

A Culture of Justice

Eric Thomas Weber

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Introduction

In February 2014, on a friend's recommendation, a young African American undergraduate student at the University of Mississippi came to my office to talk. She began to cry as we sat down. She told me that she did not know if she could stay at the university after the recent incident, in which freshman Graeme Phillip Harris and two of his friends had hung a noose and an old Georgia flag, two-thirds of which feature the Confederate battle flag emblem, on the statue of James Meredith.¹ Meredith was the first African American student to integrate the university. The young woman said that she didn't feel safe, that she didn't know if it was the right thing for her to stay.

We discussed her situation and some ways of thinking about her future and options. Harris's and his friends' actions made her feel threatened. She was afraid. A noose around the symbol of a man who integrated the university appeared to her to be a threat to her and people like her.

The day after her visit, I read an op-ed in the *Huffington Post* by Geoffrey R. Stone of the University of Chicago Law School, author of *Perilous Times: Free Speech in Wartime*.² Stone argued that the act, while "deeply disrespectful and hateful," did "not *quite* fit the conventional definition of a 'threat.'" Threats, he explained, "must not just put people in fear, but must (a) be directed at specific individuals and (b) be unambiguous."³

My sense was that either Stone was wrong or the law is.⁴ The language of "specific individuals" fails to account for the idea that threats can be made to groups. The criterion that threats be unambiguous, furthermore, appeared to me to be met with the implication that persons of said target groups would be hanged, killed. If the past precedents failed to appreciate how reasonable it is for black students to feel their lives are in danger of threats of racial violence when a noose is draped over a symbol of the

1 man who integrated the university, then something is profoundly wrong
 2 with the policy or its interpreters are tone-deaf. Just three years earlier,
 3 white twenty-one-year-old Deryl Dedmon murdered African American
 4 James Craig Anderson in Jackson, Mississippi, by driving over the victim
 5 with the assailant's truck on a late-night spree of racial harassment that
 6 followed a pattern of racially motivated attacks on African Americans.⁵

7 It was some relief for me to learn that Harris "pleaded guilty,"
 8 albeit to a misdemeanor charge⁶ of "using a threat of force to intimidate
 9 African-American students and employees."⁷ A scholar I spoke with on the
 10 matter who works for an organization that offers grants for research on
 11 free speech issues told me that in his view Harris "just had a bad lawyer."
 12 Harris's friend, Austin Reed Edenfield, also pleaded guilty to the same
 13 charge, however, and admitted "that he knew the rope and flag would
 14 be threatening and intimidating to black students," according to the *New*
 15 *York Times*.⁸ Defenses of Harris's and Edenfield's speech rights felt to me
 16 tragically unappreciative of the palpability of real threats to others' safety.

17 A racially motivated threat like the one Harris and his friends pre-
 18 sented is an extreme and stark example of the kind of problem I aim to
 19 address in this book. Far subtler concerns about culture show the range
 20 of problem that I would refer to as cultural, which can impede justice.
 21 The opposite extreme is evident in the less obviously defensible calls for
 22 "political correctness," in which a demand for cultural sensitivity might be
 23 thought to be unrealistic. James Taranto raised criticisms of the University
 24 of New Hampshire's "Bias-Free Language Guide," for example, which was
 25 said to have called terms like "American," "homosexual," and "foreigners"
 26 "problematic."⁹ Famed historian of education Diane Ravitch has argued in
 27 her book *The Language Police* that "an elaborate, well-established protocol
 28 of beneficent censorship [has been] quietly endorsed and broadly imple-
 29 mented by textbook publishers, testing agencies, professional associations,
 30 states, and the federal government."¹⁰ The harshest critic of this trend has
 31 perhaps been former presidential candidate Ben Carson, who has argued
 32 that "political correctness" is "going to destroy our nation."¹¹ He continued
 33 on to say that "I think this whole concept of political correctness—you
 34 can say this, you can't say that, you can't repeat what someone said—it's
 35 total foolishness, and it's going to destroy our nation and we need to be
 36 more mature than that."¹²

37 In these two examples we see the range of worries about culture.
 38 Of course, if one thinks that Carson is unconcerned about the role of
 39 culture in justice, I would argue that in fact he is attentive to the need for
 40

freedom of expression and for a kind of reaction to cultural differences. 1
 In calling for less emphasis placed on things like word choice or the 2
 value or weight of symbols, he is in fact advocating for a kind of culture 3
 too. In that sense, then, the first and overarching premise of this book is 4
 broadly accepted, namely that culture can inhibit or enable the pursuit 5
 of justice. Andrew Kernohan defended this view, furthermore, as well as 6
 some additional claims with which I agree and on which I draw in this 7
 project, in his book *Liberalism, Equality, and Cultural Oppression*.¹³ 8

In between the direct and palpable cases of threats and the subtler 9
 matters of language, offensiveness, and word choice in textbooks, we can 10
 find troubling cases in which flags have been matters of debate. 11

In Louisiana, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) argued in 12
 2011 that a black defendant in a capital case could not expect a fair trial 13
 in a courthouse over which the Confederate battle flag was flying.¹⁴ Denny 14
 LeBoeuf, director of the ACLU Capital Punishment Project, argued that 15
 “Flying the flag outside the courthouse only risks diminishing the trust of 16
 African-Americans¹⁵ in the criminal justice system and priming white jurors 17
 to view African-American defendants and victims as second-class citizens. 18
 Removing the flag brings us one step closer to justice.” According to a 19
 November 2011 press release by the ACLU, “Caddo Parish commissioners 20
 voted 11-1 . . . to take down the flag, which was raised outside the Caddo 21
 Parish Courthouse in 1951 as an act of resistance to the civic and civil 22
 rights advances of African-Americans.”¹⁶ The argument that defendants 23
 in a death penalty case could not expect a fair trial in a courthouse over 24
 which the Confederate Battle flag was flying proved motivating for all but 25
 Commissioner Doug Dominick, the “sole vote against the resolution.”¹⁷ 26

At the time, news on the matter only vaguely referenced support- 27
 ers’ motivations for keeping the flag. According to reporter Jeff Ferrell, 28
 “Supporters argue the flag became a symbol of southern heritage and a 29
 monument to all those who died in the Civil War.”¹⁸ While the Louisiana 30
 Supreme Court did not compel the parish to take down the flag, in its 31
 opinion the court wrote that “It is not an irrational inference that one 32
 who displays the Confederate Flag may harbor racist bias against African 33
 Americans.”¹⁹ Commissioner Dominick was more vocal about his reasoning 34
 later, as the same parish voted to remove also the Confederate monument 35
 outside the courthouse. He explained his belief in 2017 that the matter 36
 should be put to a public vote in the then-forthcoming special election,²⁰ 37
 a way of defending the monument on democratic grounds of popular- 38
 ity rather than on any kind of denial that it does harm. The move is a 39
 40

1 common red herring against progressive or anti-racist causes, especially in
 2 the South,²¹ as it ignores the claim of harm or wrongdoing or assumes the
 3 matter in question to be defensible if popular. Democratic popularity is a
 4 value, to be sure, but within the limits of the protection of minority rights.
 5 According to the *Shreveport Times*, Dominick also argued that the United
 6 Daughters of the Confederacy “probably will sue if the commission votes
 7 for removal. He said he’s concerned about the cost of litigation.”²² Defend-
 8 ers of Confederate monuments and symbols often appeal to democratic
 9 reasoning in their defense, despite the radically undemocratic meanings
 10 the artifacts in question communicate. Fortunately, in Louisiana’s 2011 flag
 11 conflict eleven of the remaining commissioners were persuaded, and, for
 12 the sake of justice, a flag was taken down.

