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PRAGMATIC PLURALISM,
MULTICULTURALISM, AND THE NEW HISPANIC

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Now that cultural differences have come under suspicion with ethnic profiling, now that a postracial and postethnic American identity is often invoked, now that the process of globalization is countered with the affirmation of national identities and indigenous races and ethnicities, now more than ever, a pragmatic reconstruction of the place of ethnic diversity and multiculturalism in our lives is needed. Drawing on American and Latin American philosophers such as John Dewey, Alain Locke, and José Martí, my essay will articulate a *thoroughgoing pluralistic* view of ethnic identity in general and of Hispanic identity in particular. I will argue that the best way of elucidating ethnic experiences and identities without relying on essentialist assumptions is offered by a *radical pluralism* that we can find in the pragmatist tradition. This radical pluralism understands ethnic identity as intrinsically heterogeneous, that is, as necessarily containing inner diversity. In this pluralistic view, the unity of ethnic groups is conceived as “a unity through diversity” (Locke’s phrase),

and ethnic solidarity is genealogically explained as being made out of differences (not in spite of them, sacrificing them, or erasing them). I will examine the critical power of this pluralistic view and how it can help us solve the problems that multicultural societies face today. In particular, I will focus on a central challenge that cultural diversity raises in the post-colonial and globalized world of the twenty-first century, namely: how to recognize and respect cultural differences without exoticism or commoditization, that is, without contributing to their marginalization or subjecting them to the homogenizing forces of a global market.

Dewey, Locke, and Martí are of one mind in arguing that ethnic and racial groups must acquire their own voices, exercise critical control over the products of their own agency, and enjoy the freedom and necessary resources for self-expression and cultural self-affirmation. The pragmatist view of diversity they propose offers an account of how the critical reconstruction of collective experience can lead to the empowerment of ethnic and racial groups, and of how it can promote and facilitate the open dialogue and mutual understanding between cultures and races. The empowerment of the diverse ethnic and racial groups that compose a multicultural society and the genuine and continuing dialogue between them are the preconditions for justice and equality and for the flourishing of all the members of such a society.

The pluralistic model of diversity that I derive from the pragmatist tradition suggests that the development and expression of the identity of ethnic and racial groups involves a *double dialogue*: an *intracultural dialogue* of all voices within the group in question; and an *intercultural dialogue* between groups in which they articulate their identity vis-à-vis each other. In the first place, the pluralistic articulation of a cultural identity requires an *intracultural* dialogue of an open plurality of voices (as many as possible). Through this dialogue the members of a culture can produce a multivocal articulation of their multiple problems, needs, values, ideals, and illusions. But this dialogue needs to be supplemented with another one that goes beyond the members of the group. For indeed, no group—no matter how

powerful or hegemonic—can fully comprehend the problems it faces and fully determine its own future independently of other groups. So an *intercultural* dialogue between the cultural group in question and other groups with which its existence is entangled is also necessary. I will argue that we need to keep cultural dialogues as open as possible, without constraining and disciplining their constitutive diversity, that is, the plurality and heterogeneity of their voices. In other words, we need to keep our dialogues *polyphonic*. We have to be prepared to fight *homogenizing* tendencies that erase differences as well as *normalizing* tendencies that make certain articulations of identity mainstream and relegate other identity formations to the margins.

Radical Pragmatism and the Critical Reconstruction of Collective Experience

Dewey argues that, to be effective, philosophical criticism must “make our desires, our strivings and our ideals . . . articulate” and provide the “experiential knowledge” required “to bring them about” (1988, 312). Dewey describes this critical articulation of ideals and reconstruction of experience as an “inquiry into conditions and consequences” (ibid.). This inquiry is both *backward- and forward-looking*: It involves the critical examination of the conditions of experience, which includes an inspection of its history, of what led up to it; but it also involves an exploration of the potentialities of experience, that is, a critical investigation of the future, of the different possibilities that are open (or can be opened) in one’s experience. So the reconstruction of experience involves a two-fold task: the *genealogical* task of mastering the determinations of the past as they affect or condition one’s present; and the *projective* task of opening up possibilities and exploring one’s future. It is important to note that both of these reconstructive tasks are highly creative: they involve creative processes of seeing connections and possibilities in one’s experience.¹ It is also important to keep in mind the engaged and interested nature of these tasks: it is the function of orienting action that structures all our reconstructive efforts. These reconstructive efforts, whether gene-

alogical or projective, are supposed to provide direction and guidance for one's agency and their value lies in their experiential consequences.

When critical reconstruction is applied to the collective experiences of racial and ethnic groups, it involves an assessment of their present situation through a critical examination and evaluation of their history and their future. But the point of directing our reconstructive efforts toward the collective experiences of groups may not be immediately obvious. What are the benefits of exploring a common past and a common future through philosophical criticism? There are two main benefits that the critical reconstruction of collective experience has to offer to racial and ethnic groups. In the first place, this reconstruction can facilitate the group's *self-understanding*. Through a genealogical reconstruction of their past and a projective exploration of their future, the members of a group can construct their own *self-image*. But the attainment of self-understanding and the construction of a self-image are not ends in themselves; they are required for *self-mastery*, that is, for taking control of one's agency. I will use the rubric of *self-empowerment* to refer to this constellation of benefits (the production of self-understanding and self-mastery) facilitated by the reconstruction of collective experience.

In the second place, a genealogical and projective reconstruction is not simply valuable for the members of a group in isolation from other groups; it helps to clarify and improve interrelations among groups and, therefore, it can promote and facilitate their mutual understanding and communication. The crucial significance of these benefits cannot be overemphasized, for the betterment of the common life of different racial and ethnic groups is of paramount importance in today's globalized world. I will refer to this constellation of benefits as the facilitation of *intercultural understanding and communication*. Both constellations of benefits that the critical reconstruction of collective experience can afford are discussed in Alain Locke's introduction to *The New Negro*,² which appeared in 1925 (the same year as Dewey's *Experience and Nature*). There Locke argued that American Negroes had reached a crucial point in their development

as a group, namely, a point where their self-empowerment becomes possible and their relations with other groups can be improved.

