

underclass. These scholars lament how such social issues, which disproportionately affect black Americans, are too often decontextualized from the political economy that spawned them.

Kendall Thomas points to West's failure to address Louis Farrakhan's homophobia, citing that the loquacious minister had "inflicted (black suffering) on the bodies of gay and lesbian African Americans" by his rhetoric. Angela Davis' excellent essay on the Capitalization of the criminal justice system does not even mention West, nor does Rhonda Williams' personal thesis on lesbianism. Perhaps they should have, whether in support of their views or as a critique. David Lionel Smith defended the Harvard scholar, pointing out that "West's conception (of nihilism) . . . has only the most superficial connections to such arguments" (of underclass black pathology). Stuart Hall rose to referee Steinberg's attack on West, but Hall's rambling discourse is almost incoherent.

Though West is given the last word, he does not produce any substantive responses to any of the specific points made by Thomas and especially by Steinberg, noting that their criticisms are a "misreading" of his work. This is a weak defense, particularly given the depth, breadth, and yes, validity of the criticisms. West should have mounted a far more viable response than what he leaves in a mere two and one-fifth pages at the book's end.

*The House that Race Built* succeeds admirably in breaking new ground on the terrain of racial ideology in the United States. However, the last word on the subject unfortunately falls short.

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**Charles W. Mills. *The Racial Contract*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997). 171 pp, \$19.95 paper.**

Over the past few years I have read a number of articles by Professor Charles Mills. I have found him to be a stimulating thinker and lucid writer. In fact, I had the opportunity to use his article, "Non-Cartesian Sums: Philosophy and the African American Experience" (*Teaching Philosophy*, September 1994) in an NEH seminar that I conducted on multicultural approaches to Honor College teaching. Mills is a significant voice among the small cadre of Black philosophers committed to correction of and expansion beyond the Eurocentric myopia of professional philosophy. In his previous scholarship he demonstrates not only that he is insightful, critical and creative, but that he also grapples with questions and issues that few other philosophers, (including fellow Black philosophers), have dared to address. Of particular note is his

provocative article, "Do Black Men Have a Moral Duty to Marry Black Women" (Journal of Social Philosophy, July 1994).

Mills is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and graduate advisor at the University of Illinois-Chicago. With his probing text, *The Racial Contract*, he now offers us an opportunity to digest his critical philosophical reflections on the nature of modern Western philosophy and political theory. He pervasively argues that both have unremitting, though hidden, ties to race, racism, and white supremacy. *The Racial Contract* challenges the philosophical orthodoxy of the white academy. Mills notes, "Philosophy has remained remarkably untouched by the debates over multiculturalism, canon reform, and ethnic diversity racking the academy; both demographically and conceptually, it is one of the 'whitest' of the humanities" (2).

Mills' conceptual alternative mandates we undertake the task of a historical reinterpretation of the Western modern world-system. The purpose of which is to disclose how modern (Western) political (power) structures and relations (at the very inception of their formation) incorporated white supremacy as a definitive political system. Concurrently, his conceptual alternative includes a theoretical (philosophical) imperative viz., a reconsideration of contractarianism beyond the constraints of social contract theory to the submerged notion of "the racial contract." Against the hegemonic self-conception of modern Western philosophy, Mills argues that racism (or more precisely white supremacy) is pivotal and not merely marginal in the very development of the modern philosophical tradition of contractarianism. This conceptual transporting of white supremacy requires uncovering the presence of "the racial contract." The complexity in unraveling the racial contract's material function and intrinsic locus as a determinate global political system of white supremacy is due to the ideological occlusion emanating from the intellectual tradition of social contractarianism. The ahistorical character of contractarianism from Hobbes to Rawls is juxtaposed to the concrete history of the racial contract. This latter contract was/is materially and institutionally manifested in slavery, the slave trade, genocide and plunder of native peoples, colonial and neo-colonial oppression and exploitation. The social contract assumes a social and political relationship on the principle of equality. The racial contract is grounded materially and philosophically on white supremacy.

My main criticism centers on Mills' perspective on the typology of the African American philosophical tradition with regard to moral and political theory. Mills (correctly) views his own text as a global theoretical framework for the analysis of race and racism. This global focus in turn directly confronts the presuppositions of the dominant white political theory. Mills assumes that those African American philosophers doing moral and political philosophy either simply pursue mainstream philosophy or are more local in their focus. By local in focus he means

addressing questions of affirmative action, Black 'underclass' or investigating African American philosophers (historical figures), e.g., Du Bois and Alain Locke, such that the broader debate is left undone. However, if we recognize Mills' claim that the racial contract is central and not marginal to a conception of the global, then the examination of the history of African American philosophers must not be seen as local in focus but as the (particular) vehicle to rethink what constitutes true universality. Though white supremacy fosters false universality (a distorted conception of the global) universality in and of itself is not false. Universality if it is not reduced to an arid abstraction must be mediated via particularity.

Mills' short but provocative text is a must-read for all those who seek to go beyond the veil of professional philosophical tradition. Mills' lucid and open writing style makes available a wealth of complex philosophical concepts and forms of analyses to the non-philosopher. Hopefully, we will hear more from Mills in the future.

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**Kyeyoung Park. *The Korean American Dream: Immigrants and Small Business in New York City*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997). 228 pp., \$15.95 paper.**

Kyeyoung Park illustrates how the Korean American dream emerges from a harsh reality. Park's central argument is that Korean immigrant adjustment is driven by an ideology of self-help. Within the context of this ideology, Korean immigrants see a close connection between entrepreneurial activity and basic survival in America. It is argued that the primacy of establishing one's own small business in order to generate stability and security has an overarching influence on the activities of individual Korean immigrants and the Korean American community in general. From this premise, Park describes how the preoccupation with entrepreneurship for subsistence shapes various spheres of life for Korean Americans. Chapters discuss how this ideological orientation sets the parameters for familial relations, gender roles, working conditions, political activities, and religious practices in the Korean community.

Interestingly, the Korean American dream is laden with contradictions. Old constraints are replaced with new ones as familial and gender roles shift in response to conditions in the United States. Although an entrepreneurial ethos forms the nucleus of the Korean American ideology, many Korean owned businesses experience financial difficulties and high rates of insolvency. In fact, Park points out that most