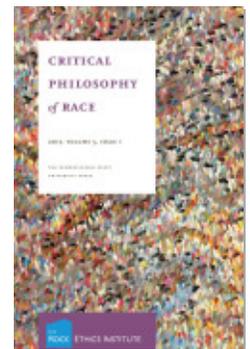Pragmatism, Racial Solidarity, and Negotiating Social Practices: Evading the Problem of "Problem Solving" Talk

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PRAGMATISM, RACIAL SOLIDARITY, AND NEGOTIATING SOCIAL PRACTICES

Evading the Problem of "Problem Solving" Talk

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Abstract

In his review of Eddie Glaude's *Exodus!* "Politics, Racial Solidarity, *Exodus!*" Robert Gooding-Williams argues that, despite sympathizing with Glaude's conception of racial solidarity, he finds that "Glaude's approach to racial solidarity is not pragmatic enough, precisely because the myth of the essential black subject still haunts it, its claims to the contrary notwithstanding." This article challenges Gooding-Williams's reading of *Exodus!*, demonstrating that despite his grasp of Glaude's conceptual map, he misses precisely what is at stake for Glaude's pragmatic notion of racial solidarity. Understanding what is at stake for Glaude's conception of racial solidarity, one sees how the subtlety of his pragmatism actually resists any lingering essentialism. However, this article concludes by showing that despite Glaude's evasion of Gooding-Williams's charge, it is his emphasis on the Deweyan language of "problem solving" that courts the criticism in the first place. To circumvent the potential for misunderstanding, this article emphasizes a "negotiation of social practices" as an alternative to Glaude's emphasis on the language of "problem solving activity."

Keywords: pragmatism, racial solidarity, problem solving activity, negotiation of social practices

In recent decades a number of scholars of African American religious and political thought have turned to the work of the classical American pragmatists as a way, methodologically, to think through some of the challenges we face in the field. Thinking in particular about the question of racial solidarity and its often-implicit specter, the dilemma concerning essentialism, in this article, I want to return the favor, and show how paying attention to black intellectual debate can help evade a potential problem pragmatism encounters.

In his review of Eddie Glaude's *Exodus!* ("Politics, Racial Solidarity, *Exodus!*"), Robert Gooding-Williams makes two major moves.[1] The first of these consists in his exploration "of the issue of racial solidarity through a detailed engagement" with Glaude's text.[2] The central argument here is that, despite sympathizing with his conception of racial solidarity, Gooding-Williams finds that "Glaude's approach to racial solidarity is *not pragmatic enough*, precisely because the myth of the essential black subject still haunts it, its claims to the contrary notwithstanding."[3] The thrust of Gooding-Williams's second move is to "explore some of the implications of Glaude's views for an engagement with the political thought of the early W.E.B. DuBois . . . and for a reconsideration of Frederick Douglass's contributions to African American political philosophy."[4] The main argument here is that "Douglass's second autobiography presents a picture of black racial solidarity that, while race conscious, avoids Glaude's residual essentialism."[5]

For the purposes of this article, I will focus only on Gooding-Williams's first move, as it most directly pertains to the question of a pragmatic account of racial solidarity. Here I read *Exodus!* against Gooding-Williams to demonstrate that despite his grasp of Glaude's "conceptual map," he misses precisely what is at stake for Glaude's pragmatic notion of racial solidarity. In short, once one recognizes what is at stake for Glaude's conception of racial solidarity, the subtlety of his pragmatism becomes all the more important to resist the charge of any residual essentialism. However, and herein lies the favor to pragmatism, I conclude by showing that although Glaude evades the charge of essentialism, it is his emphasis on John Dewey's language of "problem solving activity" that opens the door to Gooding-Williams's worry in the first place. To circumvent the concern about essentialism, I propose a *negotiation of certain social practices* as an

alternative description of the formation of publics to Glaude's emphasis (à la Dewey) on the notion of "problem solving activity."[6]

Gooding-Williams argues that Glaude's mapping of African American politics involves four distinctions, which he presents as follows:

> The first is the distinction between a pragmatist notion of racial solidarity and a cultural nationalist, or "organic," notion of the same; the second is between political and cultural conceptions of the black nation; the third is a distinction between two inflections of the politics of respectability—on one hand, "the privatization of discrimination," on the other hand, "immanent conversation"; the fourth and final distinction is between an insurrectionary politics and what Glaude calls a "soul craft politics."[7]

The upshot of the first distinction in Glaude's view is that not all articulations of black solidarity require essentialist assumptions about race. Thinking pragmatically about African American deployments of race language, Glaude extends an insight presented by the editors of *Black Nationalism in America* (*BNA*), namely "that the simplest expression of black nationalism was racial solidarity" (*Ex*, 10). Glaude finds this to be an important insight because it provides a way to account for how

> Black people caught in the violence of a racist culture, struggling to find and generate meaning (possibility) for themselves, turn to religious narrative to make sense of the absurdity of their condition, to cultivate solidarity with similarly situated selves, and to develop a self consciousness essential for problem solving. . . . [S]imply the conviction that African Americans must take the responsibility for liberating themselves. (*Ex*, 10)

This formulation allows Glaude to evade some of the problems that plague many of the positions held by theorists of black nationalism when they attempt to delineate the "basis of a common condition and color" (*Ex*, 10).

Recognizing the importance of Glaude's formulation, Gooding-Williams notes that:

> The pragmatist notion of racial solidarity eschews the cultural nationalist belief that there is something deep-rooted and organic that binds

black people together. For the pragmatist, black political solidarity is a function of the common problems faced by similarly situated African Americans.[8]

However, it is here, and between the second and third distinctions, that Gooding-Williams finds fault with Glaude's argument. Noting the correlation between Glaude's second and third distinctions—that is, a distinction between political and cultural uses of nation language which tends to correspond with "outside" and "inside" approaches to problems facing the black community—Gooding-Williams isolates a tension in Glaude's language when he also ties the 'inside' approach to common problems to 'the politics of respectability.'

Gooding-Williams elucidates the tension when explicating Glaude's discussion of the National Negro Convention Movement, saying:

> As Glaude initially describes it, the distinction between the privatization of discrimination (hereafter "PD") and an immanent conversation about racial discrimination and its effects (hereafter "IC") is a distinction within the Convention movement's "inside" approach and is supposed to capture the differences between two separate "inflections" of the politics of respectability. As we shall see, however, Glaude later contradicts this initial description, or, to put the point more generously, modifies his position to suggest that the distinction he really has in mind is not between PD and IC, but between two modes of IC.[9]

On the one hand, Glaude argues that PD located "the problem of racism outside [of] government regulation and placed it in a private domain with public implications," while IC responded to "the problem of racism by accenting the agency of black people, insisting that they were capable of responding, through self-critique and improvement, to the problems facing the black community" (*Ex*, 118–19). The distinction here is between a view which holds that racism persists because the morality and behavior of black individuals are impoverished, and a view which holds that black people must hold each other accountable and, working in solidarity, act in response to the problems facing the community as a whole. The distinction is subtle. For PD the issue is the critique and altering of inner aspects of individual selves in order to transform the way blacks are perceived by

the state, whereas for IC the issue is for the community to act together, holding its members to internally generated standards, to resolve the racialized problems they face.

On the other hand, in his discussion of Henry Highland Garnet's address to the Convention in 1843, Glaude describes IC differently, saying that the "*immanent conversation about the circumstance of black people with the two different inflections* that created a domain of self-determining action on the part of black people—confronted, with a violent posture, the domain of the state" (*Ex*, 158, emphasis added). Gooding-Williams notes that the distinction here is not between PD and IC, but between two inflections of IC. Picking up on this slippage in Glaude's language, Gooding-Williams argues that the latter description represents, in his view, "Glaude's considered and perhaps most defensible position, PD (one of the 'two different inflections') is a species of IC, not its antithesis, and the black middle class's politics of respectability is a part of that immanent conversation of the Convention movement."[10]