13 A few years later, Dylann Roof murdered nine members of the Afri-
 14 can Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Charleston, South Carolina.²³
 15 Photos of him burning an American flag and waving a Confederate battle
 16 flag in pride emerged.²⁴ Soon after, in cities around the South protests
 17 erupted, calling for taking down such flags from public grounds.²⁵ In July
 18 2015, South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley signed a bill removing the
 19 Confederate flag from the state capitol.²⁶ Alabama Governor Robert Bentley
 20 similarly ordered the Confederate flag to be taken down from the capitol
 21 building in Montgomery, Alabama.²⁷ I wrote an op-ed at the time calling
 22 for the state of Mississippi to change its flag, which featured an emblem
 23 of the Confederate battle flag in its canton.²⁸ Leaders of the Black Student
 24 Union at the University of Mississippi called the university to take down
 25 the state flag, a complicated matter, as the school is a state institution and
 26 such institutions are expected to fly the state flag. Changing the state flag
 27 requires a vote of the legislature, furthermore, and many people told me
 28 the state would never change the flag. Students in my classes asked me
 29 why a flag matters. What is the big deal about a piece of cloth? These
 30 concerns appeared to echo the kinds of worries that Ben Carson has been
 31 voicing for some time.

32 That July, I published an op-ed on “What a Flag Has to Do with
 33 Justice,” as I had begun research and sketches for this book the year
 34 before.²⁹ Over the course of a remarkable semester, in which student
 35 leaders organized a variety of efforts to change the culture, including a
 36 strangely riveting meeting of the Associated Student Body,³⁰ the university
 37 was convinced to take down the flag.³¹ Some students in my classroom
 38 continued to struggle to appreciate why the flag removal mattered, until
 39 the Ku Klux Klan organized a protest of the flag removal.³² In response to
 40

the Klan's protest, students organized a counterprotest called "Turn Your Back on Hate." Every one of my most skeptical students participated in the counterprotest and felt quite confident of the importance of taking down the state flag. The governor of Mississippi at the time said that "college students react a lot emotionally," to which I responded in *The Clarion Ledger* that the "Students' Flag Request Was 'Emotional' but Courageous."³³ After all, Plato understood courage to be a matter of fearing the right things and not the wrong things, and as such, that virtue is indeed a matter of emotion, intelligently guided by wisdom, moderation, and justice.³⁴

Some people, including me, take the Caddo Parish's and the University of Mississippi's decisions to lower their flags as important steps toward justice. It is not only a number of white Southerners who question such a judgment, however. My eyes were opened by a thoughtful and kind African American friend in Mississippi, Joanna Henderson,³⁵ when the students at the university called for the state flag to be taken down. My friend surprised me at the time when we talked about the state flag. "I don't care if you take down the flag but don't change what's in people's hearts," she said to me. I was taken aback, because she was absolutely right, yet taking down the flags and moving Confederate monuments were clearly to my mind the right things to do. Mike Williams of the Sons of Confederate Veterans made the same argument about Alabama's move to take down the flag. Regarding Alabama Governor Bentley's order to take down Confederate battle flags from the capitol following Roof's 2015 mass murders in Charleston, Williams argued that "If you don't change people's hearts, changing a flag won't do anything toward racism."³⁶

Serious court battles can be fought, and victories sometimes won with great effort, yet they can also at times reasonably seem only cosmetic, superficial. My friend was not wrong, but the weight of her point was both right and devastating. It is conceivable to take a flag down or move a statue to a museum. Metaphorically, one can understand the idea of a person's heart changing, but how to make it happen, and not just for one person but for a whole community and culture seems so heavy a task as to be impossible. Just because a symbol is removed or disallowed forcefully does not mean that people have changed. If flags are removed begrudgingly, furthermore, resentment grows and so do its consequences. What matters is what is in people's hearts, she pointed out to me, not merely what symbol adorns a flagpole or building.

Even while appreciating my friend's point, it is also true that cultures change a step at a time. When students express cynicism about the

1 potential for progress, I find that they see value in looking to analogous
 2 examples of profound cultural change. In my lifetime, American culture
 3 has shifted radically with regard to respect for persons in same-sex rela-
 4 tionships.³⁷ In the 1980s, Eddie Murphy made audiences laugh uproariously
 5 at humor about homosexuals, using the epithet “faggot.”³⁸ Such language
 6 seems striking to people today, and is referred to as “the f-slur.”³⁹ In
 7 1998, Matthew Shepard’s murder raised calls for hate crimes legislation,
 8 which resulted eleven years later in the passage of the Matthew Shepard
 9 and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009.⁴⁰ In addition to
 10 hate crimes legislation, change has come for marriage equality, partner
 11 benefits, and so much more.⁴¹ I can think of few other examples of so
 12 dramatic a cultural shift as the one I have been witness to in one gener-
 13 ation, yet it suggests the potential for progress in other areas with effort
 14 and persistence. It is worth noting, however, that the march of progress
 15 includes periods of backstepping, as well as question raising, such as in
 16 US Supreme Court reversals,⁴² in the potential for them,⁴³ and in questions
 17 for and concerning transgendered persons.⁴⁴

18 I recall countless times being told that Mississippi will never change
 19 its flag. It was put to a vote in 2001, at which point more than 64 percent
 20 of voters chose to keep the Confederate battle flag emblem in the state
 21 flag’s canton.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, in 2020, a few months after the police murder
 22 of George Floyd, the Mississippi legislature voted to change the state flag⁴⁶
 23 and put a referendum to the people for the approval of the new Magnolia
 24 flag, which has been flying since 2021.⁴⁷

25 For a time, George Floyd’s murder⁴⁸ moved Americans, and people
 26 sought solutions to the nation’s racial problems through education.⁴⁹
 27 Unsurprisingly, a countermovement has emerged swiftly,⁵⁰ in which more
 28 than seventy bills were advanced in state legislatures calling for a ban on
 29 the incorporation of critical race theory in public school curricula and
 30 higher education.⁵¹ There are countless spheres in which culture is a mat-
 31 ter of debate and challenge, but few are as intense as in education. As I
 32 explain in the pages that follow, culture, which I understand as the set of
 33 symbols, languages, beliefs, practices, and institutions passed down from
 34 one generation to the next,⁵² is of especially great importance in education.
 35 The great philosopher of education John Dewey saw education essentially
 36 as the transmission of culture, and good, democratic education as its
 37 empowering, intelligent, and humane transmission.⁵³ The transmission of
 38 culture must not be superficial, yet in countless ways we see, debate, and
 39 champion the need for the right symbols, language, beliefs, and practices
 40 for the sake of more just institutions and a more just society.