As the opening remarks of *The New Negro* make clear, the self-empowerment of a group requires self-understanding, that is, that the members of the group be able to grasp their own determinations and potentialities. In this sense, the reconstruction of collective experience can be thought of as a response to the philosophical demand for self-knowledge, as answering a social version of "Know Thyself" as "Know Thy Community." Just as the individual must know herself in order to acquire self-mastery, the members of a group must also know the determinations and potentialities of their common experience so that they can take control of their destiny. Both for the individual and for the group, the acquisition of self-mastery calls for a constant effort toward self-transformation and self-knowledge. It is important to note that the self-knowledge that is required for self-mastery cannot be attained by means of a passive cognition, by simply inspecting what is already there. It requires creativity and agency. It involves making and seeing connections in one's actions and in one's life. It is a kind of knowledge that cannot be assimilated to the conception of knowledge as a mirror that merely reflects what is already there. This Deweyan approach to self-knowledge is clearly present in Locke's description of self-knowledge as a *task* and a *challenge* for the New Negro. According to Locke, the Negro's self-image should not be taken as a given; it is not simply what the members of the group happen to think of themselves, for this unreconstructed self-understanding is bound to include the internalization of images that others cast on them and it is likely to be uncritically informed by clichés, stereotypes, and prejudices. What Locke calls the "Old Negro" is precisely the composite sketch formed by those images projected onto the Negro by those outside his group. This imposed self-image (often presented as the true identity of the Negro) should be resisted and unmasked as a fiction: "The Old Negro has long become more of a myth than a man"; "a creature of moral debate and historical controversy"; "a stock figure perpetuated as a historical fiction";

“more of a formula than a human being”; “a social bogey or a social burden” (1925, 3).

Locke’s distinction between the Old Negro and the New Negro is a distinction between a self-image imposed from the outside and a self-image that results from the agency of the members of the group themselves. In this way Locke draws a sharp contrast between an *unreconstructed* and a *reconstructed* self-image. The Old Negro has no agency; he is a disempowered (and disempowering) fictional figure. Locke describes him as someone *talked about* who has no voice of his own (“a something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be ‘kept down’, or ‘in his place’, or ‘helped up’, to be worried with or worried over, harassed or patronized”; 1925, 3). To overcome this imposed self-image, Negroes face the task of finding a voice of their own. The fulfillment of this task requires changes in the material conditions of life as well as changes in the group’s self-expression. Locke argues that crucial material changes of American society (industrialization, mass migration, and class diversification) have made possible a radical transformation of the collective identity of the Negro. He describes the “metamorphosis” from the Old Negro to the New Negro as follows: “By shedding the old chrysalis of the Negro problem we are achieving something like a *spiritual emancipation*. Until recently, *lacking self-understanding*, we have been almost as much a *problem to ourselves* as we still are to others. But the decade that found us with a problem has left us with a *task*” (1925, 4; my emphasis). This “spiritual emancipation” consists in becoming a subject and taking control of one’s agency by breaking free from the “inner grip of prejudice” and acquiring self-knowledge. The self-knowledge and spiritual emancipation of a group require more than simply compiling ready-made images; they require that the members of the group have experience in common and own this experience by becoming conscious and critical of it. As Locke puts it: “Hitherto American Negroes have been a race *more in name than in fact*, or to be exact, *more in sentiment than in experience*. The chief bond between them has been that of a common condition rather than a *common consciousness*; a problem in common rather than a *life in common*. In Harlem, Negro

life is seizing upon its first chances for group expression and self-determination. It is—or promises to be—a *race capital*” (1925, 7; my emphasis).

In Locke’s view, group unity and solidarity are achieved through common experience and the critical reconstruction of this experience. Herein lies the special significance of Harlem, which Locke considers to be the cradle of the New Negro. In the first place, in Harlem Negroes find a cultural space where they can share experiences and pursue common ideals: they find “a common area of contact and interaction”; “their greatest experience has been finding one another” in this common space (1925, 6–7). Locke emphasizes that the cultural richness of Harlem resides in its diversity. Harlem is not a monolithic space, but an effervescent arena of interaction of different cultural forces. This suggests that a group’s need for common and unified experience does not require the suppression or erasure of the inner diversity of the group; and that, therefore, the task of finding a distinctive voice for the group should be understood as the task of engaging in a vibrant dialogue of congruous and complementary voices. This pluralist insight is elaborated in Locke’s idea of “unity through diversity” (see his essay under that title in Harris 1991, 133–38).³ In the second place, the self-empowerment of a group requires not simply having experiences in common, but also and more important, owning these common experiences, that is, appropriating them in a self-conscious and critical way. Locke contends that the critical articulation of the collective experience of Negroes is the duty of “an enlightened minority”: the artists and intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance. What makes these “enlightened minds” special is that they have been able to overcome prejudice and have taken a leadership role in the self-expression of the group. This intellectual elite constitutes “the advance-guard of the African peoples” and has “the mission of rehabilitating the race in world esteem” (1925, 14).⁴ The artists and intellectuals of Harlem make a special contribution to the “spiritual Coming of Age” of the Negro race by giving expression to “the growing group consciousness of the dark-peoples” and by “gradually learning their common interests” (1925, 14 and 16). Locke

describes Harlem as one of "those nascent centers of folk-expression and self-determination which are playing a creative part in the world today"; in his view, "Harlem has the same role to play for the New Negro as Dublin has had for the New Ireland or Prague for the New Czechoslovakia" (1925, 7).

