’s goal in this section was not just to inform the charity workers of the differences between their values and the immigrants’. Addams showed the charity workers the value to be found in the immigrants’ cultures and even attempted to persuade them to adopt some of their moral attitudes. One example of this is when Addams describes the situation of one immigrant family in which the husband has “become black-listed in a strike.”155 He has been out of work for so long that he “becomes less and less eager for it, and gets a 'job' less and less frequently.”156 The charity worker’s impulse is to look down on the man, but she pauses after becoming surprised by his wife’s attitude. His wife continues to work hard, providing a meager living for her family, and never expresses anger or resentment toward her husband. “Whatever may be in his wife’s, she does not show for an instant that she thinks he has grown lazy.”157 The charity worker begins to admire the steadfast devotion of this woman, and starts to critically reflect on her own immediate instinct to chastise the man.

156 Ibid.
157 Ibid.
This is just one example of Addams’s endorsement of immigrants’ behavior as more morally pure than the charity worker's. Her underlying theory is that the immigrants, while more “primitive” or emotionally free than the “cultivated,” upper-class women that serve, often have much to teach these women. Sullivan calls this a “reciprocal relationship,” where the immigrants and charity workers both have things to give and to receive.\textsuperscript{158} Addams takes pains to describe circumstances in which charity workers have as much to learn from the immigrants as the immigrants have to learn from them.

Addams is often critiqued for utilizing terms like “primitive” and “cultivated,” or, more broadly, utilizing the racist social evolutionary ideology to describe the relations between immigrants and white Americans. Yet, these critiques misinterpret Addams’s intentions. Addams, seeing a dire situation of poverty and want before her eyes, had no interest in theoretically challenging the dominant ideologies of her time--in this case, social evolutionary theory. Instead, she aimed to inform the direct, human-oriented work necessary to immediately alleviate pain and suffering. Admitting that a charitable relationship was necessarily undemocratic because it implied an unequal relationship between giver and receiver, she aimed to make this relationship more democratic rather than perfect. Her ideas were not revolutionary, they were evolutionary. As we will see in the following section, Addams critiques multiple social arenas in \textit{Democracy and Social Ethics} and is highly aware of the deeply unequal point from which she started.

\textbf{Collective Engagement and Addams’s Critiques of “Top-Down” Problem Solving}

Jane Addams is sometimes critiqued for attempting to be a “white savior,” or inflicting her own views and values on the non-white immigrants she worked with in order to

\textsuperscript{158} Sullivan, “Reciprocal Relations.”
“save them” from their situations. In reality, Addams’s writing and life’s work demonstrate a firm commitment to working in conjunction with immigrants and heavily critiques hierarchical approaches to problem solving. She looked down upon paternalism, particularly in the form that was common among liberal reformists of the early twentieth century.

In *Democracy and Social Ethics*, Addams provides an in-depth analysis of paternalistic relations between socioeconomic classes in her chapter “Industrial Amelioration.” She tells the story of George Pullman, the president of Pullman Company, and how his paternalistic relationship with his workers ultimately resulted in a series of strikes and a complete failure of well-intended action. Pullman, who wanted to do good for his largely immigrant workers, created a company town in which they could live, work, and play. The town included amenities such as a grocery stores, church, school, and recreational facilities. When, during a depression, the company was forced to cut wages in order to keep the town’s amenities open, a city-wide strike ensued. Pullman, who until then had thought that his workers appreciated the town he had provided for them, was shocked and did not understand why his workers would not make sacrifices to keep it open.

Addams explains that, while the president might have been well-intentioned, his project was destined to fail from the start. She notes that the factory workers, while submitting to undemocratic relations in their work lives, were less eager to submit to these relationships in their social lives. “Social life,” she writes, “in spite of class distinctions, is much freer than industrial life, and the men resented the extension of industrial control to domestic and social arrangements.” In other words, while they may have submitted to...

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159 See Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives.*
Pullman’s wishes at work, they resisted being controlled in more personal areas of their lives, such as where they lived or spent social time.

Further, Addams explains that Pullman’s town failed because he did not consult the wishes of the people he was attempting to serve:

The basic difficulty lay in the fact that an individual was directing the social affairs of many men without any consistent effort to find out their desires, and without any organization through which to give them social expression. The president of the company was, moreover, so confident of the righteousness of his aim that he had come to test the righteousness of the process by his own feelings and not by those of the men.  

Here, her critique is twofold. First, she explicitly critiques the Pullman’s actions because he neglected to consult the needs and desires of his workers. In a hierarchical or paternalistic approach to problem solving, Pullman decided on his own accord what his workers needed. He did not trust them, nor did he believe that they were capable of knowing what was in their best interest. Secondly, Addams critiques him for ignoring the reactions of his workers and only judging the merit of his project by his own feelings. The president was more concerned with his own desires and moral compass than his workers. When put to the social test, this attitude often fails.

In sum, Addams proposes that any project implemented with this attitude is doomed for failure:

It is so easy for the good and powerful to think that they can rise by following the dictates of conscience, by pursuing their own ideals, that they are prone to leave those ideals unconnected with the consent of their fellowmen. The president of the company thought out within his own mind a beautiful town. He had power with which to build this town, but he did not appeal to nor obtain the consent of the men who were living in it. The most unambitious reform, recognizing the necessity for this consent, makes for slow but sane and strenuous progress, while the most ambitious of social plans and experiments, ignoring this, is prone to failure.  

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161 Ibid.
162 Ibid, 68.
Here, Addams critiques any social project that does not consult the beneficiary or is guided by the limited experiences of those with more power. While Addams does not explicitly address racial inequality, this section can be used to interpret Addams’s approach to mitigating power differentials among many groups, including different racial groups. Through the “white savior” trope, whites are often accused of instituting projects that aim to do good for people rather than with them. Addams, rather than adopting this role herself, shows that an individual in a position of power cannot decide what is best for subjugated groups. Instead, they must listen, be humble, and trust those in subjugated groups to know what is best for themselves.

The final example of Addams critiquing hierarchical strategies for social change can be found in the chapter “Political Reform.” In this chapter, she evaluates the roles of the “bosses” and the “reformers” in eighteenth and nineteenth century city politics. Her indictment of the reformers and her conditional praise of the political bosses may catch readers by surprise. In this chapter, she argues that the reformers’ paternalistic attitudes were problematic, and the corrupt “bosses,” who maintained a more transactional relationship with the immigrants, served as a better model for social amelioration.

Hays explains that two political forces dominated in late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries cities: the machines and the reformers. The machines, led by party “bosses,” gained their power primarily by “their ability to manipulate the political process” and by “bribery and corruption.”¹⁶³ They often sought self-aggrandizement and personal power at the expense of the public, and they awarded political favors in return for constituent support. Reformers, on the other hand, sought to oust the machines and replace them with

“evidence-based” political practices that were “more moral, more rational, and more efficient.”\textsuperscript{164} They wanted political power to be won by merit. They were often businessmen and men of higher socioeconomic status and concerned themselves with reforming political institutions to reflect their ideal standard for democratic bureaucracy.

Addams provides an unconventional analysis of the role of machines and reformers in the Progressive Era. She argues that, while the bosses may have been corrupt, their close personal relationships with the immigrants and their willingness to give the immigrants exactly what they asked for (in return for political support) may have made them more democratic than the reformers. On the machines, she writes:

Men living near the masses of voters, and knowing them intimately, recognize this and act upon it; they minister directly to life and to social needs. They realize that the people as a whole are clamoring for social results, and they hold their power because they respond to that demand. They are corrupt and often do their work badly; but they at least avoid the mistake of a certain type of business man who are frightened by democracy, and have lost their faith in the people.\textsuperscript{165}

Here, Addams argues that, while the political bosses may be corrupt, they provide services to the immigrants based on real needs. Some examples of these services are that he “bails out his constituents when they are arrested” or he “says a good word to the police justice when they appear before him for trial.”\textsuperscript{166} Unconcerned with more complex or idealistic notions of governmental organization, immigrants appreciate and benefit directly from this aid.

