

## Afterword

There's a lot of talk in this country about the federal deficit. But I think we should talk more about our empathy deficit—the ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes; to see the world through those who are different from us—the child who's hungry, the laid-off steelworker, the immigrant woman cleaning your dorm room. . . . I hope you choose to broaden, and not contract, your ambit of concern. Not because you have an obligation to those who are less fortunate, although you do have that obligation. Not because you have a debt to all of those who helped you get to where you are, although you do have that debt. It's because you have an obligation to yourself. Because our individual salvation depends on collective salvation. And because it's only when you hitch your wagon to something larger than yourself that you will realize your true potential—and become full-grown.

—Barack Obama, comments to the graduating class of Northwestern University,  
June 19, 2006

If the stars are gracious, events can conspire to make scholarly endeavors potentially relevant to current affairs of state. The last chapter of *Transcendence* was completed a week or so before the inauguration of Barack Obama as forty-fourth president of the United States. For some time in more popular venues and in conversation, I have been making the argument that Obama is not only a pragmatist in the sense of one who seeks expedient courses of action, which is how the media has treated his “pragmatism,” but that he is in fact a philosophical pragmatist.<sup>1</sup> Further, his pragmatism is informed by many of the same questions that moved Dewey and Mead; for example, how is it possible to help shape and build communities that can flourish in the face of adverse social and economic forces? Obama's *Dreams from My Father* can be read both as a young man's journey to invent himself in the process of investigating his family's past and as a journey to discover the kinds of beliefs and actions that will allow communities to flourish in the face of economic injustice, provincialism, rigid traditions, and ideologies.<sup>2</sup> In addition, *Dreams* and *The Audacity of Hope* suggest a cosmopolitanism that bears a striking resemblance to the one discussed in *Transcendence*.<sup>3</sup>

In this Afterword I consider briefly how several ideas explored in the book may be of assistance in interpreting Obama's politics, although a caveat is in order.<sup>4</sup> It is possible to read this Afterword as a stand-alone piece, and given its location on a Web site without the book, I assume that readers may in fact approach it in this manner. This raises a problem. Many of the terms discussed here—for example, “deliberation” and “choice”—have been examined in detail in the book, so their appearance in this context is little more than a gloss. Why then not publish the Afterword in the book itself? The reason is rather straightforward. This is not a traditional Afterword. It seeks to enter a conversation that has been gaining steam, mostly online, about the nature of Obama's political philosophy. But too little is

known, at least by this author, to come to any definitive conclusions. The Afterword is speculative in ways that the book is not.

Many commentators have been perplexed by Obama's deep commitment to specific values even as he condemns ideologies and absolutes. The notion that values can be deeply held in a nonideological fashion became suspect as the culture wars took center stage in America in recent years. If one holds values dear, one must hold them as *nonnegotiable principles*, as rules or commands, or so we have been led to believe. While this conviction has been defended on religious grounds in the political arena, in the modern world it has philosophical roots in Kant's ethics, which so agitated Dewey. (He attacked Kant during World War I as setting the stage for German autocracy.) The damage done to American political discourse by this rigidity over the last three decades is tangible. Yet the arc of American history has covered this territory before, in disparate times and in different ways. For example, Louis Menand's hypothesis in *The Metaphysical Club* is that the early pragmatism of men like Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. and William James can be appreciated fully only in light of their disgust at the ideological certainties that bred the tragedy of the Civil War.<sup>5</sup> Obama is clearly sensitive to the dangers of absolutism in American politics. In a passage that is in the spirit of Dewey, Obama declares in *Audacity*:

The rejection of absolutism implicit in our constitutional structure may sometimes make our politics seem unprincipled. But for most of our history it has encouraged the very process of information gathering, analysis, and argument that allows us to make better, if not perfect, choices, not only about the means to our ends but also about the ends themselves. Whether we are for or against affirmative action, for or against prayer in schools, we must test out our ideals, vision, and values against the realities of a common life, so that over time they may be refined, discarded, or replaced by new ideals, sharper visions, deeper values.<sup>6</sup>

Obama is making a lot of people, including traditional liberals, uncomfortable, and this discomfort in part turns on his unwillingness to inhabit given ideological boxes. This unwillingness has both political and existential roots. One commentator who has pegged the situation correctly is Russell Baker.

[Obama] seems much like Roosevelt in not being wedded to any ideological position. FDR in his campaign promised "to take a method and try it: If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something." Obama makes Democratic liberals fidgety because of a pragmatic tendency that might prompt him to settle for compromised programs rather than support traditional progressive ideas that require a terribly high price to enact. In his readiness to try to find out what will work, he is like Roosevelt.<sup>7</sup>

Baker's description of Franklin D. Roosevelt is a pretty good statement, popularized though it may be, of an element of philosophical pragmatism, in spite of Dewey's criticism of the New Deal and its scattershot approach to what works.<sup>8</sup> Pragmatists are fallibilists and reject, in Dewey's words, the quest for certainty. They are by nature "experimentalists" who do not fear novelty. I have not dealt with the theme of fallibilism explicitly in this book, but it is implied in the discussions of transcendence and cultural pluralism. To say that we are committed to the notion that selves adapt to changing circumstances, and that they contribute to these changes by their choices and efforts, complements the notion that absolutes are suspect and that fallibilism must be taken seriously. Obama would agree. "It's not just absolute power that the Founders sought to prevent. Implicit in [the Constitution's]

structure, in the very idea of ordered liberty, was a rejection of absolute truth, the infallibility of any idea or ideology or theology or 'ism,' any tyrannical consistency that might lock future generations into a single, unalterable course, or drive both majorities and minorities into the cruelties of the Inquisition, the pogrom, the gulag, or the jihad."<sup>9</sup>