Locke recognizes that the life and experience of the Harlem Negro is indeed very peculiar, since it takes place in one of the largest and most cosmopolitan metropolises of one of the most industrialized nations. How can the Negro life of Harlem be representative for all American Negroes (urban and rural, rich and poor, Northerner and Southerner), let alone for all African peoples around the globe? Locke answers: "Harlem, I grant you, isn't typical—but it is significant, it is prophetic" (1925, 7). Harlem Negroes can play the role of leaders of the race because they have become self-conscious of their experience and they have begun to take control of their agency. In my interpretation of Locke's view, what makes Harlem's cultural life special ("significant" and "prophetic") is that it can offer *exemplars of reconstructed experience*. These exemplars can be appropriated in different ways by peoples of African descent in the light of their specific contexts and histories. This critical appropriation of experience requires the genealogical and projective reconstruction discussed above. Locke only makes a few remarks about genealogical reconstruction in his references to history and tradition. But he is much more explicit about the projective side of the reconstruction of the Negro experience. He repeatedly emphasizes the need of "clarifying . . . our common vision of the social tasks ahead" so that "public opinion cannot continue to paternalize" the Negro, and he can move "forward under the control largely of his own objectives" (1925, 10). It is the duty of Harlem artists and intellectuals such as Locke himself to give explicit articulation to these objectives.

In his discussion of the New Negro's objectives Locke distinguishes between "those of his outer life" (that is, his life in common with members of other groups) and "those of his inner life" (that is, his life as a member of the group). The Negro's objectives in his "outer life" are "none other than the ideals of American institutions and de-

mocracy" (1925, 10). But although these ideals are the same as those of other Americans, the Negro's experience enriches them and contributes to a "new social understanding" and a "new democracy." On the other hand, Locke remarks, the objectives of the Negro's "inner life" are "yet in the process of formation" because so far the efforts have been directed toward a negative task, namely: the "attempt to repair a damaged group psychology and reshape a warped social perspective" (1925, 10). But Locke emphasizes that the New Negro is finally rising "from social disillusionment to race pride, from the sense of social debt to the responsibilities of social contribution" and his new "creed" is "the belief in the efficacy of collective support, in race cooperation" (1925, 11). This recently gained self-respect has been achieved by the New Negro by taking pride in "his artistic endowments and cultural contributions, past and prospective" (1925, 15). In this process of emancipation and self-empowerment Negroes have thus focused on the cultural objectives of self-expression and self-determination: "Whatever the general effect, the present generation will have added the motives of self-expression and spiritual development to the old and still unfinished task of making material headway and progress" (1925, 15–16).

What we have seen so far should be sufficient (I hope) to establish that Locke's account of the self-empowerment of the New Negro exhibits the essential features of the Deweyan model of reconstruction of collective experience. But does this account cast a favorable light on the Deweyan model? Locke's account is certainly rich and inspiring, but it is also pregnant with problems. I will briefly discuss what I consider to be the two central problems for Locke's account. In addressing these problems, I hope to show that the account does exemplify the virtues of the Deweyan model of reconstruction and can be used as a paradigm for the self-empowerment of other racial and ethnic groups.

Problems and Advantages of the Reconstructive Model

The first problem that arises for the reconstructive model of collective identity I have articulated through Locke is that it seems to be open

to the charge of *elitism*. I grant that occasionally Locke does seem to put too much faith in elites: for instance, with his claim that “the carefully maintained contacts of the enlightened minorities of . . . race groups” is “the only safeguard for mass relations” (1925, 9)—as if such contacts could not hide the segregation of the masses. I don’t want to dispute the elitist flavor of Locke’s discussion. But I do want to make clear that Locke’s view of leadership, at its core, is not elitist. When Locke prepared the *New Negro* for publication he still supported Du Bois’ notion of the *Talented Tenth*, but as his social views became more radical, his thought grew out of this notion. In the *New Negro*, under the influence of Du Bois’ humanist view,⁵ he thought of leaders as *organic intellectuals*, that is, as community representatives and activists who can regenerate the life of the group. These leaders are not different and apart from ordinary men and women; they are themselves part of the mass, and they don’t have a static position or a fixed relation to the rest of the group. Far from forgetting the masses, Locke talks about the common man frequently and assigns a crucial role to ordinary people in the transformation of the race. According to Locke’s account, the conditions for the possibility of self-empowerment become available to the Negro race precisely because “a transformed and transforming psychology permeates the masses” (1925, 7). The ultimate criterion of success for this process of self-transformation is the self-empowerment of all the members of the racial group (and not just of a particular portion of it). But although the transformation of the masses is the condition for the possibility and for the success of the empowerment of the entire race, one can still object that the process of transformation itself is elitist if the masses are treated as the passive material of the process of change, which is itself controlled by an intelligentsia or “a thinking few.”⁶ But nothing could be more antithetical to Locke’s view than the idea that common men and women form a passive and uncritical mass that can only be led: “In a real sense it is the rank and file who are leading, and the leaders who are following” (1925, 7). In Locke’s view, leaders follow the path already traveled by ordinary men and women; their role is to facilitate their journey; and, therefore, they should be as

vigilant to the behavior of the masses as the masses should be critical of the behavior of their leaders.⁷ So, for Locke, ordinary men and women are not just indispensable components in the self-transformation of the race; they are actually the real agents of that transformation. As he puts it, “it is the ‘man farthest down’ who is most active in getting up”; and, therefore, it is a mistake to think that leaders are simply “reading into the stirrings of a sleeping giant the dreams of an agitator”; it is “the migrating peasant” who is in control of the process of change (1925, 7).

The issue of leadership is indeed a vexed question for any philosophy of race and ethnicity. Many questions concerning the role and status that leaders should have in racial and ethnic groups (as representatives, as educators, as role models, as intellectual guides who shape the opinion and sensibility of the group, and so on) still remain unanswered. There is no room here for a discussion of these questions, but I hope to have shown that there is nothing in Locke’s view that is intrinsically elitist and that precludes a democratic and egalitarian answer to these questions.