On the other hand, the reformers’ ideas for political change are “set apart from daily life” and do not speak to the real needs of working people:

“[R]eform movements,” started by business men and the better element, are almost wholly occupied in the correction of political machinery and with a concern for the better method of administration, rather than with the ultimate purpose of securing the

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{165} Addams, \textit{Democracy and Social Ethics}, 99.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid, 102.
welfare of the people…. The reformers… give themselves largely to criticisms of the present state of affairs, to writing and talking of what the future must be and of certain results which should be attained. In trying to better matters, however, they have in mind only political achievements which they detach in a curious way from the rest of life.\textsuperscript{167}

In other words, the reformers’ intellectual, administrative approach to reform is hierarchical and undemocratic because it consults the “experts” over the voices of average, working people. The reformers err when they attempt to improve society by way of modifications to institutions without considering how these modifications affect the lives of actual people.

Addams’s critique of reformers and her surprising praise of machines may be interpreted as more generalized support for political bosses. This, however, was not her argument. Instead, she recognizes that political corruption is a problem, calling favors and kickbacks a “primitive” form of political organization. She instead argues for a nuanced method of reform that combines the machines’ collaborative, emotional engagement with the reformers’ plan to improve political procedures and institutions. She concludes:

For the painful condition of endeavoring to minister to genuine social needs, through the political machinery, and at the same time to remodel that machinery so that it shall be adequate to its new task, is to encounter the inevitable discomfort of a transition into a new type of democratic relation.\textsuperscript{168}

The task for those attempting to ameliorate social problems, then, was to do away with the paternalistic approach of the reformers and the political corruption of the machines. The best approach, she argued, would be to combine the machines’ raw social ethos with the reformists’ logical reforms to formal institutions. Here, again, Addams makes clear that top-down strategies for addressing social problems were as ineffective as blatantly corrupt ones.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid, 98-99.  
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid, 118.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that Addams’s theories regarding paternalism and social injustice were not undeveloped. In numerous instances, Addams argues for sympathetic understanding of the immigrants’ values and experiences. Likewise, her critiques of paternalistic relations in industry and political reform demonstrate advanced understanding of power and privilege. As she clearly articulates, Addams viewed poverty as the primary force oppressing the immigrants, not racism or xenophobia. A holistic look at Addams’s approach to social identity and difference shows that her omission of race was not nefarious; it was a strategic attempt to address what she viewed as the larger issues at hand: the limited moral scope of those with privilege, widespread economic inequality, and the dictatorial habits of those in power.

Unlike CWS, which puts racial inequality at the forefront of analysis, this chapter necessarily places economic injustice and poverty in the front seat. Addams did not explicitly address racism in *Democracy and Social Ethics* and *Twenty-Years*, but that does not mean that she was not cognizant of its deleterious effects. To understand how Addams handled her privileged positionality, it is important to consider how Addams interpreted problems of privilege and inequality across a multitude of institutional relationships.

In the following chapter, I will expand on my conclusions here and those that I made in Chapter 3. I will also extract what I believe to be the strongest insights from both a CWS and pragmatic analysis of Jane Addams. Finally, I will return to Rorty’s argument and contemporary political problems. Situating CWS within the larger body of CT and Addams/Dewey’s AP into the broader context of AP, I will work toward a theoretical model within ISJS that will make room for the insights of both hermeneutics.
CHAPTER V

ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES AND FINDING COMMON GROUND

From April 2016 to February 2017, thousands of people gathered near the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota to protest the construction of an oil pipeline that would run from Western North Dakota to Southern Illinois. The residents of the reservation and many others argued that the pipeline posed a threat to the reservation’s ancient burial grounds and its primary water source. While the protests were started by the American Indians residing at Standing Rock, solidarity demonstrations were organized all over the country. These demonstrations included other Indian Reservations throughout the United States, as well as groups of people with limited connection to American Indians. The Standing Rock camp itself grew quickly to thousands of protesters. American Indian tribes and people of all races flocked to help.

A few months into the protests, articles began circulating on social media and eventually the *The Independent* that charged white protesters, who had arrived in Standing Rock to help with the demonstrations, with “colonizing” the protest sites. One Native activist posted on Facebook that the white activists were acting in disrespectful ways with little to no respect for Native traditions or protocols:

White people are colonizing the camps. I mean that seriously. Plymouth rock seriously. They are coming in, taking food, clothing, etc. and occupying space without any desire to participate in camp maintenance and without respect to tribal protocols….These people are treating it like it is Burning Man or The Rainbow Gathering.\(^\text{169}\)

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The post continued by criticizing white protesters for playing guitars or drums by campfires without permission and for protesting only to gain a “cultural experience” to share on social media. The activist also mentioned that she had noticed some “good allies” while she was there, and said that one white girl who “jumped in front of a truck to stop it from running over one of our elders” would be “in [her] heart forever.”

Stories like this, unequal activist spaces where highly marginalized groups feel overwhelmed or victimized by the behaviors of groups with more power, are increasingly easy to find. The first inaugural Women’s March, following Donald Trump’s inauguration as President of the United States, drew up to a million people nationwide and is considered the largest single day protest in U.S. history. However, numerous activist groups led by women of color cited feeling left out of the organizing process or feeling conflicted over participating in the event. Other articles written by women of color argued that white women had not stood in solidarity with women of color in the past, so they would not return the favor. They also cited the statistic that 53% of white female voters voted for Trump as reason for not participating. One iconic picture from the march shows a black woman, with an exasperated look on her face, holding a sign that said, “Don’t Forget: White Women

170 Ibid.
174 Ibid.
Voted for Trump.” Behind her stand three young white women wearing “pussy hats” and looking down at their smart phones.175

In a similar manner, the Occupy Wall Street movement faced criticism from women who claimed that the activist spaces led overwhelmingly by men oppressed women’s voices and leadership. An organization called “Occupy Patriarchy” even formed in response which aimed at “confronting patriarchy” and insisting that “women’s needs be met in the context of Occupy.”176 Additionally, the Pulse Night Club shooting in 2016 was largely seen as an attack on people of color and LGBTQ individuals (Pulse was an LGBTQ night club and the shooting occurred on Latin night). However, following the events, activist and Ethical Humanist clergyman James Croft expressed frustration with his “activist frameworks.” Attempting to provide a “pastoral response” to all people affected by the tragedy, he felt at a loss for how to bring all the individuals, with all their various, intersecting identities, together to grieve. In a Facebook post, he lamented, “I genuinely don’t know how to balance the different requirements here. I don’t know how to uphold shared humanity, celebrate difference, recognize and respond to power differentials, and leave everybody feeling heard.”

The Occupy Movement, the Standing Rock protests, the Women’s March, and even the gatherings following the Pulse Night Club Shooting signify a challenge on the Left that has been inadequately addressed: the deeply embedded difficulty of forming political alliances across differences of identity and power. So far, the responses to the problem have been to encourage greater intersectionality, train activists on power and oppression, or, for

This chapter argues that the problem in all of these examples (and more) was not caused by activists alone. Leftist activists’ struggles to form effective political movements across difference is reflective of a larger problem at the very core of Leftist thought. It is a problem of *praxis* that was partially caused--and can be addressed with--interdisciplinary social justice scholarship (ISJS).