My friend was right that what matters ultimately is what is in people's hearts, but the places of pride in society should be reserved for messages and symbols that are the right ones to champion. People may be upset or change reluctantly, but our public spaces speak⁵⁴ and can be forces for progress or regress. All people should be enabled to feel that they can have a fair trial in court and that their institutions of higher education see them as equal citizens and students. These matters can be addressed, furthermore, while at the same time we work to address the further and related structures attached to inequalities and injustices, such that our practices, policies, and institutions live up to our words, expectations, and ideals.

These examples and challenges presented so far illustrate the form of the problem at the heart of this book, rooted in the first premise mentioned above. It is that culture can enable or inhibit the pursuit of justice. As such, the fundamental argument of this book is a call for the right kind of culture necessary for justice. The next section presents the scholarly philosophical context in which my argument is situated, and then presents the argument of the book.

Philosophical Context and the Argument

As a philosopher, I am indebted especially to the work of John Dewey, from whom I derive the central value of starting one's philosophical thinking with real-life problems, and of drawing on one's own experience. That explains my emphasis on matters of race and Confederate symbols in the opening of this chapter and in the book as a whole. I grew up in the North and then the South, and later moved to teach at the University of Mississippi, a hub of conflict between efforts for racial progress and corresponding resistance. I have also grown concerned about how the democratizing power of social media tools, developed during my lifetime, can be manipulated in dangerous ways to influence culture, especially in a nation that has decided that "money is speech."⁵⁵ Social media tools have empowered some people to grow their communities, but they have also enabled others bent on spreading distrust and hatred, rendering questions of culture all the more important.

Differences in culture have felt palpable at a number of times in my life, and when I studied Dewey, I found a thinker attentive to the power of such forces. Dewey thought it important to cut through the complexity of one's culture, to get at the roots of problems, and to apply

1 philosophical clarity and insight. In his 1947 essay on “The Future of
2 Philosophy,” he writes that

3
4 My standpoint is that philosophy deals with cultural problems.
5 The principal task of philosophy is to get below the turmoil that
6 is particularly conspicuous in times of rapid cultural change,
7 to get behind what appears on the surface, to get to the soil
8 in which a given culture has its roots. The business of philos-
9 ophy is the relation that [people have] to the world in which
10 [they live,] as far as both [people] and the world are affected
11 by culture, which is very much more than is usually thought.⁵⁶

12
13 In the context of Dewey’s outlook here, it is sensible to begin with an
14 important distinction when talking about culture. For one version of the
15 term considers a certain sense of the word as found in the idea of “high
16 culture,” as being elevated. Being cultured in that sense refers to a kind of
17 development, perhaps of enlightenment, or of empowerment to appreciate
18 finer aspects of art and beauty. This sense of culture may sound especially
19 European or colonialist, but is not meant in that way in the works of the
20 African American fellow pragmatist Alain Locke.

21 In his essay “The Ethics of Culture,” Locke argues, “In my judgment,
22 the highest intellectual duty is the duty to be cultured.” He continues,
23 “Quite unfortunately, it seems, duty toward the beautiful and the cultural
24 is very generally ignored, and certainly, beauty as a motive has been
25 taken out of morality, so that we confront beautiful duty and dutiless
26 beauty. In an issue like this, it behooves education to try to restore the
27 lapsing ideals of humanism, and to center more vitally in education the
28 duty to be cultured.”⁵⁷ The sense Locke gives here to culture is one that
29 philosophers call normative, virtuous, or prescriptive, the sort of thing
30 that is the right target of human aspirations. Locke’s understanding, at
31 least in this passage,⁵⁸ is to be contrasted with a conception of culture that
32 is merely descriptive, the sense of the term that sees culture in societies
33 as something inevitable, but which can take forms that could be morally
34 better or worse, oppressive and harmful versus freeing and empowering.

35 On the one hand, the general sense of the term “culture” with
36 which I begin this project is the descriptive sense; nevertheless, my point
37 overall is to argue for a certain aim for culture, one that enables justice.
38 My thesis is aspirational, therefore, in the way that Locke understands
39 culture to be. In addition, Locke’s thought was influential in the develop-
40

ment of the Harlem Renaissance movement, which itself provides a rich and important point of emphasis for the discussion about self-respect that I develop in the argument of this book. For Locke's point of view did not call black Americans to accept and adopt European values and colonialist tropes about culture. Rather, the Harlem Renaissance was about appreciating the beauty and originality of black culture in America and its power to effect a cultural revolution.⁵⁹ In short, while many political philosophers think about oppressed, disadvantaged, and impoverished people as victims, thinkers like Locke show the ways in which self-culture is possible and desirable, even when presented differently from the norms to which dominant groups are accustomed. This point is important for understanding and explaining how and why the argument of this book differs from past contributions that have attended to the force of culture in justice.

Perhaps the most important consonance here between Locke and Dewey on the issue of culture is how thoroughly central both took the importance of education to be in its development. In the essay, Locke continues:

I speak to a group that has already chosen to be educated. I congratulate you upon that choice. Though you have so chosen for many motives and with very diverse reasons and purposes, I fear that education for most of you means, in last practical analysis, the necessary hardship that is involved in preparing to earn a better living, perhaps an easier living. It is just such narrowing and truncating of the conception of education, that the ideals and motives of culture are effective to remove or prevent. Education should not be so narrowly construed, for in the best sense, and indeed in the most practical sense, it means not only the fitting of the man to earn his living, but to live and to live well. It is just this latter and higher function of education, the art of living well, or, if I may so express it, of living up to the best, that the word *culture* connotes and represents.⁶⁰

For reasons such as these, Locke and Dewey both saw education to be of supreme social and personal importance, in contrast with later liberal philosophers, who believe that the state should intrude minimally on culture for the sake of noninterference in people's lives.

Much political philosophy of the last seventy years has avoided talk about education. Indeed, among the most influential liberal philosophers of the last half-century was John Rawls, and he had surprisingly little to say about education. Inattention to education appears strange, furthermore, given how powerfully important he took matters of culture to be. To his credit, in *A Theory of Justice*, he wrote that “the value of education should not be assessed solely in terms of economic efficiency and social welfare. Equally if not more important is the role of education in enabling a person to enjoy the culture of his [their⁶¹] society and to take part in its affairs, and in this way to provide for each individual a secure sense of his or her [or their] own worth.”⁶² We see consonance here in this passing moment of Rawls’s argument. And the sense of a person’s worth is seen to be of profound importance, perhaps of the greatest importance for justice. He continues, arguing that

perhaps the most important primary good is that of self-respect . . . We may define self-respect (or self-esteem) as having two aspects. First of all, as we noted earlier, it includes a person’s sense of his [sic] own value, his secure conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out. And second, self-respect implies a confidence in one’s ability, so far as it is within one’s power, to fulfill one’s intentions. When we feel that our plans are of little value, we cannot pursue them with pleasure or take delight in their execution. Nor plagued by failure and self-doubt can we continue in our endeavors. It is clear, then, why self-respect is a primary good. Without it nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them. All desire and activity become empty and vain, and we sink into apathy and cynicism. . . . [Thus, we must] avoid at almost any cost the social conditions that undermine self-respect.⁶³

It is important to ask oneself at this point what kinds of conditions can undermine self-respect, if not some that we might call cultural. Consider the case of the person who is said to be unable to expect a fair trial in a courthouse over which the Confederate battle flag is flying.