The second problem that arises for Locke’s view concerns the notion of a *cultural capital*, on which Locke’s account of the New Negro’s self-empowerment rests. This notion has come under attack in the recent literature on race and ethnicity, which has accumulated different versions of the objection that the idea of a cultural capital as the possession of a racial or ethnic group is intrinsically exclusionary and oppressive. This objection arises for any account of race or ethnicity that appeals to a common cultural heritage of the group. In fact, some have argued that the very notions of “race” and “ethnicity” are intrinsically exclusionary and oppressive because their use preserves social injustices that are inscribed in them, rigidly separates individuals into groups, and implicitly legitimates the differential access to cultural and material resources. This is the view defended by David Hollinger in *Postethnic America*.⁸ According to Hollinger’s postethnic perspective, cultural objects, ideals, and institutions belong to mankind and not to any group in particular, and to claim otherwise is inherently oppressive because it tacitly justifies certain

exclusions, that is, it justifies that certain groups be prevented from enjoying cultural products and resources. Let me briefly discuss this critique of the notion of cultural capital in order to elucidate how critical reconstruction can contribute to the empowerment of a group without necessarily resulting in the disempowerment of other groups.

The notion of cultural capital refers to the range of potentialities that have been (or can be) expressed and realized by the members of a group. These potentialities need to be uncovered and appropriated through a genealogical (and projective) reconstruction, for the members of the group are not automatically aware and in control of their cultural capital. Hollinger terms the appropriation of cultural products by a particular group "the will to descend," which he characterizes as the illegitimate aspiration of "seeking empowerment through genealogy" (2000, 126). To show why this genealogical empowerment should be resisted, Hollinger takes as an example the democratic and egalitarian ideals of American culture. He asks rhetorically: "Are they not European?" (2000, 125). They are indeed but, he remarks, "it should not follow that Euro-Americans of today have a greater claim on these ideals than anyone else" (2000, 125–26). There are two important points to consider here. In the first place, note the socio-political aspects of the case that Hollinger offers for consideration. Hollinger's choice of example is very revealing. This instance of "the will to descend" is unacceptable, among other things, because the group that seeks empowerment through genealogy already has all the power and, therefore, is using genealogy to legitimate its monopoly of power and to perpetuate an existing relation of domination. But would we say the same about the genealogical empowerment of disadvantaged groups that have not yet been allowed to enjoy and exploit the cultural products of their own agency? Whether or not the genealogical empowerment of a group is desirable depends on the context and the socioeconomic and political specifics of the case. The particular position of the group in question in relation to other groups is of paramount importance. However, Hollinger ignores this element entirely; and he goes on to argue that since the cultural appropriation of ideals and institutions is clearly wrong and exclusion-

ary when done by Euro-Americans, it must also be so when done by other groups (regardless of their socioeconomic status and political power): "The will to descend has already been indulged, in a multitude of fields, to the benefit of Europeans and of white Americans. Correcting this need not mean cynically turning the tables and indulging this will on behalf of some other contemporary group" (2000, 127). But this is a fallacy. It doesn't follow that genealogical empowerment is always wrong and exclusionary *unless* we assume that the value of such empowerment can be assessed independently of the conditions under which it takes place and the consequences of its achievement. But should we say the same thing about the genealogical empowerment of oppressed groups and their oppressors? The value of cultural appropriation is simply not the same for groups in a position of power and for groups that have been dispossessed of their own cultural agency.

But in the second place, the key issue is whether cultural capital is claimed as the *exclusive* possession of a group, or as a cultural contribution of the group to society that can be used and enjoyed by other groups as well. If the appropriation of cultural products involves exclusivity, then it has the potential to be oppressive. Hollinger assumes that all instances of cultural appropriation are of this kind, but this is not necessarily the case. It is true that the language of "possession," "capital," "heritage," and so on does have those exclusionary connotations. But claiming one's cultural products as one's own does not have to be done to the exclusion of others; claiming one's heritage doesn't have to be exclusionary if one is willing to share. It is certainly possible to call attention to the link between certain ideas, artifacts, styles, institutions, and so forth and the practices and traditions of one's group, while offering these cultural products as contributions for the use and enjoyment of other groups in a multicultural society. This is indeed Locke's view. Although he emphasizes the Negro's cultural capital, Locke does not hold an exclusionary view. What he calls the "free-trade in culture" and "the principle of cultural reciprocity" (cf. Harris 1991, 206) are supposed to speak to Hollinger's concern. In fact, Locke could have written the following passage as a rebuttal to

Hollinger: "Culture-goods, once evolved, are *no longer the exclusive property of the race or people that originate them*. They belong to all who can use them; and belong most to those who can use them best. But for all the limitless exchange and transplanting of culture, it cannot be artificially manufactured; it grows. And so far as I can understand history, it is *always a folk-product*, with the form and flavor of a particular people and place, that is to say, for all its subsequent universality, culture has root and grows in that social soil which, for want of a better term, we call 'race'" (Harris 1991, 206; my emphasis).

Neglecting forms of cultural appropriation and self-affirmation that don't involve exclusivity, Hollinger comes to the conclusion that the ethnic roots of our cultural products should be de-emphasized: "At issue is how much of our appreciation for a doctrine or a work of art or an institution should be based on its perceived ethno-racial ancestry. From a postethnic perspective, the answer is, not much" (2000, 127). In Hollinger's view, the ethnic roots of cultural products do not play an active role in their appreciation and can become obstacles for their use and enjoyment; they are something accidental to be transcended, mainly negative (biased) aspects to be overcome. In this sense Hollinger refers to examples of cultural products that, despite the ethnic specificity of their origins, have become the universal patrimony of mankind: for example, the scientific and artistic achievements of Ancient Egypt. But the crucial mistake here is to think that one *cannot* make cultural products available universally and at the same time develop an appreciation for their ethnic ancestry, that we have to choose between these two things, that one can only be done at the expense of the other. This error gives plausibility to the claim that the cost of expanding the availability of cultural products is to detach them from their ethnic roots and to minimize the value of their ethnic aspects. But this is simply wrong. In fact, making cultural products available outside the cultural contexts in which they were developed, far from being incompatible with, actually *requires* an appreciation of their ethnic ancestry. Such an appreciation is a precondition for the *full* enjoyment and the *responsible* use of these products. The exploitation of cultural resources without the awareness and ap-

preciation of their ethnic dimension is dangerous and irresponsible, for it amounts to being unwilling to control the oppressive consequences that such exploitation can have for the groups in which those resources originated. Hollinger's claim that "Egypt, surely, belongs to us all, and so, too, does democracy" (2000, 128) is both right and wrong. It is correct insofar as it is a way of emphasizing the availability that these cultural products have (or should have). But it is incorrect insofar as it denies the different relationships or linkages that different groups have to these products.