In order to demonstrate the connection between the theories constructed by interdisciplinary social justice scholars and the strategies utilized by Leftist activists, I will do the following. First, I will extract the strengths of both a critical whiteness and pragmatist analysis of Jane Addams. Then, I will demonstrate how these insights may be used to illuminate strengths and weaknesses of even larger theoretical frameworks: critical theory and American pragmatism. Finally, I will argue that ISJS that has over-utilized critical theory for political purposes is partially responsible for the problems we now see in Leftist praxis. A resurgence of American pragmatism in ISJS can help mitigate the consequences.

**Strengths of a Critical Whiteness Critique of Jane Addams**

Unlike many analyses of Jane Addams’s philosophical writings and work at Hull-House, critical whiteness studies places race and whiteness at the forefront of critique. While other analyses tend to focus on the identity and experiences of those *oppressed* by race, critical whiteness studies helps illuminate the behaviors, ideas and ideologies of those *elevated* by their racial identity. In Jane Addams’s case, one of those ideologies that needs examination is social evolutionary theory.

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As demonstrated in Chapter Three, Addams utilized social evolutionary theory, a hierarchical paradigm which places whites at the social and cultural pinnacle of civilization, to argue against the oppression of non-white peoples. Put simply, like most educated individuals during that time, Addams described the new immigrants of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century as “less developed” culturally and morally than their white counterparts. However, unlike the intellectuals who utilized the paradigm as reason to oppress the immigrants, Addams argued that their “more primitive” morals were actually to be understood and, at times, admired. Even though, as Fischer argues, Addams likely utilized social evolutionary theory in order to sway the opinions of educated Anglo-Saxons like herself, her use of it remains problematic. Critical whiteness studies helps us see that, while Addams was a “woman of her time,” if her goal was to be subversive, she could have followed the lead of activists and theorists of color who completely avoided the paradigm and even critiqued it.

Further, Addams’s refusal to follow the lead of intellectuals and activists of color, as exemplified in Wells’ retort to “Respect for Law,” shows that Addams failed to be an ally in the Freirean sense. Freire writes, “And those who recognize, or begin to recognize, themselves as oppressed must be among the developers of this pedagogy. No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed.” In other words, oppressed groups must be the authors and the leaders of their own liberation. If one wishes to become an ally and work for another group’s liberation, she must subvert her own wishes, beliefs and desires in order to follow the lead of the oppressed group. Addams, who frequently worked within the racially-dominant paradigms of her time (i.e., white, Anglo-Saxon), failed to to be

178 Fischer, “Addams, Race, and Social Evolutionary Theory.”
179 Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 35-36.
racially subversive in her work. This notion is supported by numerous Addams scholars who, while admiring her accomplishments, admit that she sometimes “unwittingly perpetuated…racist assumption[s].”\textsuperscript{180}

Critical whiteness studies also shows that Addams did little to subvert the oppressive institutions of white supremacy and capitalism as they related to the new immigrants. Rather, her theorizing and her work at Hull House, as argued in Chapter Three, helped to change the immigrants’ relative positions within those systems. In other words, the immigrants “became white” and, over time, were allowed entrance into the middle class. According to Roediger, race and class were intertwined in this process, as new immigrants were eventually able to become naturalized citizens, receive New Deal support (which often excluded blacks), own homes, and be included in housing covenants which barred blacks from certain neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{181} As Freire argues: “It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors….If the goal of the oppressed is to become fully human, they will not achieve their goal by merely reversing the terms of the contradiction, by simply changing poles.”\textsuperscript{182} Helping the new immigrants become white and middle class only worked to change the new immigrants’ position within white supremacy and capitalism, placing them racially above blacks and other non-whites and, for the first time, virtually on-par with Anglo-Saxon whites.

A critical whiteness studies critique of Jane Addams, paradoxically, has the power to instill hope and empower both whites and people of color. First, a critical whiteness critique shows people of color how they have been abused by even well-meaning whites. Most

\textsuperscript{180} Hamington, “Public Pragmatism,” 173
\textsuperscript{181} Roediger, \textit{Wages of Whiteness}, 158.
\textsuperscript{182} Freire, \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed}, 38.
Addams scholars, with a few exceptions, agree that Addams’s intentions were noble and that she genuinely sought to help the new immigrants. However, intent is not the focus of critical whiteness studies--impact is. Addams, meaning to or not, at times utilized racist paradigms and modes of thinking either to persuade others or to guide her practice. These racist paradigms have serious impact, particularly on people of color.

Further, critical whiteness critiques can help people of color unlearn the oppression they have internalized within a white supremacist polity. Describing this phenomenon, Freire writes, “Self-deprecation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything…that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness.”

Learning how powerful people and institutions have perpetuated negative images of oneself and others in one’s identity group can be empowering for people of color and other oppressed groups. Addams may have used social evolutionary theory to be persuasive to a white, Anglo-Saxon audience, but it is important to remember that the paradigm she used causes real harm to real individuals; her “strategic” use of it does not negate its effect. In other words, terms like “primitive,” “under-developed,” and “uncivilized,” may have been utilized strategically by Addams, but they were nevertheless harmful to those groups she described.

Finally, a critical whiteness critique can help instill hope in whites who want to engage in anti-racist activism. For some whites, learning about racism and white supremacy can be shame-ridden and paralyzing. For others, learning to critique the flawed and deleterious actions of whites who came before them can foster a spirit of hope and a

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183 Ibid, 45.
commitment to change. It can be easy to write off a critical whiteness critique of Jane
Addams, citing that she was simply a “woman of her time” or that her intentions were noble,
so her racist undertones were, at worst, regrettable. It is more difficult to examine Addams’s
work for its limitations and mistakes to learn from them. Critical whiteness studies gives
these whites the theoretical tools with which to start this process.

**Strengths of a Pragmatist Critique of Jane Addams**

As demonstrated in Chapter Four, a pragmatist analysis sheds much needed light on
Addams’s praxis. It shows that Addams’s theoretical approach to race, privilege, and power
was nuanced. Her theorizing was more complex, and had more complicated goals, than the
immigrants’ assimilation to whiteness.

Firstly, while critical whiteness studies critiques Addams for not being subversive
enough, pragmatism helps us see that Addams goal was not to be subversive at all. Her goal
was, instead, to work for incremental amelioration of the sociopolitical systems in which she
found herself. In developing the pragmatist conception of truth, James explains that working
within dominant or socially-accepted paradigms is necessary to developing new ideas. On the
process of a new idea becoming truth, James writes:

> This new idea is then adopted as the true one. It preserves the older stock of truths
> with a minimum of modification, stretching them just enough to make them admit the
> novelty, but conceiving that in ways as familiar as the case leaves possible…The
> most violent revolutions in an individual’s beliefs leave most of his older order
> standing….New truth is always a go-between, a smoother-over of transitions. It
> marries old opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of
> continuity.¹⁸⁴

According to James, an idea does not become “true,” in the sense that it becomes
incorporated into an individual or group’s stock of beliefs, unless it has its roots in that

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¹⁸⁴ James, *Pragmatism*, 27.
individual or group’s current beliefs. In other words, one cannot throw a “Z” belief into a pile of “X”s without a few “Y’s” to go along with it—to transition between the old and the new.

James’s pragmatic conception of truth helps illuminate Addams’s theory and practice in a new light. Her approach to communicating her ideas with that audience was pragmatic, not subversive. She utilized social evolutionary theory as one of her paradigms because her audience, by and large, accepted social evolutionary theory as true. Rather than insisting her readers throw away their previous stock of beliefs to adopt an entirely new one, Addams allowed them to retain many of their already held beliefs. Likewise, rather than outwardly questioning the notion that the new immigrants were “primitive” or “less civilized,” she accepted that paradigm as the theoretical and social reality in which she worked. Upon accepting this theory, she began questioning bits of it, poking holes in vulnerable places, asking her readers to consider—if the immigrants are culturally different, is that necessarily a bad thing? To the twenty-first century reader, this strategy may seem harsh. But for Addams’s significantly privileged social world, suggesting that the immigrants’ culture had any value at all may have seemed radical.