Rawls’s claim about the vital role of self-respect for justice as I am discussing it is drawn from his early work *A Theory of Justice*, before his next major contribution, *Political Liberalism*.⁶⁴ In that later book, he

argued it is a fact that there can be many cultures that are different and reasonable, such that people can freely live in different ways that meet expectations of justice. Given that, freedom to embody one's culture can lead to disagreements and clashes with others' cultures, but such freedom should be protected so long as the exercise of one's cultural norms does not harm other people, a central norm of traditional liberalism. There can be as a result various moral and religious doctrines that are irreconcilable yet each reasonable on its own account, according to Rawls. For that reason, Rawls's later work sought to focus only on a political conception of justice, rather than one rooted in any specific culture within a broader whole. "For Rawls," as Joshua Forstenzer clarifies, "the fact of reasonable pluralism entails that the only legitimate ideal for settling debates about constitutional arrangements and matters of basic justice is a political conception of justice which can be the object of an overlapping consensus among all reasonable citizens."⁶⁵

Over the course of writing this book, one reviewer claimed that one cannot call for a certain kind of culture in the way that this book does precisely because of the "fact of reasonable pluralism." I disagree for two reasons. The first reason for disagreement is the presumption in the language and theory of "the fact of reasonable pluralism"—that conflicts cannot be reconciled even though the different beliefs and persons in question are reasonable. If philosophers seek to avoid unnecessary assumptions, as is a common expectation, then we must not assume that differences are irreconcilable when persons and beliefs are reasonable. Religious doctrines, among others, change or are reinterpreted, and it should not be assumed in advance that reconciliation is impossible.⁶⁶

The second reason I disagree about the potential challenge is that cultures together create a larger culture in, with, and through which they all transact and influence each other. That larger, shared context is the sphere of culture with which I am concerned. Rawls's claim that the justifications must be political does not change the fact that the enveloping unity to which such arguments apply is nevertheless an overarching culture, transacting with the many cultures within it. An apt metaphor here is the tapestry, in which many different threads make up the whole. There is no limit to the number of layers of culture, yet they make up a unity, which itself can be the locus of demands for justice.⁶⁷ The tapestry metaphor suggests that the process of addressing conflicts of culture is akin to sorting out the tensions in the different threads that make up the tapestry. In addition, the incorporation of different threads enriches

1 the tapestry, and the combination of strings in balance yields greater
 2 strength as a whole than any individual strand on its own. Given these
 3 considerations, it is vital for people to theorize about how and why there
 4 are or should be limitations to what is acceptable for justice in the various
 5 cultural interactions of diverse societies. The complexity of the topic here
 6 calls for clarification of the numerous premises that together lead to the
 7 central claim of this work, a task to which I turn now.

8 The first premise of the argument of this book has been mentioned
 9 already, but is repeated here, where I highlight each moving forward, one
 10 at a time.

11 *Premise 1: Culture can enable or inhibit the pursuit of justice.*

12 The literature has attended too little to Rawls's distinction about what
 13 he calls the two facets of self-respect. One aspect of his point concerns
 14 a sense of a person's own value, but the other concerns their confidence
 15 that one's plan of life is within one's power to pursue. That aspect of
 16 Rawls's concerns is lumped into the term "self-respect," but could not a
 17 person who is perfectly self-respecting live in an unjust society in which
 18 they are given little cause to believe that their plan of life is within their
 19 ability to pursue? When I see a four-ton boulder, I know from experience
 20 that it would be absurd for me to consider lifting it up straight with my
 21 arms, legs, and back alone. I know from my interactions with the world
 22 that something of that weight is not worth my time. What if a reasonable
 23 plan of life is made impossible by the immense weight of poverty and
 24 racism? What about hopes for a fair trial in a courthouse over which the
 25 Confederate battle flag is flying? Returning to the boulder analogy, what
 26 we do when we wish to move a boulder is to employ tools and techniques
 27 that amplify one's power, such as levers and artifacts like gas-fueled
 28 construction machines. Culturally speaking, one can confront time and
 29 again reason to doubt that society will be sufficiently fair to make one's
 30 plan of life possible. Or one can lack the education and tools needed to
 31 move impediments to one's aims. When we cannot move the boulder, we
 32 figure out how to cope with it, go around it, or otherwise ignore it. It is
 33 important to note, furthermore, that lacking in education is not a fault
 34 of one's own, particularly when the wider public intentionally narrows
 35 the scope and power of public education.⁶⁸ Sadly, liberal philosophers,
 36 including Rawls, advocate for a narrow public education⁶⁹ to avoid con-
 37 flicts with people's different backgrounds, prioritizing noninterference over
 38 democratic empowerment.

Rawls is understood to be a philosopher in the liberal tradition. Liberalism centers on liberty of the individual, rooted in the idea that people should be maximally free to pursue their aims in a way consistent with like liberty for others. Both in *A Theory of Justice* and then even further in his follow-up book, *Political Liberalism*, Rawls inclines toward the argument that the dominant political tradition of the Western world hinges upon an outlook that calls for minimal interference in people's lives so that people may be maximally free. It is in this context that I identify the second premise of the argument of this book, namely:

Premise 2: The liberal norm of equal citizenship and its implications for a culture of justice conflict in many ways with liberalism's further norm of minimalist interference in people's lives and culture.

After all, if each person is to be maximally free, then it is perfectly plausible that a dominant majority will see as natural and to its own benefit to make up and sustain a culture in which its dominance and supremacy are supported culturally and embedded in the social fabric of society. Books for children can teach kids to count with humor at the expense of the less fortunate children, such as in examples like "Ten Little Nigger Boys," in which a young boy is eliminated from the story one at a time, often in developments that involve the death of the child.⁷⁰ The text of the book was even put to music.⁷¹ In other contexts, young people learned of "Ten Little Indians."⁷² Today, parents teach children about "Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed." In short, what parents read to their children to teach them how to count could have substantial consequences on how people think about others. I return to this subject especially in chapter 4. At bottom, however, it is important to note that what people choose to do with their liberty can have an effect on the ways in which disadvantaged groups interact with the world and do or do not experience the conditions that give them confidence that they can expect a fair chance in any number of life's tests and trials.

