

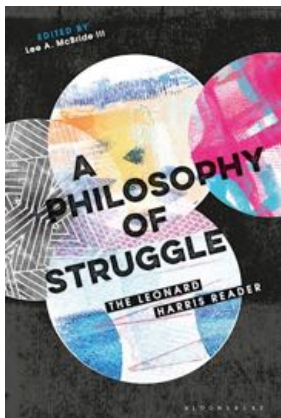
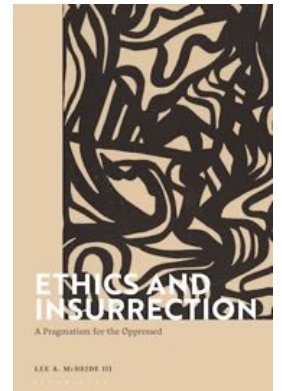
"I AM AN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHER"



[Lee McBride](#) is Professor of Philosophy at The College of Wooster. His writings cut across American and decolonial philosophy, feminist theory, environmental ethics, and philosophy of food. He is the author of [Ethics and Insurrection: A Pragmatism for the Oppressed](#) (Bloomsbury, 2021), editor of [A Philosophy of Struggle: The Leonard Harris Reader](#) (Bloomsbury, 2020) and co-editor of [Pragmatist Feminism and the Work of Charlene Haddock Seigfried](#) (Bloomsbury, 2022).

### What does American philosophy mean to you?

"American philosophy" is an umbrella term that denotes a collection of philosophies that arise out of those North American territories that would eventually become the United States, Canada, and Mexico. In the literature, we find essays like Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The American Scholar" that call for "Americans" to break from their colonial Eurodescended doctrines and canonical figures and create their own views, write their own books, develop their own knowledge rooted in this place. Transcendentalism, pragmatism, American idealism, and naturalism are a few of the philosophies readily depicted via Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau, Charles S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey, Jane Addams, Josiah Royce, and George Santayana.

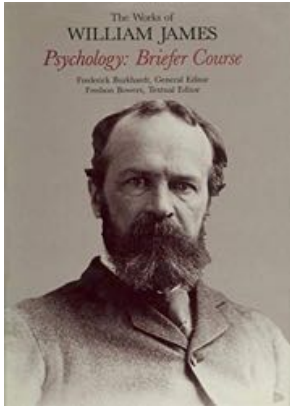


But some of us have slowly started to recognize that the indigenous peoples of Turtle Island/North America and the Caribbean islands had/have philosophies of their own; that the enslaved Afrodescended peoples thrust into these lands as a product of the transatlantic slave trade developed their own American philosophies.

And thus, American philosophy (for me) includes figures like: Handsome Lake, John Wannuacon Quinney, David Walker, Maria Stewart, Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, Ignacio Ramírez, José Martí, W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, Aimé Césaire, Gloria Anzaldúa, Vine Deloria Jr., Édouard Glissant, María Lugones, Sylvia Wynter, Patricia Hill Collins, Guillermo Hurtado, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson.

## How did you become an American philosopher?

I read William James's *Psychology: The Briefer Course* as an undergraduate; I remember being terribly unimpressed. Later, once I started teaching my own courses (with MA in hand), I shoved James's *Pragmatism* into my introduction to philosophy course—Plato, Descartes, Hume, and James. Even then, I was not an American philosopher; at the time, my focus was on ancient Greek philosophy.