Although Gooding-Williams is right, Glaude's language *is* inconsistent here, I suggest that the inconsistency is instructive. It reveals an implicit difficulty with which Glaude is dealing.[11] Part of Glaude's task is to view the transition of African American uses of nation language (between 1831 and 1843) from a conversation among downtrodden, yet creative, selves to the development of a sense of people-hood, against the odds. A version of nation language that eventually brings critique to bear against the repressive state apparatus even within conversations about their inner private selves. Implicit within this complex formulation are the factors that there was an "outside" approach (an overtly "political" polemic toward the state), and an "inside" approach (on the one hand, a people who viewed themselves as morally impoverished in need of personal transformation, yet, on the other hand, having conversations about how their activity could transform both *their* souls and the nation's). Or as Glaude puts it, "I distinguish the two approaches, then, to call attention to the different registers at which ideas of we-ness and we-intentions operate" (*Ex*, 114–15).

To hold these tensions together, Glaude relies on the work of Michael Walzer. He argues that Walzer's interpretation of how political education and civic participation operates in "Exodus politics" illuminates the need to distinguish between PD and IC within a politics of respectability. Glaude contends,

> For Walzer, the slavishness learned in Egypt takes two forms. First, the Israelites internalized a view of themselves as defeated. . . . Second, the Israelites had what can be thought of as an Egyptian idea of freedom. . . . Walzer describes two sorts of responses to these two forms of slavishness. One states that the liberation of the oppressed will require an act of God or the heroic energy of a vanguard group. The other believes that liberation will be achieved, to some degree, by the oppressed or "at least be the work of the oppressed themselves." This distinction between a vanguard and a social-democratic reading of Exodus helps us, I believe, to understand the difference between the two inflections within a politics of respectability. Proponents of one view seek racial uplift but see the people as downtrodden, incapable of liberating themselves. The other understands that freedom requires a cooperative effort and a stern discipline among fellows if they are to take on responsibility for the community. But neither is possible without the initial commitment to take charge of themselves. (*Ex*, 119–20)

With this in mind, it is important to note that Glaude's distinction between PD and IC remains consistent throughout his historical reconstruction of the uses of Exodus and nation language in the Convention movement, up until 1843. It is in his discussion of Henry Highland Garnet that Glaude's inconsistency becomes apparent. However, he presages this. Glaude says, "Henry Highland Garnet's address of 1843 poses an interesting challenge to Walzer's conception (and by extension my conception) of Exodus politics and political messianism" (*Ex*, 145–46). Garnet's rejection of the typical Exodus model came as a transition of sorts, perhaps *the* transition, in which African Americans' commitment to take charge for themselves gets articulated in terms of a violent confrontation to the state. In this sense, although Gooding-Williams is correct to charge that Glaude's language is inconsistent, he misses that this 'inconsistency' is part of the story. Not only does Garnet's address undermine the PD/IC distinction, it also destabilizes the "outside/inside" distinction. Yet, as we will see, if we pay close attention to what is at stake with this distinction we begin to recognize *just how pragmatic* Glaude's argument actually is. Briefly, by destabilizing the "outside/inside" distinction, Garnet's address demonstrates the point that Glaude goes on to make, namely that black solidarity often exceeds concerns about white proscription. But I jump ahead.

This is not to suggest that Gooding-Williams ignores the way that Garnet's address operates within Glaude's narrative. For instance, in his discussion of the fourth distinction he finds in *Exodus!*—the distinction between insurrectionary politics and soul craft politics—Gooding-Williams acknowledges,

> On Glaude's view, Garnet succeeded in basing an outside approach to common problems on an "inside" approach, in grounding an endorsement of political violence against the American nation-state in an immanent conversation accenting black "agency-as-struggle."[12]

For Glaude, the typical Exodus model, when holding all the tensions mentioned in the previous paragraph together, acted as a soul-craft politics— "an argument over the soul of the nation" (*Ex*, 160).[13] But Garnet's address posed a real challenge to this model. As Glaude emphasizes,

> Garnet's speech was not a jeremiad. The call for violence was not couched in a prophetic language that warned the nation of the wages of sin. In fact, Garnet explicitly rejected attempts to imagine African Americans as a chosen people who reminded America of its covenantal duty to deal justly with others (particularly blacks). America, for him, was not the issue. (*Ex*, 161)

Yet understanding how Garnett undermines the PD/IC and outside/inside distinctions is crucial to grasping the ways in which Glaude's pragmatic account of racial solidarity evades reliance on a form of racial essentialism.