A significant body of research has weighed in on the subject of self-respect. To be sure and as I have noted, there are matters on which I agree with Andrew Kernohan's book *Liberalism, Equality, and Cultural Oppression*. Kernohan recognizes that culture can be a force for oppression and injustice. Steven Young, in his extended review of Kernohan's book in the *University of Toronto Law Journal*, notes that "Kernohan's conception of the manner in which culture shapes individual preferences is a major advance over the accounts of most of his liberal contemporaries."⁷³ I

1 support Kernohan's claim that culture is an important force and target for
 2 efforts to pursue justice, but with Young, I agree that "Kernohan focuses
 3 almost exclusively on the knowledge that individuals possess, rather than
 4 the process by which individuals come to know their own interests."⁷⁴ In
 5 other words, Kernohan and most in the liberal tradition tend to underes-
 6 timate the importance of education and of those forces that can get in the
 7 way not only of a person's self-respect, but of that second part of Rawls's
 8 conception that he strangely calls self-respect, namely people's confidence
 9 in their ability to pursue meaningful life plans. That confidence is affected
 10 by others. For these reasons, I turn to Dewey for insight. First, Dewey is
 11 a strong advocate for the advancement of democratic values in education.
 12 Second, he calls for a term more appropriate than "self-respect" for the
 13 second aspect of Rawls's meaning, namely "a sense of one's positive power."

14 When I have a sense of my positive power, I do not lack self-respect
 15 if I fail to believe that I can lift the four-ton rock with only my bare arms,
 16 legs, and back. Rather, I have experience of the world that gives me a
 17 sense of what powers I have or lack, given the facts of the world and its
 18 repeated reactions to my efforts. If we accept the importance of Rawls's
 19 directive, however, as I do, if not thinking his terminology is ideal, then
 20 we must aim for both the development of self-respect in all people as
 21 well as a sense of their own positive power. Thus, the third premise of
 22 my argument runs as follows:

23 *Premise 3: A culture of justice involves the conditions necessary for*
 24 *the development of self-respect and a sense of positive power in all people.*

25 A further and important feature of my argument about self-respect
 26 and the need for a new term for what Rawls calls its second aspect is
 27 the matter of whose burden is at work. For it is commonly thought that
 28 persons should have self-respect, as a matter of individual responsibility.
 29 Thomas E. Hill, for example, argues that persons have individual duties
 30 to themselves to be self-respecting, even in the face of oppression.⁷⁵ Alain
 31 Locke's notion of the ethics of culture appears to suggest that all people
 32 could make the decision to aspire to be cultured, furthermore. At the
 33 same time, the idea of how a person's confidence is developed or could
 34 be impeded through experience with one's society and the world can
 35 clearly be beyond one's control, as Polycarp Ikuenobe argues in "Culture
 36 of Racism, Self-Respect, and Blameworthiness."⁷⁶ The point here, and it
 37 appears in the passage above that Rawls acknowledged as much, is that
 38 responsibility for self-respect and a sense of one's own positive power

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in the world is shared, not merely a matter of an individual's choice or responsibility. In sum:

Premise 4: Self-respect and a sense of one's own positive power are not merely individual matters of character, but require conditions for their development for which other people are partly responsible, such as with respect to education, food, healthcare, and enabling opportunities for employment.

When one accepts the importance of external forces in conditioning a person's confidence in their ability to pursue meaningful life plans, that does not necessarily deny the importance of considering the ways in which a person has some responsibility for self-examination and analysis of their experiences. In other words, what makes sense is not some foolish confidence that a person can be anything they want to be, even if that attitude has benefited some people. Barbara Ehrenreich's *Bright-sided* argues that the "relentless promotion of positive thinking has undermined America."⁷⁷ At the same time, approaching one's possibilities with no belief in the potential for one's success is also troubling and self-defeating. A significant number of my African American students when I taught at the University of Mississippi told me that they had a relative who urged them not to go to school there. "You'll get killed!" they were warned. On the one hand, it is foolish not to be concerned about the dangers of racism in America and in Mississippi. On the other hand, when the kids visited the university and believed it to be the right place for them, they had to combat the social and familial pressures that may have nudged them away from some of their life plans achievable only through attendance at that university. For example, there is no other public school of pharmacy in Mississippi than the one at the University of Mississippi, the graduates of whose program are at the time of writing said to earn starting salaries more than \$105,000 today.⁷⁸ Thus, while forces external to ourselves condition our confidence in whether our life plans can reasonably be pursued to fruition, there are ideal attitudes for examining such conditions, involving some amount of openness or optimism to be balanced by a degree of stoicism. This explains, in brief, the next premise:

Premise 5: A sense of positive power is not simply a mindset or a kind of naive confidence, but instead must be informed by realistic feelings and experiences, a kind of stoic pragmatism⁷⁹ or optimism conditioned by the exercise of one's own powers and the experience of others' reactions and responses to such exercise.

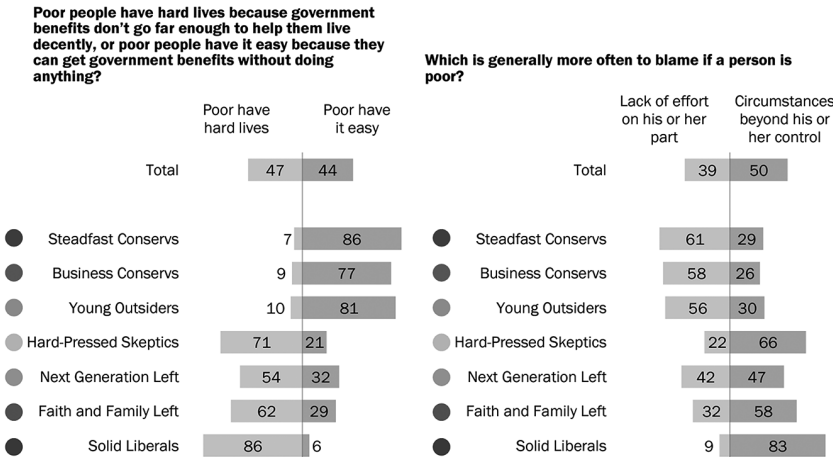
1 Efforts to address the need for public or social contributions to
2 help people are commonly met with worries and criticisms of so-called
3 “social entitlements,” which politicians like former US Representative
4 Paul Ryan have said lead to a culture of dependency.⁸⁰ In response, Anna
5 Maria Santiago has argued that the war on poverty shifted into a war
6 on the poor.⁸¹ In the United States, there are stark differences in points
7 of view concerning whether the lives of the poor are hard or easy. The
8 Pew Research Center, for instance, found that 86 percent of “steadfast
9 conservatives” believed that “the poor have it easy because they can get
10 government benefits without doing anything.” And, in stark yet strikingly
11 balanced contrast, 86 percent of “solid liberals” believe that “the poor have
12 hard lives because government benefits don’t go far enough to help them
13 live decently” (see fig. 1.1).