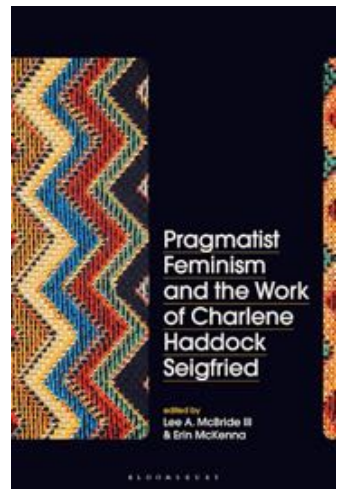


But then I matriculated to Purdue University and found myself surrounded by trailblazing American thinkers: Paul B. Thompson, Leonard Harris, and Charlene Haddock Seigfried. Thompson taught me John Dewey, Josiah Royce, Michel Foucault, Jurgen Habermas, and agrarian ethics. Harris taught me Alain Locke's value theory and critical pragmatism, Karl Marx, W.V.O. Quine's *Word and Object*, and nuanced philosophies of race and racism. Seigfried taught me William James, John Dewey, Jane Addams, and pragmatist feminism. I was awash in a complex confluence of ideas. I ended up writing my dissertation on John Dewey and Alasdair MacIntyre under Charlene Haddock Seigfried.

## How would you describe your current research?

I edited Leonard Harris's *A Philosophy of Struggle* (Bloomsbury, 2020), and Erin McKenna and I co-edited *Pragmatist Feminism and the Work of Charlene Haddock Seigfried* (Bloomsbury, 2022). I authored *Ethics and Insurrection: A Pragmatism for the Oppressed* (Bloomsbury, 2021). Additionally, in 2021, I published an article on decolonial philosophy, titled "Culture, Acquisitiveness, and Decolonial Philosophy" (*Decolonizing American Philosophy*, eds. Corey McCall and Phillip McReynolds).

So, my recent research bears marks of Harris's philosophy born of struggle, insurrectionist ethics, critical pragmatist ethical naturalism, Seigfried's pragmatist feminism, black feminist visionary pragmatism, and decolonial philosophy.



My present works-in-progress develop three themes. First, I am highlighting the place of poetry and well-patterned language in philosophy, especially for those looking to exceed the dominant discourse, what Emerson might call our present circle. Second, I am deploying the decolonial insights I find in Sylvia Wynter and others to critique and complicate canonical pragmatist and agrarian thought. And third, I am writing a concise introductory book on the philosophy of W.E.B. Du Bois (under contract with Indiana University Press).

## What do you do when you're not doing American philosophy?

I spend a lot of time engaged in food-related activities. I like to eat. I like to think that I am decent in the kitchen; that is, I like to cook. I garden (edible fruits and vegetables) when I can devote ample attention to my beds. Additionally, I love to travel, to immerse myself in new environments, to experience new cultures, and eat the food. And, before COVID-19, I used to do a lot of (power vinyasa) yoga.

## What's your favorite work in American philosophy? What should we all be reading?

I am partial to John Dewey (especially, *Individualism Old and New*, *Freedom and Culture*, and the *Ethics*) and William James (especially, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* and *Talks to Teachers On Psychology and To Students On Some Of Life's Ideals*). But people should be reading (more) Alain Locke (see *The Philosophy of Alain Locke* edited by Leonard Harris and *African American Contributions to the Americas' Cultures* edited by Jacoby A. Carter).

Beyond these historical figures, I would strongly suggest: Leonard Harris, *A Philosophy of Struggle*; Maria Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*; Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*; Sylvia Wynter, "The Pope Must Have Been Drunk, The King of Castile a Madman," "Is Development a Purely Empirical Concept or Also Teleological?," and "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom"; Elizabeth Anderson, "Pragmatism, Science, and Moral Inquiry" and "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices: A Pragmatist Perspective"; Kyle Whyte, "Indigeneity and US Settler Colonialism," "Indigenous Climate Change Studies: Indigenizing Futures, Decolonizing the Anthropocene," and "Critical Investigations of Resilience"; and Kristie Dotson, "How is This Paper Philosophy?," "Introducing Black Feminist Philosophy," "On the Way to Decolonization in a Settler Colony," "Black Feminist Me: Answering the Question 'Who Do I Think I Am'," "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression," and "Tales from An Apostate." These are brilliant scholars; each of them has left an indelible mark on my thinking.

(April 2023)