However, it is at this juncture that Gooding-Williams claims to find an implicit form of racial essentialism haunting Glaude's argument. Acknowledging the significance of Glaude's position for political philosophy, Gooding-Williams says,

> Glaude's idea of an Exodus, soul craft politics is philosophically important because it so effectively puts into question the assumption that cultural nationalism and assimilationism exhaust the options available to African American politics, an assumption that so very often—too often—haunts the philosophical discussions of African American politics.[14]

Nevertheless, Gooding-Williams suggests that even Glaude's option has its limitations, particularly with his "'common problems' notion of racial solidarity."[15] Drawing on a concept developed by Charles Larmore,[16] Gooding-Williams argues that he finds in *Exodus!* a residual "form of *political expressivism*, a politics predicated on a prepolitical idea of 'the meaning of being black.'"[17] The difference between Glaude's position and that of cultural nationalists though, in Gooding-Williams's view, is that his political expressivism "is identified not with something 'deep-rooted,' but with 'common problems.'"[18]

Gooding-Williams's states that

> in our post-Jim Crow or post-Civil Rights era, *we should not take for granted, and will find it ever more dubious to take for granted, that there are problems that an overwhelming majority of (let alone all) blacks see as palpably present and that an overwhelming majority (let alone all) see as palpably demanding collective political mobilization.*[19]

The argument here is that in Glaude's account, racial solidarity is forged through "efforts to respond to [the] *palpably* shared problem" of U.S. racism (*Ex*, 12 emphasis added), but given the diffuse nature of white supremacy in the contemporary U.S., the suggestion that it is a *palpably* shared problem that holds the black community together smuggles in a prepolitical conception of what *that problem is*—thereby also importing a prepolitical conception of race. In response, Gooding-Williams suggests that it may be more plausible to account for racial solidarity "as a function of politics, where political speech and action of African Americans moves African Americans to embrace the belief that they share certain problems (which belief they *might not* otherwise share) and to act accordingly."[20]

However, there are at least three problems with Gooding-Williams's description and criticism of Glaude's position. First, implicit within Gooding-Williams's position appears to be a latent essentialism. For instance, in his response to Glaude, he argues that it should not be taken for granted, "*that there are problems that an overwhelming majority of (let alone all) blacks see as palpably present.*" Questions that must be asked at this juncture are: Who are these *blacks* to whom these palpable problems do not exist? And, on what lines, then, is their racial identity, and solidarity, drawn?

These questions can also be asked of Gooding-Williams's arguments in his *In the Shadow of Du Bois* (especially chapter 6). For example, interrogating Tommie Shelby's *We Who Are Dark*,[21] Gooding-Williams poses a similar challenge to Shelby as he does to Glaude here. Taking seriously one of Shelby's central questions—"What political principles can blacks reasonably expect for other blacks, because they are black, to commit to as a basis for group action?"[22]—Gooding-Williams elaborates, and I think helpfully, on some of the limitations to Shelby's "foundationalism." Shelby's response to the question relies on a distinction he makes between "thin" and "thick" conceptions of blackness.[23] For Shelby, the thin conception of black identity is determined primarily through processes of interpolation. He says that on the thin conception of black identity, "blackness is a vague and socially imposed category of 'racial' difference that serves to distinguish groups on the basis of their members having certain visible, inherited physical characteristics and a particular biological ancestry."[24] However, the problem is to account for a "deeper," thick conception of black identity. Although Shelby provides an account of a thick conception of black identity as multidimensional, Gooding-Williams argues that the account is unconvincing. Insofar as it "includes a thin component,"[25] Shelby's thick conception of blackness cannot act as a basis for black solidarity "that could unite blacks across the class divide."[26] Gooding-Williams's argument, in short, is that ultimately if the thing that connects middle-class blacks, who do not experience anti-black racism in the same ways as lower-class blacks, is their supposed shared thin conception of black identity there is no noncircular reason to expect black elites to embrace Shelby's "core foundational principle—again, that anti-black racism should be eliminated."[27] However, the question that Gooding-Williams never answers himself is, to whom is he referring when he talks about the black people, who will or won't act in solidarity?