14 Wherever one falls on the political spectrum, it is generally agreed
15 on that dependency on hard drugs can be dangerous, such as with regard
16

17
18 Figure 1.1. Pew Research Center poll showing how political leaning affects per-
19 ceptions of the causes of poverty. *Source:* “Beyond Red vs. Blue: The Political
20 Typology,” Pew Research Center, Washington DC (June 2014), [https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2014/06/6-26-14-Political-](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2014/06/6-26-14-Political-Typology-release1.pdf)
21 [Typology-release1.pdf](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2014/06/6-26-14-Political-Typology-release1.pdf), 44.

22
23 **Wide Differences Between Right and Left Over Why Some People are Poor**

24 % who say...



39 2014 Political Typology. Q25c & Q53.

40 PEW RESEARCH CENTER

to powerful pain medicines, yet other forms of dependency are normal to live with for life. People come to need glasses, medicines, breathing machines, and more as part of the necessities of life, yet we do not think of such needs as vices. My thinking is further framed by the notion that “No Man Is an Island,”⁸² and the self-made person is, in my view, a pernicious, atomistic myth.⁸³ Thus, while in some narrow senses we know that some forms of dependency are dangerous, we must nevertheless consider the ways in which people have needs that the public must fill. John Dewey was a frequent advocate not merely for negative liberty, sweeping away impediments to freedom, but also for enabling people to exercise and grow their powers. We attend to such needs in small ways already when we provide “free and reduced” breakfast and lunch programs in American schools through the US Department of Agriculture.⁸⁴ While it is true that some stigma can be attached to kids receiving free and reduced lunch, contrary to the expectations of critics of entitlement programs, spending more and providing all schoolchildren with free breakfast and lunch can avoid the stigmatizing feeling and cultural differentiations at work.⁸⁵ I summarize this step of the argument for a culture of justice as follows:

Premise 6: While dependency on others can in some cases become a vice, it is not one inherently. As such, mechanisms that enable the development of self-respect and a sense of positive power should avoid stigmatizing dependency, as all people are in various ways dependent on others.

One of the challenges to the argument I make in this book takes the form of Robert Nozick’s rebuttal to claims about patterns of injustice.⁸⁶ Nozick’s argument can be captured by a strange experience I had at a conference. An architect gave a presentation at a meeting on “Space and Place,” in which he criticized the skyline of Philadelphia. He mocked the city for the juxtaposition of new, modern, and stark buildings next to what he took to be more beautiful and older ones. He bemoaned the ugliness of the skyline. I found his talk strange. No one in particular had intended a certain look to the city’s skyline. No one was to blame for how it looked. In effect, the odd arrangement of the city’s skyline appeared to me to be a consequence of freedom, the freedom of individuals or of groups to pursue their interests in proximity to one another. The skyline that resulted could accidentally turn out to be beautiful, but if it did not, who could be blamed for its appearance?

In retrospect and in fairness to that architect, one can notice that as cities develop, it could make sense for people to decide to care about

1 what their towns and skylines look like. Of course, to do so would be to
 2 prioritize one set of values over the freedom of individuals and groups to
 3 do as they please. In Charleston, South Carolina, for example, Rainbow
 4 Row is a beautiful lane of homes, and a historic one at that. There are great
 5 restrictions on freedoms for those who wish to sell or purchase homes
 6 there. An aesthetic decision made in the community determined the fact.
 7 Similarly, when a city wishes to have a certain look or to prioritize some
 8 things over others, it might decide that no building can be built above a
 9 given height. Washington, DC, for instance, is regulated by the Height of
 10 Buildings Act of 1910, creating “an unmistakable skyline and unobstructed
 11 views to civic symbols,” according to the US National Capital Planning
 12 Commission.⁸⁷ Homeowners’ associations abound, furthermore, creating
 13 rules that are to be followed regarding landscaping, home maintenance,
 14 appearance, and waste removal practices, among other matters.

15 The thing to note here is that while at one point in time the resulting
 16 pattern of free individuals’ activities may be no one’s fault, once people
 17 band together and make decisions collaboratively, they certainly can and
 18 often do decide to choose some patterns over others, some regulations over
 19 others. As such, just because some matters are the results of individual
 20 actions does not mean that what is everyone’s responsibility is thereby no
 21 one’s. Similarly, when it comes to culture, we can see that the patterns
 22 that emerge from individual action can be matters of public and shared
 23 responsibility. Hence, the next premise runs as follows:

24 *Premise 7:* The powers that establish, maintain, and change culture are
 25 shared among individuals and institutions. Correspondingly, responsibility
 26 for culture is also public and shared. In short, it is false to say that what
 27 is everyone’s responsibility is therefore no one’s responsibility in particular.

28 The final premise of this book concerns one of the most difficult
 29 areas to address for those who fervently wish for a culture of justice, and
 30 it harkens back to the second premise, concerning the tensions inherent
 31 within liberalism. In particular, in the United States, a central and founding
 32 value of the Constitution is the protection of the freedom of speech. It is
 33 so foundational because if people are not free to express their ideas, how
 34 can a society be said to truly consider all perspectives on how to think
 35 and what to do? There are many reasons why the United States profoundly
 36 protects the freedom of speech, yet by means of the exercise of that free-
 37 dom, individuals can purposefully aim to express ideas that undercut a
 38 culture of justice. The point here is to acknowledge and consider again

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the challenge that is not new, yet is always vital, namely concerning the question of how a tolerant society is to treat and react to intolerant people and actions. Dewey, the philosopher of democracy, was a profound and vocal defender of the freedom of expression, yet he argued in 1941 that “There are still many, too many, persons who feel free to cultivate and express racial prejudices as if they were within their personal rights, not recognizing how the attitude of intolerance infects, perhaps fatally as the example of Germany so surely proves, the basic humanities without which democracy is but a name.”⁸⁸ Prejudices that can be viciously dangerous for democracy are not limited to matters of race, of course, but also are troubling on many other fronts, too many to name briefly here. Key examples in the United States have taken the form of hate speech and religious attacks on others. These areas are important to address in this project to show that while expression is defensible, when such acts become a kind of cultivation of hatred, concerns are warranted. Similar arguments have been made regarding sedition, on which Geoffrey Stone has concentrated,⁸⁹ a thinker to whose arguments I return in chapter 7. In addition, there are, I argue, areas in which previously protected forms of speech have yet to be sufficiently appreciated as the dangerous threats they are. These areas of consideration about the need for a culture of justice must be most carefully considered both because they involve something of profound importance, as in the freedom of thought and expression, as well as in the freedom of religion, and because they represent areas of powerful resistance to the effort to strive for justice. Hence, the final premise of the book is summarized as follows:

Premise 8: The remaining tensions inherent in liberalism impeding a culture of justice must be overcome, especially with regard to the protection of hateful speech, religious attacks on self-respect, and resistance to social norms of cultural respectfulness.

Together these premises support the thesis of this book, which I present in detailed and abbreviated forms:

Conclusion: There is a shared, public obligation to establish and maintain a culture that maximally fosters self-respect in all people and a sense of their own positive power to pursue meaningful life plans.