Another valuable theoretical underpinning of Addams’s praxis is the notion of solidarity. Rorty defines solidarity as expanding one’s moral universe to include people who look different, speak different, or act different from oneself. It is

the ability to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation – the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of “us.”

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185 Fischer, “Addams, Race, and Social Evolutionary Theory.”
186 Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, 192.
Addams urged her readers to consider the value of the new immigrants’ cultures, customs, and behaviors. She asked her readers to look past their racial, cultural and other prejudices in order to care about—and work to improve—the suffering of new immigrants and other subjugated people. In Twenty Years, she writes that the Settlement House must “be grounded in a philosophy whose foundation is on the solidarity of the human race.”

This solidarity must have its roots in sympathetic understanding, or a concerted effort to learn about the experiences of those who are different from oneself.

Importantly, Addams’s willingness to work within the sociopolitical or ideological paradigms of her own time, as well as her commitment to human solidarity, produces a praxis of social democracy that can unite people across difference and produce practical change in laws, policies, and institutions.

First, Addams’s commitment to working within the context of dominant ideological paradigms provides a more accessible way for individuals with privilege to, as Rorty says, “lend a hand.” By utilizing the social evolutionary paradigm, Addams allows privileged individuals to make slight and gradual changes in their judgements. This, as James explains, is more mentally and emotionally straightforward than insisting that individuals throw away their beliefs completely. It is also a strategy that is more likely to “work” because individuals are unlikely to accept ideas that require a complete subversion of their previous beliefs.

Furthermore, Rorty argues that social progress requires privileged individuals to actively engage in the process. He writes that, while much of the struggle, suffering, and sacrifice is felt by the least advantaged, aid from those with privilege is indispensable:

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187 Addams, Twenty Years, 85.
188 Hamilton, Social Philosophy.
189 Rorty, Achieving Our Country, 54.
190 James, Pragmatism.
Although these two kinds of initiatives reinforced each other, the people at the bottom took the risks, suffered the beatings, made all the big sacrifices, and were sometimes murdered. But their heroism might have been fruitless if leisured, educated, relatively risk-free people had not joined the struggle. Those beaten to death by the goon squads and the lynch mobs might have died in vain if the safe and secure had not lent a hand.  

Thus, Addams’s praxis for social change ensures that privileged individuals are welcomed and not turned away due to an inability (or at times, unwillingness) to completely change their worldview to suit those they are serving.

Second, Addams’s praxis produces change in laws, policies and institutions by placing social democracy as the sociopolitical ideal. Current arrangements, she argues, may be formally democratic, but they do not work toward the well-being of all people or to ensure that “every human being, independent of the quantity or range of his personal endowment, has the right to equal opportunity with every other person for development of whatever gifts he has.” In order to adjust institutions to reflect this ideal, Addams served as the Vice President of the National Women’s Suffrage Association and the Chicago Board of Education, formed the National Women’s Peace Party, co-founded the American Civil Liberties Union, and publicly supported unions, collective bargaining, and the Pullman strike. By insisting on democracy as a social, political, and moral model, Addams was able to work toward adjusting the policies and laws embedded in the institutions that already existed, such as corporations, representative government, schools, and even more “private” institutions like the family and charity. Addams worked to expand democracy to include more people and chip away at its harmful aspects. This potentially made her work more successful then if she had advocated throwing away these institutions altogether.

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Thirdly, Addams’s pragmatic praxis provides an example for how philosophy, and intellectuals in general, can engage in public discourse. On the role of philosophy in public problems, Dewey writes:

[T]he task of future philosophy is to clarify men’s ideas as to the social and moral strifes of their own day. Its aim is to become so far as is humanly possible an organ for dealing with these conflicts…enlightening the moral forces which move mankind and in contributing to the aspirations of men to attain to a more ordered and intelligent happiness.\(^{193}\)

To Dewey, philosophy should abandon its habit of describing moral problems in absolutes, or categorizing complex social problems into larger, theoretically dense but practically empty concepts such as “Ultimate” or “Absolute Reality.” It should, instead, decipher the moral aspects of “specific” and “concrete” situations.\(^{194}\) Addams does this effectively in Democracy and Social Ethics, where each chapter corresponds to a social institution that she believes should be adjusted to fulfill the social democratic ideal. In chapters like “Filial Relations” and “Educational Methods,” Addams describes the moral situation, paying particular attention to its social and historical context. Then, as Dewey advises, she discusses particular moral issues relevant to the family or to education, rather than providing a treatise on “education” or “the family” itself. Here, we see that Addams carefully engages the moral challenges of her time, including those related to race, gender, class, and power. She does this, however, with a clear commitment to suggesting minor, incremental changes rather than sweeping, revolutionary ones.

**Implications for Interdisciplinary Social Justice Scholarship**

By now, it might be clear that critical whiteness studies tends to shed an almost exclusively negative light on Addams, while a pragmatist analysis sheds an almost entirely


\(^{194}\) Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*. 

positive light on her. This begs the question: how do you combine a critical, negative, and subversive methodology with an equally positive, moderate, and evolutionary approach? In other words, how do you shine the light on Addams that she deserves without ignoring the darker parts of her work?

The remaining sections of this chapter will show that, in an interdisciplinary social justice context, critical whiteness studies and pragmatism may be used concurrently, but for distinctly different purposes. Setting boundaries for where critical or pragmatic approaches may be used is not to draw a hard and impenetrable line; it is to ensure that both hermeneutics can contribute to interdisciplinary analyses. In order to demonstrate in which arena each hermeneutic is suited, they will be placed into the context of their larger bodies of literature: critical theory and American pragmatism, broadly construed. I will then argue that CT is best suited for cultural critique and AP is best suited for political praxis.

**Defining Interdisciplinary Social Justice Scholarship**

Interdisciplinary Social Justice Scholarship (ISJS) has two components: an interdisciplinary method and a social justice orientation. Interdisciplinarity emerged as a response to the disciplinization of knowledge that accorded between 1870 and 1910, in which “higher education was reorganized around twenty to twenty-five disciplines, each with its own department, major, and set of courses.”195 “Studies” departments also surfaced that were concerned with geographical regions (e.g., European Studies), historical eras (e.g., postcolonial studies), or cultural groups (e.g., African American or women’s studies). “Studies” programs are necessarily interdisciplinary because the term studies denotes a “perceived misfit among need, experience, information, and the prevailing structure of

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195 Klein, *Humanities, Culture, and Interdisciplinarity*, 12.
knowledge embodied in disciplinary organization.”196 They “represent fundamental challenges to the existing structure of knowledge” by placing a subject at the center of inquiry and the disciplines as tools that can be integrated in various ways.197 Put simply, interdisciplinary scholarship is scholarship that integrates “information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge.”198

Social justice scholarship is typically interdisciplinary, but it does not have to be. Rather than defining itself by its method, as in interdisciplinary scholarship, social justice scholarship defines itself primarily by its values:

The social justice sensibility does not even pretend to be objective, neutral, or dispassionate, even though these are among the most important virtues identified by the dominant discourse in research methodology texts. Rather, social justice research makes an explicit “preferential option” for those who are disadvantaged by prevalent social structures or extraordinary social acts; it emerges from and channels the emotions of the researcher.199

Social justice research, then, is value-driven, often with the explicit purpose of serving the needs of disadvantaged groups such as women, people of color, LGBTQ folk, poor or working class people, and others. It challenges the notion that research can be objective or neutral and instead encourages scholars to engage with their own positionalities, intentions, and emotions. To social justice scholars, knowledge should not simply describe the world; it should be “put to work” to improve it. Put together, interdisciplinary social justice scholarship is academic work that uses an interdisciplinary method--pulling on two or more

196 Repko, Interdisciplinary Research, 9.
197 Ibid.
198 Ibid, 14.
199 Swartz, In Defense of Partisan Scholarship, 2.
disciplines or schools of thought—to solve problems that impact vulnerable individuals and groups in the actual world. It is both a method and an ethos.