Returning to Gooding-Williams's response to Glaude, and following Glaude's pragmatic approach, I propose that we think of blackness as a discursive (or socio-practical) formation. If we think of blackness as the relation between (and consequences of) a number of discourses about race we can talk about who these black people are without presupposing any essential or prepolitical features about them. For example, we know that there are *at least* three critical ways of thinking and talking about blackness in our discourses about race: blackness as having to do with (visible) ancestry; blackness as being part of a particular political history; and blackness

as identification with a particular style or culture.[28] Recognizing that blackness, as a discursive formation, emerges in our conversations and practices about race helps us account for who these black people are that may or may not act in solidarity—that is because "politics" is always already pulling on every individual the moment they enter the world. In short, black people are those whose identity can be said to fall within the ways in which these discourses relate.[29]

A second problem with Gooding-Williams's analysis is that he misreads Glaude's use of the phrase "a palpably shared problem." One of Glaude's initial moves in presenting his pragmatic conception of racial solidarity is to wrest the description of the Black Church as a public out of the hands of Habermasian accounts of the public sphere.[30] In doing so, the 'publicness' of the Black Church (and by extension the Convention movement) is discussed, not in terms of rational-critical discourse, but rather in Deweyan terms. Glaude, like Dewey, views publics emerging as consequences of social practices. Glaude says,

> The consequences of actions are thought of, in [Dewey's] view, in two ways: (1) those that affect only the individuals directly engaged in a particular transaction—these are private transactions—and (2) those with indirect consequences, that is, consequences affecting individuals not immediately concerned with the transaction. These are public only in the sense that the indirect consequences are "extensive, enduring, and serious." A public, then, is formed when some association perceives a common interest in an effort to avoid some consequences and secure others; it "is created through an act of shared practical judgment". (*Ex*, 23)[31]

In this light, it is clear that palpably shared problems are themselves consequences of social practices. When these consequences are "extensive, enduring, and serious," a public is formed. These publics, in turn, maintain a sense of self-as-community in response to these consequences, while attempting to avoid some ends and secure others. Glaude's description is pragmatic, indeed.

This illuminates the third problem with Gooding-Williams's criticism of Glaude's description of a pragmatic conception of racial solidarity. Simply put, Gooding-Williams misses what is at stake for Glaude. This becomes clear in his lack of reflection on the *function* of the distinction

between the political and cultural uses of nation language in *Exodus!* In his discussion of this distinction, Gooding-Williams writes,

> When Glaude speaks of a political idea of the black nation, he has in mind uses of nation language that, while giving some attention to issues of moral reform and social uplift, focus primarily on state power and, specifically, on the racist practices and laws of the nation-state. When, on the other hand, he speaks of the cultural idea of the black nation . . . he has in mind uses of nation language that while giving some attention to American racism, focus primarily on issues of moral reform and social uplift. . . . As I understand Glaude, he believes that *both* ideas of the black nation have served to mobilize pragmatically-forged, problems-based feelings of racial solidarity.[32]

Gooding-Williams's description is correct, but he does not see *why* Glaude holds "that *both* ideas of the black nation have served to mobilize" forms of racial solidarity.

After describing the Black Church as a public in Deweyan terms—that is, as forming in response to problems—Glaude's position is open to the criticism that he, thereby, views African American culture and identity as being entirely predicated by white proscription. This position suggests that African American identity and culture is totally reactive, and is, furthermore, totally determined by white supremacy. Again, this position is merely a restating of the thesis that the slave (and by extension her or his progeny) is merely an extension of the master's will. It is precisely this argument that Glaude's pragmatic conception of racial solidarity is designed to hold at bay.