For better or for worse, cultural products and resources don't belong to all of us equally. But this does not mean that we cannot all use them or enjoy them; we can, but we will do so differently. For better or for worse, the cultural history of a people is inscribed (in various ways) in the ideas, artifacts, and institutions that they produce. It is true that these ethnic "inscriptions" can become biases that have to be overcome. But in that case an appreciation for ethnic ancestry is all the more important if we want the overcoming of bias to be successful. And, of course, cultural "inscriptions" are not always burdens for social development and progress that have to be countered and lifted; they can be (and typically are) reservoirs of possibilities that can be exploited by many groups in many different ways (sometimes in old and customary ways, sometimes in novel and creative ways). In other words, ethnic "inscriptions" can be resources, indeed cultural capitals.

This nonexclusionary view of cultural capital is grounded in Locke's dialectical view of the development of ethnic and racial groups. In this view, given the relations of mutual dependence between groups, we cannot make sense of the development of each group independently of the others. Groups develop together; they become mutually enriched or impoverished in and through their interactions. The simultaneous formations and transformations of interrelated groups are forged in their interactions and mutual adjustments. (In Deweyan language, the formation of group identity is *transactional*.) Groups just cannot develop independently of one another: A self-professed isolationism makes the development of the

group crucially dependent on a particular relation to and attitude toward other groups. Locke explicitly denounces the myth of social and racial separatism: "The fiction is that the life of the races is separate, and increasingly so. The fact is that they have touched too closely at the unfavorable and too lightly at the favorable levels" (1925, 9). Locke argues that the fiction of separatism is not only detrimental to the development of particular groups but also to the whole of society, for it renders impossible the realization of American democratic ideals: "Democracy itself is obstructed and stagnated to the extent that any of its channels are closed" (1925, 12).

In Locke's view, the development of the New Negro involves the development of new relations between racial and ethnic groups in America. This brings us to the second benefit that the critical reconstruction of collective experience can afford, namely: the facilitation of *intercultural understanding and communication*. Although Locke's account of the reconstruction of Negro life focuses quite heavily on the self-empowerment of the group, he also emphasizes how this reconstruction can facilitate and promote the communication between groups and improve their mutual understanding. He emphasizes that the "new American attitude" that the New Negro is helping to create is characterized by a "closer understanding" of the different racial and ethnic groups that compose American society (1925, 10). This "new American attitude" is to be understood interactionally, that is, as maintained by the different racial and ethnic groups in their continued communication, cultural exchanges, and mutual understanding of their respective expressive and artistic agency. Now that Negro voices are heard, now that their cultural products become available to the whole of society, now that their artistic expressions find an audience, a set of "entirely new mutual attitudes" (1925, 8) becomes possible. It is important to note that this interactive and communicative view of the development of racial and ethnic groups in a multicultural society explores *enabling conditions* for the mutual enrichment of these groups, but it cannot provide a formula that guarantees success in interracial and interethnic relations. This view does not involve a naïve optimism or deterministic meliorism. It sim-

ply contends that mutual understanding makes it *possible* that groups support and enrich each other in their development. As Locke puts it: "It does not follow that if the Negro were better known, he would be better liked or better treated. But mutual understanding is basic for any subsequent cooperation and adjustment" (1925, 8-9). The mutual understanding of racial groups is a *precondition*, but not a guarantee, for the improvement of racial relations and for the pursuit of the progressive realization and fulfillment of American ideals.

To conclude this section, I want to call attention to the fundamental significance of both the social and the dialectical aspects of the pragmatist view of identity that we can find in Dewey and in Locke. In its social dimension, this pragmatist view puts the emphasis on the interrelations between personal and collective identity,⁹ making clear that self-knowledge is a social task, that is, that to know oneself is to know others with whom one shares a common history, a cultural bond, and a reservoir of experience. Thus, on this social view, the injunction "know thyself" is translated into "know thy community." But there is a further complication for, in its dialectical dimension, the pragmatist view tells us that group identities cannot be extricated from the interrelations among groups and, therefore, the collective identity of a group is crucially dependent on the identity of other groups. Thus in order to know one's community one must know other communities as well, for one cannot fully understand the identity of a group without understanding the identity of other groups. With this dialectical twist, it becomes clear that the dictum "know thy community" presupposes the maxim "know thy neighbors (or neighboring communities)." The upshot is that, on this view, the quest for self-knowledge and self-mastery becomes a far-reaching exploration that goes beyond the parochial domains of one's own experiences or the experiences of one's group. This experiential exploration involves the reconstruction and critique of the collective experience of many groups; and it requires opening channels of interaction and paths of communication between these groups so as to facilitate their mutual understanding.

An interesting account of the kind of experiential exploration that is required for self-knowledge and self-mastery can be found in the writings of María Lugones, a Latina philosopher whose views are very close to the social and dialectical model discussed here, even though she does not explicitly draw on the pragmatist tradition.¹⁰ Lugones (1989) argues that the quest for self-knowledge and self-mastery requires a playful and adventurous attitude, for such a quest is quite literally an expedition and those who participate in it must be explorers or travelers: They must explore new experiential domains or, as she puts it, "travel" to new "worlds" of experience that are foreign to them. She recommends "playfulness" and "world-traveling" as ways of overcoming the obstacles that block cross-cultural and cross-racial understanding. In her view, "world-traveling" involves the exploration of experiential contexts where identities different from ours flourish; and being "playful" involves having an experimentalist attitude with respect to one's self and the "worlds" one inhabits. According to Lugones, through playful explorations we can develop a loving empathy toward those who are significantly different from ourselves, thus transforming our relationship with them and, at the same time, transforming and enlarging our own selves.¹¹ The playful attitude required by these explorations involves being willing to take risks and being open to novelty and surprises (even destabilizing ones). It is revealing that in her description of this attitude she uses the concept of *reconstruction*.