Abbreviated thesis: There is a shared, public obligation to establish and maintain a culture of justice.

I have gathered the premises and conclusion in the following summary.

1 *Premise 1:* Culture can enable or inhibit the pursuit of justice.

2

3 *Premise 2:* The liberal norm of equal citizenship and its impli-
4 cations for a culture of justice conflict in many ways with
5 liberalism's further norm of minimalist interference in people's
6 lives and culture.

7

8 *Premise 3:* A culture of justice involves the conditions necessary
9 for the development of self-respect and a sense of positive
10 power in all people.

11

12 *Premise 4:* Self-respect and a sense of one's own positive power
13 are not merely individual matters of character, but require
14 conditions for their development for which other people are
15 partly responsible, such as with respect to education, food,
16 healthcare, and enabling opportunities for employment.

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18 *Premise 5:* A sense of positive power is not simply a mindset
19 or a kind of naive confidence, but instead must be informed
20 by realistic feelings and experiences, a kind of stoic pragma-
21 tism or optimism conditioned by the exercise of one's own
22 powers and the experience of others' reactions and responses
23 to such exercise.

24

25 *Premise 6:* While dependency on others can in some cases
26 become a vice, it is not one inherently. As such, mechanisms
27 that enable the development of self-respect and a sense of
28 positive power should avoid stigmatizing dependency, as all
29 people are in various ways dependent on others.

30

31 *Premise 7:* The powers that establish, maintain, and change
32 culture are shared among individuals and institutions. Corre-
33 spondingly, responsibility for culture is also public and shared.
34 In short, it is false to say that what is everyone's responsibility
35 is therefore no one's responsibility in particular.

36

37 *Premise 8:* The remaining tensions inherent in liberalism
38 impeding a culture of justice must be overcome, especially
39 with regard to the protection of hateful speech, religious attacks

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on self-respect, and resistance to social norms of cultural respectfulness.

Conclusion: There is a shared, public obligation to establish and maintain a culture that maximally fosters self-respect in all people and a sense of their own positive power to pursue meaningful life plans.

Abbreviated thesis: There is a shared, public obligation to establish and maintain a culture of justice.

The Plan

To argue for a culture of justice, I begin with a chapter considering the ideal of justice. For, while I draw on resources from the philosophical pragmatist John Dewey, ideals are nevertheless important, practical tools for living better in the real world. To be sure, ideals will never be achieved in full, but that does not keep them from being valuable guides for how to get closer to goals that we aim to achieve. In addition, what appears to be the ideal today nevertheless can be refined, and the goal for tomorrow will continue to remain on the moral horizon. The recognition of these characterizations of justice is important for keeping in mind that progress will always and only ever be partial, that justice will be ever evolving, yet nevertheless that ideals can be meaningful. In a nod to a concept drawn from fellow pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce's philosophy, an inspiration for Dewey, I call chapter 1 "Justice as an Evolving Regulative Ideal."

Next, it is important to appreciate how a set of theories has come to converge on the importance of culture for justice. In fact, Peirce's philosophy of science included an appreciation for the convergence of theories on the truth. When different theories, approached from various directions, come to converge on a conclusion, that is at any given time taken to be a strong indication that there lies the truth. This chapter considers the convergence of the social and political theories of John Dewey, John Rawls, and Richard Rorty on the vital importance of culture for the sake of justice. Hence, chapter 2 is titled "Convergence on Culture."

After that, the next chapter examines the set of impediments to a culture of justice, taken as an overview attended to in greater detail than I could offer in this introduction. Chapter 3 is therefore titled "Impediments

1 to a Culture of Justice.” The chapter begins with further examination of
 2 some background tensions that lead Rawls to attend to the matter of cul-
 3 ture in justice. Then, I categorize two forms of challenge, the first of which
 4 are theoretical and the second of which are difficulties for implementation.
 5 Responses to these challenges are addressed throughout the course of the
 6 book, but this chapter revisits several introduced here and adds more that
 7 must be considered in a robust defense of the need for and efforts to estab-
 8 lish and maintain a culture of justice.

9 Chapter 4 centers on the distinction between the concept of self-
 10 respect and a sense of a person’s own positive power. Both conceptions are
 11 taken to be important much in the way that Rawls notes in *A Theory of*
 12 *Justice*. The distinction is emphasized both for its rhetorical force and its
 13 consequences for concepts of responsibility, respect for oppressed groups,
 14 and appreciation for people’s self-respect even when they have reason to
 15 doubt that their unjust society will truly give them a fair chance in life
 16 and in court trials. As I have noted, an ideal and guiding attitude for
 17 testing one’s own potential for positive power is captured in the concept of
 18 stoic pragmatism, a term I borrow from philosopher John Lachs.⁹⁰ Hence,
 19 chapter 4 is titled “Self-Respect, Positive Power, and Stoic Pragmatism.”

20 Chapter 5 examines an application of the test of the distinction
 21 between self-respect and positive power in the case of poverty. Titled
 22 “Culture, Poverty, and Positive Empowerment,” the chapter aims to con-
 23 sider the ways in which challenging economic conditions can get in the
 24 way of people’s development of a sense of their positive powers to pursue
 25 meaningful life plans. In the United States, people have often presumed
 26 that there is equality of opportunity for all, that anyone can become pres-
 27 ident, yet there are compelling reasons to believe that the path of upward
 28 mobility has been on a downward spiral.⁹¹ The purpose here is to consider
 29 the various ways in which people’s aims and purposes can be empowered,
 30 both through the removal of barriers and through the positive support of
 31 the growth of their powers to pursue meaningful life plans. And, as much
 32 as possible, policy ought to eliminate stigmatizing forces that get in the
 33 way of people’s participation in the channels of opportunity.

34 Next, I focus chapter 6 on the libertarian challenge to patterns, con-
 35 sidering how and why we should think that the obligation to establish a
 36 culture of justice is both public and shared. Chapter 6, on “Obligations for
 37 Culture as Public and Shared,” considers education in the broad sense as
 38 the transmission of culture. Here, I note the ways in which liberal political
 39 philosophers have tended not to appreciate Dewey’s claim that “democracy

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is a way of life.”⁹² The implications of this chapter are not limited to the power and need for democratic schools, but also for related practices in news media and social media engagement. Supporting democracy and the needs for justice is a public obligation and is shared, even if and when people fail or purposefully resist such expectations. The point is to note that, like in a fish tank, the cultural environment of the water is one in which we all swim. There is therefore a need for the cultivation of a culture of justice, much in the way that scholars in the field of education have studied the question of “what kind of citizen” schools should be working to cultivate.⁹³ My version of the question to ask and my thesis to answer: What kind of culture? A culture of justice.

Chapter 7 then turns to the deeply difficult matter of the freedom of speech, especially as concerns cases of hate speech and the need to revisit questions about the nature of threats. Titled “Free Speech and the Cultivation of Hatred,” chapter 7 centers on the distinction very briefly introduced in this chapter between mere expression of ideas for their consideration versus the cultivation of hatred and other forms of threats on self-respect and people’s senses of their own positive power to pursue meaningful life plans.