Interdisciplinary social justice scholarship is central to the practical relevance of this thesis. First, even in ISJS settings, it can be extremely difficult to utilize some hermeneutics with others to produce the theoretical integration that interdisciplinary scholarship requires. It can be helpful to ISJS scholars to explore the theoretical foundations, assumptions, and epistemologies of various hermeneutics to see where they might struggle to integrating them. Second, ISJS scholars, flawed and human like everyone else, can at times become attached to one hermeneutic or discipline at the expense of others. Doing so may cause them to sacrifice quality and utility for theoretical purity. Third, if ISJS scholars do not carefully discern the strengths, weaknesses, or the appropriate application of different disciplines or hermeneutics, they may sacrifice producing the most innovative solutions to humanity’s problems. Hermeneutics, and the disciplines that encapsulate them, should be tools, not rules to follow or ideals to uphold.

In the following section, I will place critical whiteness studies and pragmatism into the larger context of critical theory (CT) and American pragmatism (AP), broadly construed. I will demonstrate the weaknesses of CT’s political praxis and and the political utility of American pragmatism.

**Critical Theory and American Pragmatism**

Placing critical whiteness studies and Addams’s pragmatism into the larger bodies of critical theory and American pragmatism can help us determine how these two hermeneutics can best be utilized in ISJS. Both CT and AP are oriented toward social justice, with theorists encouraging scholarship that furthers progressive causes and speaking to the experiences of
the marginalized. They are also interdisciplinary, in that they encourage working across
disciplines and incorporate various methods and ways of knowing under their larger
theoretical umbrellas.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines critical theory as scholarship that
“provides the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing
domination and increasing freedom in all their forms.”200 While critical theory “in a narrow
sense” typically refers to the “several generations of German philosophers and social
theorists in the Western European Marxist tradition known as the Frankfurt School,” a
critical theory in general refers to one that seeks “human ‘emancipation from slavery,’ acts as
a ‘liberating … influence,’ and works ‘to create a world which satisfies the needs and
powers’ of human beings.”201 Critical theory typically crosses disciplines, analyzing
“psychological,” “cultural,” “social,” and “institutional forms of domination.”202 Any theory
with similar goals can be understood as “critical.” For the purposes of this thesis, I will pay
particular attention to those critical theories that focus on social identity, such as race,
gender, sexuality, or ethnicity, and the power and oppression that stems from them. These
bodies of literature include women’s studies or feminist theory, critical race and whiteness
theory, queer theory, and other ethnicity or area studies focused on race, ethnicity, and
power.

American Pragmatism, on the other hand, is a philosophical tradition, with many
attributing its foundations to Ralph Waldo Emerson. Charles Peirce is considered the
“founder” of AP, and he was followed by such thinkers as William James, John Dewey, Jane

Addams, and Richard Rorty. More recently, scholars have expanded AP to include the contributions of women and people of color, including African-American pragmatism and Native American pragmatism. In a broad sense, this thesis defines American pragmatism as the philosophical writings of these or other thinkers that serve three primary goals: first, to move away from correspondence theories of truth that attempt to capture the world as it “really” is; second, to stress the practical value of knowledge and one’s moral responsibility to directly engage theory with socially-ameliorative practice; and third, to deflate the ontological difference between truth and value. In respect to the last goal, many pragmatists adhere to some form of James’s assertion that what is true is what is “good for us to believe,” or at least that what is true is what proves to be useful or beneficial in experience. The pragmatism of Addams and Dewey is explicitly political, with Addams and Dewey having engaged in the Progressive Movement of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Their pragmatism, taken together, is oriented toward progressive action, rooted in sympathetic experience, and engaged in establishing a social democracy.

**CT and AP’s Approach to Politics**

One of the most significant distinctions between CT and AP is their approach to politics. On the one hand, CT typically states a clear political aim to its theorizing. Critical whiteness studies, for example, states clearly that it is “as much political project as critical paradigm.” Likewise, a famous idea that came out of second wave feminism is that the “personal is political.” Hanisch argued that women’s issues were “political problems” that should be addressed with “collective action” for a “collective solution.” This thinking has sustained relevance in contemporary women’s studies literature. In sum, Swartz argues that

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204 Man Ling Lee, “Rethinking the Personal and the Political,” 163.
the notion of praxis is fundamental to all critical scholarship, and critical scholars “make explicit the social and politically overt aims of their work.”

Further, CT tends to heavily critique complex notions of power that are intrinsically tied with identity. Power, in its many forms, is central to critical theory. Foucault describes power as an omnipotent and insidious force, influencing our behavior from all directions:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.

Here, Foucault challenges the limited notion of power as imposed from above upon those below. Power, in the Foucauldian sense, is everywhere, intertwined in everyone and everything, encouraging us in positive ways (e.g., social pressure to have manners or finish one’s homework) and negative ways (e.g., repressing one’s sexuality or acting out of fear of punishment).

Likewise, CT specializes in what Rorty calls “‘the politics of difference or ‘of identity’ or ‘of recognition.’…[it] thinks more about stigma than about money, more about deep and hidden psychosexual motivations than about shallow and evident greed.” CT, as expressed through women’s studies, ethnicity/race/area studies, or sexuality studies, insists that recognizing difference is essential to relieving oppression or stigma. Rather than ignoring difference, as some social justice theories suggest, CT insists that we recognize it so that we may undo the harm caused by identity-based oppression. CT also proposes that powerful groups impose suffering on less powerful groups due to deeply emotional reasons.

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205 Swartz et. al., Creative Democracy, 63.
207 Rorty, Achieving Our Country, 77.
One critical whiteness article, for example, argues that that relationship between whites and non-whites is sadomasochistic and that the oppression of people of color arises out of a “psychosocial condition.” The “sadist and the masochist do not learn how to love on equal human terms” in “hierarchical systems of oppression,” so they must “learn to love differently.” Here, we see that concepts such as emotional feelings of love, sadistic tendencies, and psychosocial oppression are all utilized to produce a theoretical explanation for racism.

Another element of CT’s approach to politics is the blurring of the line between private and public, and culture and politics. Audre Lorde, for example, famously declared, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” Here, she suggests that black feminism consider private actions, such as caring for one’s mental health, family, or body, as political acts. Likewise, in critical whiteness studies, Matias argues that individuals’ private emotions be incorporated into our understanding of white supremacy. She writes:

If race is a social construction, as most believe, then there must also be an emotional dimension that binds those who become racialized as white to one another….The social and political construction of white emotionality is just as real, complex, and problematic as are social constructions of patriarchal masculinity.

Matias suggests that, much like patriarchy is sustained by harmful, dominant notions of masculinity that often show themselves through men’s emotions (e.g. anger, violence, aggression), whites maintain their power through emotions like pity, guilt, and fear.

Lastly, guided by an explicitly political praxis, CT often advocates completely overthrowing “the system” to reassign power to those that are oppressed in that system.