While arguing that, in some respects, "an idea of racial solidarity among black individuals was impossible without the experiences and relationships of race these individuals held in common" (*Ex*, 54)—i.e., white proscription—Glaude does not "want to image the independent black church movement as a complete reaction to white proscription. This would certainly obscure the more positive role it has had in the formation of black communities" (*Ex*, 23). It is precisely Glaude's pragmatist commitments that allow him to hold these two positions in tension without resorting to a form of essentialism. It is also in this light that Glaude's "outside/inside" distinction becomes critical to his argument.

Although the "inside" approach to problems is always in some respect circumscribed within a racist state, it is not ostensibly *about* the state. The "inside" approach is about the members of the community; it is about their moral and ethical lives; it is where they generate their artistic interests and standards of judgment, but it is not drawn along essentialist lines. Take for example, a mixed-race woman (half-black and half-white)[33] marries a white man and in their happy middle-class suburban life have a son—a boy that has very seldom contact with his mother's black family. For much of his young childhood, his peers noticed little difference between him and them. He never experienced profiling by police or store clerks. Yet, as a teenager watching Allen Iverson's crossover, he began walking with a particular style. And, listening to Jay-Z and Nas, he began talking with a particular inflection. Suddenly, his peers recognize his blackness, as if he started wearing it. To suggest that this young man's blackness revolves around or emerges because of white proscription utterly fails to account for the ways in which processes of identification exceed processes of inter-polation. It is precisely this dynamism that I take to be at stake in Glaude's "outside/inside" distinction. Oftentimes, black people come to own their blackness for existential reasons that exceed the relationship between individuals and the state.

Although Glaude's position evades Gooding-Williams's concerns about essentialism, the worry still makes sense. The problem emerges in Glaude's account of black racial solidarity as "formed in the problem-solving activity of securing some consequences and avoiding others" (*Ex*, 110). Although Glaude's impulse to read racial solidarity pragmatically is correct, his reli-ance on Dewey's notion of problem-solving activity leads him to view com-munity formation on lines that seem too narrow.

In "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy," Dewey presents a picture of the human as an organism, an agent-patient—that is, as a living being who experiences *doings* and *sufferings* within its environments. He says, "Any account of experience must now fit into the consideration that experi-encing means living. . . . Where there is experience, there is a living being. Where there is life, there is a double connection maintained with the envi-ronment."[34] This account highlights the contingent and tragic nature of our existence. However, precisely because of the highly contingent nature of human experience, Dewey views life as being riddled with problems and provides an account of action as being involved primarily with problem-solving. As he argues,

> Given a world like that in which we live, a world in which environing changes are partly favorable and partly callously indifferent, and experience is bound to be prospective in import; for any control attainable by the living creature depends upon what is done to alter the state of things. *Success and failure are the primary "categories" of life; achieving of good and averting of ill are its supreme interests*; hope and anxiety . . . are dominant qualities of experience."[35]

While I find Dewey's account of the twofold aspect of experience (*doing* and *suffering*) quite compelling, I believe that he overstates the case when he contends that success and failure are life's primary categories. For this to be right, it would appear that, despite the simultaneity implicit in the description of the double connection between the human organism, as agent-patient, and the environment, experience is primarily about *suffering* and *responding to suffering*. In turn, it seems that the notion that life is primarily about solving problems ignores important aspects of our *doings*. I am thinking, for example, of formations which emerge around artistic appreciation, as in my example above.[36] In other words, although I agree with Dewey's tragic sensibility, I am unconvinced that "problem-solving" accounts for enough of our *doings* to render all public-formation as primarily problem-solving activity.