Finally, chapter 8 returns to the subtler matters of culture, those about which Ben Carson thought people are threatening to “destroy our nation.” Titled “Correcting Political Correctness,” the chapter examines the popular term and reasons why its very language seems imperfectly suited to address the concerns that prompt its use. At the same time, the need for a kind of care and concern for respecting people’s cultures seems both called for and reasonable to expect and ask of people. Where conflicts between cultures exist, compromises can be sought and at least conflicts minimized with respect for differences. At the same time, those problems about which “political correctness” is invoked are matters on a spectrum that raise more or fewer concerns for people on both sides of the political aisle, though usually about different things and values. Relabeling the need for what political correctness might better refer to could be of some help, while we both aim to appreciate the need for cultural respectfulness, yet with some understanding that matters of culture take time to change. Public consciousness can be changed gradually and with occasional revolutionary moments and phases. Nevertheless, whether on matters large or small, the aim ultimately can be to establish and maintain a culture that maximally fosters self-respect for all people and a sense of their own positive power to pursue meaningful life plans.

Notes

Introduction

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52. I owe aspects of my understanding of culture to Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, in Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (1934; repr., New York: Mariner Books, 2005), xiii. In Mead's preface to Benedict's book, she refers to culture as the "systematic body of learned behavior which is transmitted from parents to children." It is worth noting that different fields of study may concern themselves with different aspects or senses of the term "culture" and for their own various reasons. For example, Ralf Michaels writes in "Legal Culture" that "Legal culture stands between law and culture, with unclear borders in both directions. According to a widespread understanding, legal culture represents that cultural background of law which creates the law and which is necessary to give meaning to law." See Ralf Michaels, "Legal Culture," in *Oxford Handbook*

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19 uate his sense of culture as something that is more expansive, something that
20 all people experience as part of their daily lives. There, he writes that “I, too,
21 confess that at one time of my life I may have been guilty of thinking of culture
22 as cake contrasted with bread. Now I know better. Real, essential culture is baked
23 into our daily bread or else it isn’t truly culture.” See Alain Locke, “Frontiers of
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- 26 59. Arnold Rampersad, “The Book That Launched the Harlem Renaissance,”
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- 29 61. For many years teaching students how to write, it bothered me to see
30 the use of “their,” a plural pronoun, associated with “a person,” a singular. Other
31 languages make use of a gender-neutral singular pronoun, however, which is quite
32 useful, and matters of gender today have called for some rethinking of the mat-
33 ter. At the same time, the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes a use of the “singular
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36 [blogpost] *Oxford English Dictionary*, September 4, 2018, [https://public.oed.com/](https://public.oed.com/blog/a-brief-history-of-singular-they/)
37 [blog/a-brief-history-of-singular-they/](https://public.oed.com/blog/a-brief-history-of-singular-they/). Others have endorsed such usage, such as
38 *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary* and the style guide of the American Psychological
39 Association. See “Singular ‘They,’” *Merriam-Webster.com*, September 2019, [https://](https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/singular-nonbinary-they)
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66. An example of reconciliation in religious conflict could be useful here, such as in regard to the saying “spare the rod, spoil the child,” a simplification of biblical scripture. The thought for many is that it means that one must hit one’s children to avoid spoiling them. The question of which rod is at issue reveals the insight that it is the shepherd’s rod. The good shepherd does not punish or seek to hurt one’s sheep, but rather to tap them to give direction. The latter interpretation is nonviolent and the former is violent. Assuming that one must dismiss the scripture if one is a Christian advocate for nonviolence misses the incredible potential variety of interpretations of doctrines. Assuming irreconcilability could well indicate a lack of imagination, a cynicism concerning the potential for democracy to yield solutions to conflicts where people could not see them before.

67. I am indebted to Tibor Solymosi for calling my attention to the tapestry metaphor, which we can find in a number of writings, including Larry Hickman’s foreword to a work on John Dewey and Chinese education. See Larry A. Hickman, foreword to *John Dewey and Chinese Education*, ed. ZHANG Huajun and Jim GARRISON (Boston: Brill, 2022), ix–xi, xi. Capitalization here is listed as in the original.

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- 3 72. Helen Jill Fletcher and Janet P. D'Amato, *10 Little Indians: A Counting*
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- 6 49 (1999): 151–65, 156.
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- 11 thiness," *Public Affairs Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (2004): 27–55.
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- 16 [olemiss.edu/careers-in-pharmacy/](https://pharmacy.olemiss.edu/careers-in-pharmacy/).
- 17 79. As I clarify in the pages to come, I borrow the term "stoic pragmatism"
- 18 from John Lachs's book by the same name. When I refer in this book to the
- 19 philosophical tradition known as Pragmatism, I capitalize the name, unless it is
- 20 in quoted material or in Lachs's terminology. See John Lachs, *Stoic Pragmatism*
- 21 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).
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- 31 *Limits* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014). See also Brian Miller and
- 32 Mike Lapham, *The Self-Made Myth: And the Truth about How Government Helps*
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- 35 ger Tells Students," CNBC.com, May 15, 2017, [https://www.cnbc.com/2017/05/15/](https://www.cnbc.com/2017/05/15/arnold-schwarzenegger-channels-elizabeth-warren-in-u-of-houston-speech.html)
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- 37 84. Craig Cruse and David Powers, "Estimating School District Poverty
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- 42 The Impact of Universal Free Meals on Student Performance," Syracuse University
- 43 Center for Policy Research, 235 (2017), <https://surface.syr.edu/cpr/235>.

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87. “Heights and Views,” National Capital Planning Commission, <https://www.ncpc.gov/topics/heights/>.
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91. Fareed Zakaria, “The Downward Path of Upward Mobility,” *Washington Post*, November 9, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-downward-path-of-upward-mobility/2011/11/09/gIQAegpS6M_story.html.
92. John Dewey, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us,” in *America’s Public Philosopher*, ed. Eric Thomas Weber (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 62.
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Chapter 1

1. David Walker, *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, ed. Peter Hinks (1829; repr., University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).
2. Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
3. Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).
4. Bell’s *Silent Covenants* makes the most extensive case for this. In addition, Elizabeth Anderson has more recently argued in favor of integration as a moral imperative, though recognizing that *Brown*, while well intended in her view, was indeed insufficient to achieve integrated communities. Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).
5. Another version of this outlook gives up on the meaningfulness of justice in worldly affairs. Such a religious response sees justice as something only possible in the afterlife, as divine justice.
6. Martin Luther King Jr., “Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience,” in *The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 43–53, 52. The phrase is believed to have originated from abolitionist preacher Theodore Parker, according to John Haynes Holmes, “Salute to Montgomery,” *Liberation* 1, no. 10 (1956): 5. I am indebted for this latter reference to Clayborn Carson, senior ed., *The Papers of*