The playful attitude involves openness to surprise, openness to being a fool, openness to self-construction or *reconstruction* and to construction or *reconstruction* of the "worlds" we inhabit playfully. . . . In attempting to take a hold of oneself and of one's relation to others in a particular "world," one may study, examine and come to understand oneself. One may then see what the *possibilities* for play are for the being one is in that "world." One may even decide to inhabit that self fully in order to understand it better and find its *creative possibilities*. (Lugones 1989, 17; emphasis added)

"World-traveling" involves experimentation with life-experiences and the critical reconstruction of these experiences and of the self

who has them. As described by Lugones, experimentation and reconstruction require that we explore new cultural contexts and become acquainted with the new forms of experience and the possibilities these contexts have to offer to our life. But it is important to note that this exploration and experimentation have important constraints and limitations. Cross-cultural traveling may not be always possible; we may find insurmountable obstacles along the way in our attempts at transcultural experimentation. For example, the constraints that our embodiment imposes on our identity become important obstacles when we try to travel across genders, sexualities, races, and ethnicities. In some cases our agency may be able to remove these obstacles, but in other cases it may not. And at any rate, even when cross-cultural traveling is possible, a genuine transcultural understanding may require more than playful experimentation; it may require a deep process of transformation at the personal and interpersonal level as well as at the level of the material conditions of existence. We have to acknowledge that there are always limits to the creative reconstruction of identities, as the pragmatist emphasis on context and historical constraints reminds us.¹²

I will conclude with a brief discussion of the social and political implications of the pragmatist approach to ethnicity developed in this essay. For this discussion I will focus on the account of Hispanic identity developed by the Cuban poet, philosopher, and political thinker José Martí.

The New Hispanic

After constant waves of migration the Hispanic community has acquired a strong presence in the United States. It has already become the largest minority and the fastest growing, according to the Census Bureau, which projects that Hispanics will constitute almost a quarter of the U.S. population by the middle of the twenty-first century. Increasingly, Hispanics have acquired more socioeconomic freedoms and more opportunities for self-expression. There has been also an increasing interest in Hispanic culture by the rest of American soci-

ety. And although Hispanic Americans have not yet produced a cultural movement comparable to the Harlem Renaissance, the socioeconomic and political conditions for the creation of the *New Hispanic* seem to be now available: Hispanics are now in a position to create their own images and take control of their cultural agency. As with the New Negro, the first stage in this process of cultural self-affirmation is to do some repair work, that is, to fight the old images and prejudices that are imposed on Hispanics and constrain their development. The marginality of the *Old Hispanic* still weighs heavily in the mainstream perception of Hispanics in American society: Hispanics are still frequently perceived as foreigners and as sources of cheap labor, being all too often relegated to "those jobs *Americans* don't want to do." As Locke recognized, the ultimate success in overcoming a situation of oppression depends on the genuine and durable transformation of the material conditions of the life of the oppressed group. But an important aspect of the process of emancipation, which accompanies and facilitates the changes in the material conditions, is the cultural transformation through which the group understands, criticizes, and expresses itself, reworking the self-images already available to the group and creating new ones. My suggestion is that a philosophical voice that can help guide this process of cultural reconstruction and creation is that of José Martí. It is my claim that in Martí's view of Latin America we can find the critical and reconstructive elements of the pragmatist approach to ethnic identity; and, I submit, he should be considered the Alain Locke of the *New Hispanic*.¹³ Since there is no space here for a full overview of Martí's account of Latin American identity, following the structure of my argument in this essay, I will focus on the following two parts of his account: his discussion of the conditions for the self-empowerment of Latin Americans, and his arguments for the need and importance of intercultural understanding and communication.

In "Our America" (1891) Martí argues that the self-empowerment of Latin Americans requires critical self-understanding and creative agency, which are everywhere lacking in the Hispanic world. He repeatedly warns that until Latin Americans realize that they need and

lack adequate knowledge and appreciation of who they are, they will not be able to find the path toward liberation and their situation of oppression will not change. According to Martí, what stands in the way of the spiritual emancipation of Latin Americans is an induced self-hatred and distrust of their own potentialities. The other side of this negative self-image is the admiration and idealization of the European and the Yankee. As a result, what has characterized the cultural and political agency of Latin Americans is the imitation of foreign models. But, Martí remarks, "neither the European nor the Yankee could provide the key to the Spanish American riddle" (1999, 117). Latin Americans will have to find the key to this riddle by themselves; but they won't find it until they repair their lack of self-knowledge and self-reliance and they overcome their imitative tendencies. In other words, the central task is to fight against the *colonial mentality* that survives in Latin American republics even after their independence: "The colony lives on the Republic" (1999, 116). It is this colonial mentality that is responsible for "the excessive influx of foreign ideas and formulas" and "the wicked and unpolitical disdain for the aboriginal race" (ibid.). From colonial times Latin Americans have inherited a negative and oppressive attitude toward "the indigenous": they "are ashamed of the mother who reared them, because she wears an Indian apron," without realizing that "our America . . . will be saved by its Indians" (1999, 112). Martí underscores that it is imperative that Latin Americans become acquainted with their own history and that they develop a new appreciation for their indigenous customs and traditions. For it is only through self-knowledge and self-respect that they will be able to find the path to their own creative agency.