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209 Ibid.
210 Ibid, 286.
Marxist praxis is one example of overthrowing “the system,” where the system is capitalism and a communist revolution is the praxis. However, there are many other examples of this praxis in various schools of CT. For example, in *Ecocritique*, a book written to critique modern ecological movements, Luke argues that, in order to save the planet from precarious overconsumption and environmental destruction, a “new modernism” is required:

[M]odernity is not a unilinear and irreversible course from primitive community to complex society…it is both the result and the practice of continuously making critical choices under certain economic, ideological, and organizational constraints set by the use of power and knowledge in a context where elements of the past, present, and future mutually co-exist. It does not need to be the way that it has come to be…There are many alternative modernities that can be created.211

Here, Luke concludes his book with a suggestion that a new modernity, with completely different economic, ideological and institutional bases than the world currently has, is what will save the Earth from its own destruction. A “new modernity” must destroy and replace the old.

Another example of a political praxis of “overthrowing the system” can be found in critical whiteness studies. In critical whiteness studies, white supremacy is the sociopolitical system that needs to be overthrown, and the “abolition of whiteness” is the strategy. Ansley defines white supremacy as

a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.212

White supremacy, then, is a hegemonic system that permeates all institutions in a society, connecting whites and nonwhites through Foucauldian webs of power. Critical whiteness

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studies claims to work toward “the abolition of whiteness” by forcing “whites to confront issues of race” and making “white dominance problematic.” Even those critical whiteness scholars who do not identify as “abolitionists” assert that they are working toward mass subversion of power and the destruction of white supremacy.

This tendency to advocate political or ideological revolution represents what Swartz et al. call “foundationalist critical theory.” This type of CT “assumes it is possible to discover authentic descriptions of social reality that are free from ideology, descriptions that can be found through social scientific methods and the use of reason.” The “true” descriptions offered by CT scholars can help free individuals from their “false” consciousness and the harm that comes from existing in an oppressive order. Foundationalist critical theories are often accompanied by a “tragic frame,” which “represents a lack of hope in a redemption of the ‘enemy,’ and approaches social change as only being able to occur through a ‘death.’” This systemic “killing” of the enemy, whether it be capitalism, modernity, patriarchy, or white supremacy, however, comes with a risk. Foucault warns, the “claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall program of another society, of another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions.” Critical theories such as those discussed here, with the political praxis of overthrowing “the system” to replace it with a new one, are, according to Swartz, Bruke, and Foucault, at risk of instituting a new order which is also oppressive, though perhaps in different ways.

214 Swartz et. al., Creative Democracy, 66.
215 Ibid.
216 Cited by Swartz et. al., Creative Democracy, 66.
217 Cited in Swartz et. al., Creative Democracy, 67.
Rorty, on the other hand, suggests that CT’s political praxis has a paralyzing effect. It tends to create political “spectators” rather than “agents.”218 In other words, CT leads to educated individuals who have strong political feelings, but who engage very little in national politics. It does this for three reasons. First, revolution requires substantial physical risk. Second, practical suggestions for revolution in CT often sound poetic, but are fairly meaningless in practice. And third, advocating revolution without a detailed suggestion for a political alternative is paralyzing.

First, political rhetoric, that is “revolutionary rather than reformist and pragmatic” (such as found in CT) creates political spectators because revolution requires substantial physical risk.219 Convincing anyone to put their lives on the line for a political cause is difficult, and CT’s revolutionary rhetoric is no different. For instance, in pushing for revolutionary action against white supremacy, Ignatiev and Garvey praise the militia movement on the Right, arguing that the Left should follow suit. Upon viewing a flier criticizing the Far-Right militia movement, they write, “The flyer advises us, ‘The key to protecting the rights and civil liberties of all Americans does not lie in forming armed paramilitary groups who want to take the law into their own hands.’ We can think of no better way.”220 The remainder of the chapter, titled “Aux Armes! Formez les Batallions!” (“To Your Arms! Form the Batallions!”) argues that armed insurrection that aims to disrupt the “law-and-order stance of the anti-racists” is a surefire strategy for overturning white supremacy. They literally advise their readers to grab weapons and fight. While some readers

218 Rorty, Achieving Our Country.
219 Rorty, Achieving Our Country, 103.
220 Ignatiev and Garvey, Race Traitor, 94.
may feel comfortable forming an armed paramilitary group upon reading Ignatiev and Garvey, it is fair to assume that not all feel so empowered.

Second, CT tends to create political observers because its suggestions for instigating political revolution sound poetic but are extremely vague in practice. Some notable examples from critical whiteness studies are the frequent suggestions to “kill the white, save the human,” “abolish the white race,” or “love whiteness to death.” Critical whiteness studies’ goal of overturning white supremacy can be achieved, these scholars argue, by ideologically “killing the whiteness” in individuals or teaching whites to love in a liberating manner. They argue that such actions form the recipe for political revolution.

Rorty argues that these strategies are too vague and abstract to serve as effective political praxis:

The contemporary academic Left seems to think that the higher your level of abstraction, the more subversive of the established order you can be. The more sweeping and novel your conceptual apparatus, the more radical your critique... But it is almost impossible to clamber back down from their books to a level of abstraction on which one might discuss the merits of a law, a treaty, a candidate, or a political strategy.

In other words, reading about “loving whiteness to death” may fill students or scholars with hopeful feelings, but when forced to consider how to put this into practice, many are left stumped. Ignatiev and Garvey offer some suggestions on how to subvert whiteness, but they are often limited to small, albeit habitual actions, such as mouthing off to a police officer or taking an unpopular stance on a cultural issue. While these actions may be subversive, they do not constitute political revolution.

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221 Matias and Allen, “Loving Whiteness to Death”; Ignatie and Garvey, Race Traitor.
222 Rorty, Achieving Our Country, 93.
223 Ignatiev and Garvey, Race Traitor.
Finally, CT’s revolutionary rhetoric tends to paralyze would-be political agents because it often suggests overthrowing a system without offering alternative solutions. Critical whiteness studies, again, offers an exceptional example of this tendency. Ignatiev and Garvey argue that, to overturn white supremacy, one must consider that virtually every dominant institution is racist and must be overturned, even those institutions that call themselves “anti-racist.” Indeed, progressive reforms to these institutions are not enough:

Just as the capitalist system is not a capitalist plot, race is not the work of racists. On the contrary, it is reproduced by the principle institutions of society, among which are the schools (which define “excellence”), the labor market (which defines “employment”), the law (which defines “crime”), the welfare system (which defines “poverty”), and the family (which defines “kinship”)—and it is reinforced by various reform programs which address many of the social problems traditionally of concern to the ‘left’.  

Many CT scholars may read this statement and agree that yes, every institution in our society maintains racial inequity because we live in a white supremacist polity. But the problem as it relates to political praxis is not its correctness; rather, it is its practical use in politics. An effective political praxis for overturning literally every single institution in a society is undoubtedly hard to come by. Further, without alternative suggestions for how schools, families, governments, and other institutions might be formed, critiques such as these can leave readers with an enlightened sense of hopelessness.

Rorty argues that CT scholars think that “the system, and not just the laws, must be changed.” The larger system, maintained by harmful ideology, is the problem, not its individual components that may be adjusted to meet better ends. The problem with this strategy, Rorty continues, is that it lacks clear, specific, concrete suggestions for change. Revolution, often described in completely metaphoric terms, is offered as the only means for

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political action. This, again, produces political spectators that are newly enlightened with society’s insidious problems, yet helplessly devoid of concrete political strategies to address them.