I would suggest, then, that rather than thinking about racial solidarity in terms of "problem-solving activity"—and here is the favor to pragmatism—it can be better described in terms of being constantly *negotiated in response to certain social practices* that open up the space within which to secure some ends and avoid others. In its most straightforward sense, I use negotiation precisely to capture the simultaneous priority of doing *and* suffering to human endeavors; often we act, and form publics, in ways, and for reasons, that exceed solving problems.[37] Furthermore, the negotiations at play with regard to racial solidarity are in response to particular social practices.[38]

Nonetheless, *negotiation of certain social practices* must be construed along broader lines than "problem-solving." By focusing so heavily on problem-solving activity, Glaude is forced to defend his position from the thesis that African American culture/politics is merely a reaction to white proscription.[39] By recognizing that individuals are born into stories already being told, to borrow a formulation from Alasdair MacIntyre,[40] and negotiating who they are within their contexts, we note that often they work to

craft identities, and form publics, in ways that exceed their concerns with the state. This is not to argue that Glaude's emphasis on the language of "problem solving activity" is necessarily problematic, but rather to offer a formulation—that of *negotiation of certain social practices*—that at once captures Glaude's pragmatic point, while resisting worries like Gooding-Williams's. In the end though, *Exodus!* is an important text precisely because it recognizes just how highly contingent processes of community formation and racial solidarity are. In fact, it is precisely his illumination of this contingency that allows Glaude to evade the charge of harboring a racialized version of political expressivism.

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NOTES

1. Robert Gooding-Williams, "Politics, Racial Solidarity, *Exodus!*" review of *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America*, by Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 18, no. 2 (2004). Although Gooding-Williams has republished this essay in his book *Look, a Negro!* (New York: Routledge, 2006), I refer to the original journal pagination.
2. Gooding-Williams, "Politics, Racial Solidarity, *Exodus!*," 118.
3. Ibid., 118
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. This is not to suggest that either Glaude's or Dewey's pragmatism are in tension with the notion of the *negotiation of certain social practices*, or that the language of "problem solving activity" is necessarily essentialist. It is rather an attempt to provide a language, still consistent in terms of content with the pragmatist point, that disallows criticisms like Gooding-Williams's.
7. Gooding-Williams, "Politics, Racial Solidarity, *Exodus!*," 118–19
8. Ibid., 119
9. Ibid, 120–21
10. Ibid., 121
11. Again, this is not to deny Glaude's inconsistency, nor to suggest that it was deliberate.

12. Gooding-Williams, "Politics, Racial Solidarity, *Exodus!*," 122

13. Glaude's use of the term soul is influenced by Ralph Ellison. He says in a footnote: "My thinking about 'soul' follows that of Ralph Ellison in his brilliant essay 'What Would America Be Like without Blacks,' in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John Callahan (New York: Modern Library, 1995). Ellison writes, "Without the presence of Negro American style, our jokes, tall tales, even our sports would be lacking in the sudden turns, shocks and swift changes of pace (all jazz-shaped) that serve to remind us that the world is ever unexplored, and that while a complete mastery of life is mere illusion, the real secret of the game is to make life swing. It is the ability to articulate this tragic-comic attitude toward life that explains much of the mysterious power and attractiveness of that quality of Negro American style known as 'soul.' An expression of American diversity within unity, of blackness with whiteness, soul announces the presence of creative struggle against the realities of existence" (*Ellison*, 582; quoted in *Ex*, 189n11).

14. Gooding-Williams, "Politics, Racial Solidarity, *Exodus!*," 123.

15. Ibid.

16. Charles Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

17. Gooding-Williams, "Politics, Racial Solidarity, *Exodus!*," 123. Gooding Williams describes Larmore's notion as the idea "that the political order should express the deepest commitments of its members," in his *In the Shadow of Du Bois*. And while Gooding-Williams is, rightly, suspicious of the implication of what "deepest" means generally, his main problem is with the assumption of a specific form of political expressivism, namely "romantic political expressivism." Gooding-Williams writes: "In general, Larmore conceptualizes romantic political expressivism as the thesis that the identities of peoples are given, or formed, antecedently to the organization of states, and that states, rather than behaving as soul-less, mechanical agents of goals alien to those identities, should reflect, articulate, and nourish them." Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 13. It is this worry, about romantic political expressivism, that animates Gooding-Williams's criticism of Glaude here.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 124

20. Ibid. This is one of the points in which Gooding-Williams's misreading of Glaude's position becomes explicit. Glaude admits, for instance, "In some ways my intent has been to lay aside the debate about racial essentialism and perhaps get us to see that what really counts is not our filiation but our politics. Accusations of being a traitor to the race, often hurled by black nationalists, lose a bit of their punch. We turn instead to debate the merits of positions and the ethical significance of our choices for the future. We also open up space for critical reflection on other issues that confront the community, such as gender and class (*Ex*, 202n. 10).

21. Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

22. Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 225. Shelby asks this question in *We Who Are Dark*, 155.
23. See Shelby, *We Who Are Dark*, chapters 1 and 6.
24. Ibid., 207.
25. Ibid., 209.
26. Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 226–27.
27. Ibid., 228.
28. So rather than thinking of blackness as resulting from thin and thick components, I propose we view it as a discursive formation that emerges from the relationship between the ways in which we talk and think about blackness. In this sense, for instance, one is not black (in a thin sense or otherwise) because of a "socially imposed category of 'racial' difference that serves to distinguish groups on the basis of their members having certain visible, inherited physical characteristics and a particular biological ancestry," but rather because of how we talk about one's ancestry, political history, and culture or style. For example, Ronda Rousey does not suddenly become black because we discover that her great-grandfather was black (the question would still remain what made him black?), but the news sparked discussion about the relationship between her ancestry, the political history with which she identifies (does she make claims about "her people's" history of oppression?), and her style and comportment (does she make claims about blackness being existentially significant to her?). In the end, whether or not Ronda Rousey is viewed as black has less to do with any essentially determinative feature, like biology, and more to do with the myriad of ways in which we talk about blackness.
29. Precisely because essentialist accounts of blackness fail, none of the three discourses isolated above succeed in accounting for "what is blackness?" But, when we look at the ways in which the discourses relate, we begin to see why and how we can, with some consistency, refer to some people, and not others, as black. Doing justice to my claims here will require a longer work in itself.
30. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991); and especially Nancy Fraser's criticism of Habermas in "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy" in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991); see also Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's discussion of both Habermas and Fraser in *Righteous Discontent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
31. It might appear contradictory for Glaude to refer suddenly to the interest in securing some and avoiding other consequences as "common" after his denial of shared problems yielding identical interest or agreement on a course of action. However, upon closer analysis there seems to be no contradiction at all. On the one hand, Glaude denies that common problems yield identical interests (for example racism does not compel all "blacks" to become progressives). On the other hand, Glaude argues that publics are formed when people organize because they perceive certain issues as problems that they have to deal with (for example, some "black" Christians

form a Convention movement to debate strategies to deal with a problem they, at least, agree they share, i.e. racism). Of course, Glaude's book also demonstrates that there was more at stake for the Convention movement than responding to racism.

32. Gooding-Williams, "Politics, Racial Solidarity, *Exodus!*," 120

33. Keep in mind that I'm thinking about blackness as a discursive (and socio-practical) formation.

34. John Dewey, "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 61. The essay was originally published in 1917.

35. Ibid., 64, emphasis added.

36. This is not to dispute that problem-solving activity is central to the formation of many publics (or public associations). However, it is to highlight that we have numerous ways of interacting with our environments. To attribute the formation of public associations simply to responding to problems can miss some of the ways in which we associate as part of our *doings*.

37. In a more technical sense, I use the term negotiation to maintain Dewey's rejection of dualistic accounts of human beings. If we reject subject/object dualisms in account of human beings in relation to the world, and begin with a view of human beings as organisms, many of the metaphysical problems associated with the nature of the subject fall away. This account of negotiation also shares affinities with Jacques Derrida's deployment of the term. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), especially chapter 1.

38. I invoke the phrase social practices both to encompass Dewey's notion of the *environment*, and to emphasize the point that even as individuals negotiate their circumstances in private, those negotiations require (or are implicated in) *social* contexts. Furthermore, I refer to the negotiation of social *practices* because of the ways in which our contexts generate standards by which members, and those contending for membership, evaluate their participation. Although my reference here is most clearly to Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 187; my use of the phrase social practices also closely resembles Brandom's in his account of G. W. F. Hegel and Wilfrid Sellers in Robert Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); and *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), especially chapter 1.

39. This recognition also sheds light on Glaude's emphasis on the question of agency in his *In a Shade of Blue*.

40. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 213.