In Martí's view, the key to the emancipation of Latin America ("the key to the Spanish American riddle") is to be found in what he calls *nature* and *creation*. Martí characterizes as "natural" all those resources that can be found in one's surroundings and the exploitation of these resources according to the needs and interests of the people. In Martí's writings the term "natural" is often used as synonymous with "consonant with one's environment" or "faithful to

one's context." As he uses the term, "nature" includes both human and material resources; its opposite is not culture, but artifice: The unnatural is what results from accepting images, ideas, and models that don't fit the local reality. As Martí puts it: "The struggle is not between civilization and barbarity, but between false erudition and Nature" (1999, 113). In his view, it is very important that "the new Americans" are formed "in the direct study of nature" (1999, 118). They must study the natural elements of their own environments and learn to find themselves at home in their own cultural contexts. To achieve this, Martí argues, educational institutions must undergo transformation and pay attention to the local realities: "The European university must bow to the American university. Our Greece must take priority over the Greece which is not ours" (1999, 114). Martí describes the intellectual leader that the American university should aim to produce as "a new real man schooled for these real times in critical philosophy" (1999, 116). But the intellectual revolution that should take place at the level of the university is only one component in the wider process of transformation of the social institutions and media that educate the people: "Newspapers, universities, and schools should encourage the study of the country's pertinent components" (1999, 114).

Being in contact with the natural elements of one's environment and being aware of the potentialities of one's culture are the conditions of possibility for the form of genuine agency that Martí contrasts with imitation: what he calls *creation*. This is how he describes his faith in the youth of Latin America, a revolutionary generation that (he claims in 1891) begins to be in touch with their own past and identity and to be capable of creative agency: "The frock coats are still French, but thought begins to be American. The youth of America are rolling up their sleeves, digging their hands in the dough, and making it rise with the sweat of their brows. They realize that there is too much imitation, and that *creation holds the key to salvation*. 'Create' is the password of this generation" (1999, 117; emphasis added).

In Martí's discussions of "nature" and "creation" we find a passionate defense of the thesis of *local self-government*. He emphasizes

that the fundamental importance of this idea is due to the creative power that government and political leaders have: "In a new nation a government means a creator" (1999, 114). Given their especially powerful form of creative agency, it is crucial that political leaders study "nature" and acquire knowledge of and respect for their region's history and ethnic diversity. On this depends the emancipation of Latin American republics: "Republics have paid with oppression for their inability to recognize the true elements of their countries, to derive from them the right kind of government. . . . To know one's country and govern it with that knowledge is the only way to free it from tyranny" (1999, 113–14). Martí describes the "natural statesman" as the one who knows the natural elements of his nation and the needs and interests of its people. In his view, good self-government "is nothing more than the balance of the country's natural elements" that makes it possible "to reach that desirable state where each man can attain self-realization" (1999, 113). This "balance of natural elements" can only be achieved through a *critical* reconstruction of the people's experience. For, it is important to note, Martí's political view is not a mere celebration of whatever is local, indigenous, and consonant with the folk culture. As Martí puts it: "Nations should live in an atmosphere of self-criticism" (1999, 117).

Martí's view of self-government and political emancipation has been characterized as a form of Bolívarism.¹⁴ And indeed it is Bolívar who inspired Martí's idea that the path to liberation can only be found by those who know and respect the history of Latin America and the cultural diversity of its peoples. In "Simón Bolívar" (1893) Martí argues that Latin America needs its own political leaders who can envision and develop original forms of government adequate to the complex and diverse realities of Latin American republics. In this piece (a speech in honor of Bolívar delivered to the Latin American Literary Society of New York in 1893), Martí provides a balanced assessment of the Liberator, including both praise and critique. Although heavily influenced by Bolívar, Martí's political views are far more pluralistic and contextualist. Martí explicitly argues against Bolívar's idea of uniting the Latin American "countries of the revolu-

tion under a distant, central government,” and he defends a “multi-headed American revolution born of the desire for local self-government” (1999, 170).

In Martí’s pluralist and contextualist view, Latin America is composed of diverse local realities with different histories and ethnic roots. The question that immediately arises for this view is the following: Where does the unity of Latin Americans reside? If the peoples of Latin America exhibit such an irreducibly diverse range of ethnic characteristics and cultural agencies, how are they united? The first thing to note here is that the only unity that Martí’s view of Latin America can offer is the kind of unity that is formed by heterogeneous elements, a unity that does not suppress or erase but in fact requires differences, a *unity through diversity*.¹⁵ But what constitutes this unity? According to Martí, what unifies the diverse peoples of Latin America is a common experience that includes indigenous and colonial elements. The core of this common experience is the experience of *oppression*, of being oppressed and of fighting against oppression. Latin Americans are unified in the present by a shared past and a shared hope for the future. They find their roots in a set of interrelated indigenous and non-indigenous cultures that shared the experience of being under the yoke of a colonial power and came to form a common vision of emancipation and freedom. The unity of Latin Americans is, therefore, a *political* unity: They are unified by their common history of oppression and their common project of *liberation*. As Martí puts it: “The pressing need of Our America is to show itself as it is, one in spirit and intent, swift conquerors of a suffocating past, stained only by the enriching blood drawn from the scarves left upon us by our masters” (1999, 119).

To carry out the project of liberation that unifies them, Latin Americans need to know who they are: They have to develop a critical self-understanding and claim an identity that is formed through their free agency. This quest for self-mastery and cultural self-affirmation involves two equally important tasks that complement and support each other. The first task has already been discussed: It is to get to know Our America in all its historical and ethnic diversity; that is, to

acquire knowledge of the different local realities that compose Latin America. The second task is to get to know the neighboring nations and cultures that are in contact with Latin America and whose relations can have an impact on its free agency and affect its future. Martí writes: “Nations that do not know one another should quickly become acquainted” (1999, 111). The rationale for the task of knowing one’s neighbors involves two distinct points. The first one is the conceptual, *dialectical* point about identity examined above. As we saw, one’s identity is dialectically bound up with the identity of others; and this applies to collective identities as well as to the identities of individuals. Accordingly, knowing the collective identity of Latin Americans requires knowing the collective identity of non-Latin Americans. It is important for Hispanics to get to know the experience and identity of other ethnic groups in America that don’t share their history, customs, and traditions. In this sense Martí calls our attention to “the difference in origins, methods and interests between the two halves of the continent” (1999, 118); and he emphasizes the “risk” that this difference poses to Latin Americans given the differential power of the two halves of the continent. In particular, Martí claims that “Our America’s greatest danger” is its “formidable neighbor” (1999, 119), the United States, which is capable of blocking revolutions and undermining local self-governments. And this brings us to the second, *political* point contained in the rationale for knowing one’s neighbors.