Unlike critical theory, American pragmatism’s praxis tends to produce political agents, not political spectators. This is because AP does not advocate completely overthrowing systems, but working with them to make them more democratic. This means that activists, students, and scholars following AP praxis know exactly what tools are at their disposal to affect political change--the policies within the institutions that already exist.

Dewey argues extensively for philosophical engagement in policy, stating that the way to adjust the negative social impact of complex systems is to make small, incremental changes to those systems. Dewey writes:

When social life is in a state of flux, moral issues cease to gather exclusively about personal conformity and deviation. They centre in the value of social arrangements, of laws, of inherited traditions that have crystallized into institutions, in changes that are desireable.

Institutions, then, and the laws, policies and traditions that undergird them, become the arenas for progressive social change. The key, Dewey argues, is not to supplant or overthrow them completely, but to seek specific changes to improve them. To Dewey, “Action is always specific, concrete, individualized, unique. And consequently judgements as to acts to be performed must be similarly specific.”

Addams likewise demonstrates the power of working for gradual changes to institutions in order to improve human conditions. For instance, she advocated extensively for more democratic labor relations within an industrial capitalist system, and she helped

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achieve the first child labor laws in the country. She also explicitly endorsed unions and workers’ active engagement in the management of firms. As previously noted, *Democracy and Social Ethics* is full of Addams’s suggestions for minor adjustments to formal institutions, including the suggestion that city reformers engage directly with the city’s poor so that they know which policies sound good in theory but “fail to meet real human needs in practice.”

Another reason AP produces effective political practice is that it is typically non-violent and non-confrontational. It often requires much less physical risk to work within existing systems to make incremental change than to form armed militias or organize political revolutions. Addams was also firmly against antagonism, arguing that hostility or opposition between groups is “not only useless and harmful, but entirely unnecessary.” It is reasonable to deduce that non-violent and non-confrontational praxis may empower more individuals to act, as they are not required to put their physical safety on the line.

Finally, AP offers effective political praxis because it declares unabashed support of democracy. Instead of suggesting an overthrow of the current political order, Addams and Dewey propose a refined definition of democracy that includes social justice at its core. This helps scholars and activists move away from sweeping critiques of “the system” and toward specific, concrete suggestions for the system already in place. It also maintains the value of a representative democracy and does not advocate a revolution without a detailed suggestion for an alternative.

Culture: Theory :: Politics: Policy

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229 Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 23.
While CT and AP both claim political aims, it is important to be clear about what we mean by politics and whether CT is really having an affect on politics or whether it is better suited to something else. CT often utilizes the term “political” loosely, referring to almost any concept or idea that is related to power or status. Unlike CT, I define politics as “the formal use of legal or governing institutions to enact laws and policies that affect individuals or groups.” This definition is necessarily more specific than “politics” or “the political” are sometimes defined.

Importantly, CT scholarship has had a major impact on our world. As Rorty argues, its work to dismantle oppression by studying power and identity “has made America a far more civilized society than it was thirty years ago.” 231 He continues, “the change in the way we treat one another has been enormous.” 232 Further, the rightful indignation that students and activists felt in the 1960s was warranted, and if “civil disobedience had never replaced an insistence on working within the system, America might no longer be a constitutional democracy.” 233 Despite this progress, however, within the past few decades, something equally as harmful as racism, sexism, and homophobia has been on the rise. While scholars, students, and activists have been focusing on identity, economic inequality has increased:

During the same period in which socially accepted sadism has steadily diminished, economic inequality and economic insecurity have steadily increase. It is as if the American Left could not handle more than one initiative at a time—as if it either had to ignore stigma in order to concentrated on money, or vice versa. 234

In other words, ISJS scholars have been so exclusively utilizing CT, that pragmatic approaches to social justice, particularly those concerned with poverty and economic

231 Rorty, Achieving Our Country, 81.
232 Ibid.
233 Ibid, 69.
234 Ibid, 83
inequality, have been pushed aside. Theories highlighting identity and difference have
dominated the analysis of social problems, so analyses addressing economic inequity and
poverty have become less common. It is not that CT has caused harm; rather, its dominance
in ISJS has pushed equally-useful pragmatism to the wayside.

CT’s political praxis may be weak, but that does not mean that CT is not useful. That
is because CT is best suited for cultural critique, not political praxis. I define culture as “the
complex ways that individuals see and interact with themselves and their social
environments.” It is the home of Foucauldian webs of power, complex emotions, and private,
individual actions. It is also where changes in our beliefs, attitudes, and habits make the most
difference.

Foucauldian notions of power are especially useful for understanding how, on a day-
to-day basis, humans oppress and are oppressed by others. It shows how intersectional
identities allow one to be both the oppressed and the oppressor. It demonstrates how
language is encoded with power, how our most private institutions such as family, friends,
and intimate partnerships function within and maintain hierarchical ideologies. It shows how
raising girls differently from boys might affect their choices later in life, why a white woman
reaching for a black woman’s hair without asking may be perceived as oppressive, and why
humans view natural resources as ours for the taking. It explains how we assign meaning to
arbitrary differences like skin color, national origin, or sexual chromosomes and then choose
loyalty to others based on those arbitrary differences. It does all of these things and more. It
does not, however, help us form effective political movements.

CT is poor political praxis because differences do not bring people together, sameness
does. Likewise, successful political movements rely on a strong narrative of the collective
weak versus the strong. Rorty writes, “In its Foucauldian usage, the term ‘power’ denotes an agency which has left an indelible strain on every word in our language and on every institution in our society.” In this understanding of power, it is nearly impossible to motivate large groups of individuals to come together to protest the actions of a powerful minority. In other words, “speaking truth to power” becomes meaningless when “power” is something that exists within all of us and each of us is capable (and guilty) of oppressing others. When viewed through a CT lens, various attempts at political unity seem futile or even harmful. The Standing Rock protests were sites of further “colonization” by white activists over Native activists; the Women’s March was an oppressive space where white women shut out women of color; and Occupy Wall Street was a patriarchal space that silenced the voices of women.

American pragmatism shows us that political movements formed around social identity are weak from the start, particularly if they fail to propose concrete policy changes to existing political institutions. That is because policy is the primary method for political change, not theory. Contemporary progressive movements have begun to demand concrete policy changes, but they will continue to be overshadowed by cultural discrepancies unless CT detaches itself from political praxis and focuses its attention on culture. Black Lives Matter released a list of policy demands that include reparations and investment in black communities; the Women’s March also released a document called “Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles” which includes specific policy proposals. This is a start, but a revitalized Left needs “a concrete political platform, a People’s Charter, a list of specific reforms.” In order to get there, sameness must be championed over difference, economic

235 Ibid, 94.
236 Ibid, 99.
injustice should again be considered worthy of ISJS’s time, and democratic political institutions must be acknowledged as the best option we have. *Policy* should be the primary method for achieving political change; *theory* should be the primary method for achieving cultural change. Critical theory should divert its attention to culture, and American pragmatism should take the reins on politics.

These distinctions are not meant to be ontologically pure. On the contrary, the distinctions between culture and politics--and theory and policy--are meant to help ISJS scholars analyze contemporary and past sociopolitical activity in a way that does not result in political impotence. By making these distinctions, I assert that methods matter, and the methods that we use influence behavior outside of the academy whether we describe them as “publicly engaged” or not. Politics, in the way that I have defined it here, remains immensely important within the context of the United States. This country maintains the foundations of a liberal democracy, and in order to create the *social democracy* that Addams and Dewey prescribe, we must begin by proposing tangible adjustments to the policies within our most salient institutions.
Addams’s world was wrought with racism, xenophobia, and extreme wealth inequality. Anglo-Saxon whites, feeling threatened by the influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, produced popular cultural products that denigrated the immigrants’ cultures and blamed them for everything from Communism to the spread of disease. These newcomers, who were eager for work in the newly bustling cities, had complexions that were a bit darker than their Anglo counterparts and were easily distinguished from their African American, Asian American, and American Indian counterparts. They brought their cultures, languages, and “foreign” customs to the new land, and they poured into factory lines, performing dangerous, arduous work for miniscule pay.