The dialectical point about the need of getting to know neighboring nations and cultures acquires a special political significance when it comes to power relations. This is why the need of knowing the United States is of special importance for Latin American republics. For after achieving independence from their colonizers, these republics live under the menace of another master, an even stronger superpower whose oppression has the potential to surpass in some respects that of the colonial power of previous centuries. This is the central thesis of “The Truth about the United States” (1894). In this essay Martí argues that “in Our America it is imperative to know the truth about the United States,” and that to know this truth and to spread

it constitute the "duty" of any "good American who sees the continent's peace and glory secure only in the frank and free development of its various native entities" (1999, 174). According to Martí, ignorance of this truth is responsible for a superficial admiration and a harmful envy of the United States in Latin American republics. He warns that the "excessive love for the North" and the "vehement desire for progress" are based on false images and can become blind and self-destructive. Given these dangers, Martí argues that it is "urgent . . . to put before Our America the entire American truth, about the Saxon as well as the Latin, so that too much faith in foreign virtue will not weaken us in our formative years with an unmotivated and baneful distrust of what is ours" (1999, 175). To correct the lack of knowledge about the United States in the Hispanic world and to fight its damaging implications, he suggested the addition of a permanent section in the New York-based magazine *Patria* devoted to "Notes on the United States."

Martí repeatedly emphasizes the crucial importance of intercultural communication and mutual understanding between the Americas. The task for us Hispanics, he argues, is to repair not only our ignorance about foreign cultures but also their ignorance about our culture: We need to learn about the United States as much as they need to learn about us. Martí remarks that in the United States Hispanics are only known through clichés and inaccurate images that don't come from the agency of Hispanics themselves. So, he argues, we Hispanics need to make ourselves known in our own terms, we need to dismiss misconceptions and prejudices about us so that "all the violence, discord, immorality and disorder" in the United States is no longer "blamed upon the peoples of Spanish America" (1999, 176). In other words (borrowed from Locke), we have to tear down the fiction of the *Old Hispanic* and introduce all Americans to the *New Hispanic*. Hispanics need to conquer their own cultural space. They need to conquer the freedom and opportunity to create their own self-image and to find their own voice in a genuine dialogue between equals with other ethnic groups in the Americas. Through the progressive acquisition of mutual understanding and the sharing of

experiences it may be possible to create a common ground and even a common project between the Americas, eventually transcending the "us and them" dialectic altogether.¹⁶

Concluding Remarks

I want to conclude by emphasizing the importance of Martí's suggestion of the political unity that the Americas can achieve through intercultural communication and understanding. This suggestion springs directly from the pragmatist approach to ethnicity discussed and defended here. While living in New York, Martí realized that the United States was becoming a microcosm of the Americas and that, within the United States, it was all the more important that different ethnic and racial groups¹⁷ come to understand each other and be able to maintain open lines of communication between them. The pragmatist view of ethnicity developed here offers an account of how the critical reconstruction of collective experience can lead to the empowerment of ethnic and racial groups, and it can promote and facilitate the open dialogue and mutual understanding between cultures and races in the Americas. Dewey, Locke, and Martí are of one mind in arguing that ethnic and racial groups must acquire their own voices, exercise critical control over the products of their own agency, and enjoy the freedom and necessary resources for self-expression and cultural self-affirmation. The empowerment of its diverse ethnic and racial groups and the genuine and continuing dialogue between them are the preconditions for a better America.

The ideas and suggestions explored here also have validity beyond the American context. As a result of colonialism, globalization, and recent migration patterns, the multicultural aspects of societies across the globe have been enhanced, and the global community has itself become more interconnected and mutually dependent. We face today special multicultural opportunities and challenges: Globalization has created new opportunities for the communication and mutual enrichment of cultural groups across the globe, but it has also raised unprecedented challenges for preserving and empowering cultural

minorities, which are especially vulnerable and exposed to the homogenizing tendencies of global markets and to the global injustices and disparities created and enhanced by these markets. Not only transnational institutions but also transnational cultural practices (artistic, academic, economic, political, and so on) are needed to respond properly to these challenges and opportunities. It is in this sense that it is of crucial importance today for individuals and groups to get to know themselves as they get to know the neighboring communities and cultures with which their lives are entangled. It is particularly important and urgent today to keep our global cultural dialogues *polyphonic*, fighting homogenizing and normalizing tendencies that erase or marginalize differences. This sense of importance and urgency is what the pragmatic pluralism articulated and defended here tries to convey.

FOURTEEN

PRAGMATISM, LATINO INTERCULTURAL
CITIZENSHIP, AND THE TRANSFORMATION
OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

José-Antonio Orosco



In his recent study of the interconnections between globalization and violence, *Fear of Small Numbers*, Arjun Appadurai draws a distinction between the civic and the political patriotism expressed by many immigrants living within the United States. Especially for those immigrants coming from the Global South, there is a sense of “surviving in a moral cocoon within the belly of the beast” when it comes to describing life in America.¹ These immigrants, both legal and undocumented, treasure the idea of taking advantage of the freedoms and liberties that come with citizenship. Nonetheless, they feel contempt for the “American way of life” that they associate with crime, sexual immorality, political corruption, and racism against nonwhite people. They have patriotism for the political ideals of the United States, but are disgusted by its civic life, its popular culture, and the moral hypocrisy of its citizens. They love America, but don’t care much for Americans. Such conditions are ripe for frustration and political violence, according to Appadurai.