In *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Dewey describes the vast changes brought about by industrial capitalism, the United States’ economic system at the time. People no longer lived agrarian lives, isolated in large part from any greater social or moral obligation outside of their immediate kin. Instead, industrial capitalism connected people like never before. They were brought together physically, in crowded cities and factories. And they were brought together morally, now connected through complex economic arrangements that spanned cities, counties, states, and even countries. He, like Addams, challenged the idea that one could live a moral life by only responding to the needs of those with whom one is most immediately and intimately connected. To Dewey, the “scientific revolution,” “industrial revolution,” and the democratic “political revolution” seemed to produce as many moral problems as they solved.237

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The similarities between Addams and Dewey’s world and our situation in 2018 is uncanny. Replace nineteenth century industrial capitalism with contemporary global capitalism, and many of the same social and moral problems remain. In the United States, we have seen a resurgence of xenophobia and nationalism accompanied with a “fear” or extreme hatred of immigrants with slightly darker skin. These twenty-first century immigrants, mostly from Latin America and the Middle East, are blamed for problems ranging from gang violence and drug abuse to white poverty and unemployment. A globalized labor force means that the United States’ once heyday as an industrial powerhouse is over, and physical labor is outsourced to developing countries with looser regulations and lower or nonexistent minimum wage laws. Entire areas of the United States like the “Rust Belt” earn new names for their deteriorating factories and decaying buildings. Once thriving cities like St. Louis, Detroit, and Cleveland struggle to produce wealth as other cities thrive for their technology and communication output. We are seeing a contemporary “return to the city” in those places that have been able to adjust to the demands of an information and finance economy. As more people flock to these thriving cities, inequality and segregation deepen and rural areas empty.

Today, as in Addams’s time, racial and economic issues are inextricably intertwined. Vast economic inequality is rampant at the same time that outright racism and xenophobia become more mainstream. A literal wall to keep out immigrants has been proposed by the President of the United States, Mexican and Muslim immigrants are the scapegoat du jour, and the livelihoods of other populations of color such as African Americans and American Indians remain precarious. Now, more than ever, it is important to evaluate the social,

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239 Ibid.
economic, and political conditions of the industrial era, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of progressive attempts to improve it. By doing so, we can intelligently inform contemporary progressive action in yet another era of vast social, political, and economic change. One critique that is most useful for doing this is Rorty’s analysis of the post-Civil Rights Left.

In Achieving Our Country, Rorty argues that the American Left is bifurcated into a “Cultural Left” and what remains of the old “Reformist Left.” He argues that cultural issues have supplanted economic issues, replacing “real politics” with “cultural politics.” This is a problem, he writes, because those suffering from economic exploitation have few places to turn, particularly because intellectuals have largely abandoned their commitment to economic justice. Likewise, in intellectual and Leftist spaces, “white male” is often used to represent a range of devilish qualities. When a white male experiences, or feels that he has experienced, exploitation, those leaders who do tend to his feelings can be perilous. On the American Left, Rorty writes:

One symptom of this inability to do two things at once is that it has been left to scurrilous demagogues like Patrick Buchanan to take advantage of the widening gap between rich and poor. While the Left’s back was turned, the bourgeoisification of the white proletariat which began in World War II and continued up through the Vietnam War has been halted, and the process has gone into reverse. America is now proletarianizing its bourgeoisie, and this process is likely to culminate in a bottom-up populist revolt.

What Rorty calls the “bourgeoisification of the white proletariat” is substantiated by significant historical evidence. The New Deal and the economic growth that powered World War II and reached into the 1950s and 1960s extended the bounds of the middle class, allowing many, including the new immigrants that Addams served, to join its ranks. Whites

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\(^{241}\) Ibid, 83.
received more benefits than non-whites, and the 1950s saw the greatest expansion of the middle class in the United States’ history. White men in particular, already experiencing a disproportionate share of social and political power, gained economic power. Think *Leave It to Beaver* or *Father Knows Best*. A stable, middle-class life in an affordable home, one male breadwinner, and children who had the support to succeed was the quintessential American Dream. For many, this dream was a reality. In the 1950s, one income was enough to support a family, and homeownership was attainable and widespread compared to previous decades. This American Dream was obviously discriminatory along lines of race and class and excluded the majority of women and people of color. Yet, for those whites and some non-whites who secured a stable, middle-class life, this era was a golden age of dignity and expanded economic opportunity.

From the 1970s onward, however, the middle class began to shrink, and what Rorty calls the “proletarianizing of the bourgeoisie” began to occur. Calling this group the “New Poor,” Smith writes, “They have become what might be called ‘middle-class drop-outs,’ middle-class Americans sliding downscale, people slipping backward late in life, which is the exact opposite of the American Dream.” Due to globalization, outsourcing of labor, and automation, mass layoffs sent many who enjoyed a stable, middle-class life into crushing poverty later in life. Mimicking larger trends, Smith writes that “the living standards of middle-class Americans have fallen behind a dozen countries in Europe. Americans worked longer hours, often for lower pay and benefits, and made up the difference with the highest ratio of two-income households of any advanced economy.” Baby boomers have been

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242 Smith, *Who Stole the American Dream?*
243 Ibid, 69.
244 Ibid, 73.
“especially hard hit. By late 2011, 4.3 million of them, roughly one in six Americans age fifty-five to sixty-four, were unable to find full-time work.”\textsuperscript{245} What is more, the American millennial generation is the first generation to have less wealth than their parents and expect less growth in wealth over their lifespan.\textsuperscript{246}

We see here then, that the 1950s were more than just a national shame of rampant sexism and racial segregation. It was also an economic golden age of widening prosperity for many--particularly, the white middle class. While it was exclusive to many and fueled by environmentally precarious consumerism, the security, dignity, and stability at its core are values that progressives should work to preserve. Thus, when Trump supporters--particularly those from the Rust Belt who have felt the effects of globalization the hardest--shout “Make America Great Again!” we must consider that there are two realities to which they refer. They refer to the racist, sexist, consumeristic culture of the 1950s, but also to the economic security that promised them a life free of poverty and stress. It is easy to ignore this and angrily declare Trump supporters racist or sexist--or worse, dismiss their pain because so many of them are white men. It is more difficult to consider the paradoxical nature of our current social and economic polity--acknowledging that one can be both socially privileged and economically disenfranchised.

Interdisciplinary social justice scholarship can add nuance to the stories we tell about the rise of Trump. In particular, utilizing critical theory, we can unpack the intersections of race, class and gender when analyzing the rise of Trumpism. We can see how whiteness supplies whites with “psychological wages” that make their whiteness difficult to relinquish, or how internalized patriarchy and racism may have led so many white women to vote for

\textsuperscript{245} Ibid, 70.
\textsuperscript{246} Ibid, 80.
These analyses are helpful and important. Yet, they cannot be all we do. We must shed light on the current Left’s most precarious blind spot: economic injustice. We need to also, always remember our common humanity—that there is more that connects us than divides us, and that our democracy is a precious possession that should not be overthrown with either Right-wing populism or Left-wing delirium. To do all of this effectively, we must incorporate American pragmatism into the progressive intellectual’s lexicon. And we must integrate pragmatism into ISJS’s reserve of hermeneutics so that progressive political praxis has the intellectual guidance it deserves.

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247 Allen, “What About Poor White People?”
Bibliography