We ought to remain open to the possibility that we are in error regarding our deepest convictions, even if in practice we may never change them. And it is just this sensibility that sets the stage for a comparison between thinkers such as Sartre and Dewey, between existentialists and pragmatists. Not only do both emphasize the importance of action but both recognize that change is inevitable, especially if we are dealing with creatures who live in a world of contingent events and who deliberate and choose. As we shall see, Obama is an interesting figure in this regard, for it can be argued that he is in fact an existential pragmatist, that is, he is a politician oriented toward seeing the world in terms of what works, and in defending the power of deliberation and choice as crucial to the process of determining what works. He is also committed to a notion of self-creation, which is made possible by communities that support what Dewey calls growth and what Mead refers to as the enlargement of the personality.<sup>10</sup>

In an article on Obama's political philosophy, Bart Schultz argues that Obama is indeed a philosophical pragmatist and that he follows in the footsteps of figures such as Dewey, Mead, and Jane Addams, all members of the Chicago School of Pragmatism.<sup>11</sup> Schultz aptly summarizes features of Obama's Chicago pragmatism.

The various facets of Obama's Chicago pragmatism mentioned thus far—his emphasis on democratic, progressive education and future generations, on bottom-up politics and community service, on democracy as a way of life or culture of deliberation and participation, on combining direct action and electoral action, on experimentalism and fallibilism, on America as hope and the land of self-creation rather than fixed identities, etc.—do not fully capture the tensions and apprehensions of his philosophical orientation or the richness of the Chicago pragmatist tradition.<sup>12</sup>

For Schultz, one of the missing ingredients in this summary is an appreciation of Lincoln's role in Obama's thought and in the development of pragmatism. The extent to which Lincoln may have influenced pragmatism is surely open to debate. However, this hypothesis is worth exploring because the specific interpretation of Lincoln that Schultz has in mind, that of J. David Greenstone, has the potential to shed light on key elements of Obama's thought, especially those that fall within the orbit of the pragmatic tradition. Greenstone's major work on Lincoln, and the relationship between reform and humanist liberals, *The Lincoln Persuasion*, was published posthumously.<sup>13</sup> Schultz is convinced that Greenstone's ideas influenced Obama. He bases this claim on the similarity of their ideas and on the fact that they shared a network of colleagues at the University of Chicago.<sup>14</sup>

Before turning briefly to the relationship between Obama and Lincoln, we need to make the case—or at minimum suggest that one could be made—for a connection between Lincoln and pragmatism. Unfortunately, the possible influence of Lincoln on pragmatism or specific pragmatists would require a study unto itself. But we do not need to accept a causal connection here between Lincoln and the pragmatists. For the task at hand we need only examine whether there is a family of resemblance between their ideas and sensibilities. Greenstone provides a good summary of elements of this resemblance—especially to a

version of pragmatism that would have been congenial to Dewey and Mead—in a passage from *The Lincoln Persuasion*, which Shultz quotes.

Anticipating the arguments of the late-nineteenth-century Pragmatists, Lincoln emphasized the importance of a community of inquiry and practice that depended on both socially established habits and socially shared language. As a number of authors have suggested, Emerson can be seen as a link between the Puritans' focus on nature as God's handiwork and the Pragmatists' emphasis on naturalism. Similarly, Lincoln represents a link between the Puritans' focus on society and the Pragmatists' emphasis on community and scientific collaboration. Lincoln's argument about the nature of this community is indicative of perhaps his most fundamental justification for unionism; it is an argument that echoes that of the tenth Federalist paper: the full exercise and development of human reason requires not the intimacy of a small, morally homogeneous community, but the diversity and freedom of a geographically and temporally extended republican society.<sup>15</sup>

Assuming that a case can be made for a family resemblance between pragmatism, especially in its Chicago version, and Lincoln, where are we to locate an explicit connection to Obama? Even a casual reader of Obama's speeches and writings is struck by his references to Lincoln. He has in fact claimed that Lincoln was a major influence on his thinking.<sup>16</sup> Schultz articulates avenues for exploring the connection.

What Obama has found in Lincoln just is what the pragmatists have always found in him, and this has been a type of pragmatism long associated with the University of Chicago. It is a vision of a democratic community as an educating community, as an experimental, open community of inquiry that through participation mobilizes our collective intelligence and problem-solving abilities. . . . [B]oth Dewey and Obama, like Lincoln, discovered in the world a much richer practice of citizenship as demanding service and recognizing the need for sacrifice—Obama's Inaugural Address, like Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, expressly linked the key notion of service to the sacrifices made by members of the military. For both, the aspiration to Oneness is built on the recognition of sacrifice and the sadness and setbacks of our uncertain destiny.<sup>17</sup>

But we don't have to take Schultz's word for the connection between Obama and Lincoln. Here are Obama's words from *Audacity*. They occur right after he confronts the potential liabilities of always finding oneself too ready to compromise or follow the course of (political) pragmatism. There are times when one must question the certainty of uncertainty in order to act.

I'm left then with Lincoln, who like no man before or since understood both the deliberative function of our democracy and the limits of such deliberation. We remember him for the firmness and depth of his convictions—his unyielding opposition to slavery and his determination that a house divided could not stand. But his presidency was guided by a practicality that would distress us today, a practicality that led him to test various bargains with the South in order to maintain the Union without war; to appoint and discard general after general, strategy after strategy, once war broke out; to stretch the Constitution to the breaking point in order to see the war through to a successful conclusion. I like to believe that for Lincoln, it was never a matter of abandoning conviction for the sake of expediency. Rather, it was a matter of maintaining within himself the balance between two contradictory ideas—that we must talk and reach for common understandings, precisely because all of us are imperfect and can never act with the certainty that God is on our side; and yet at times we must act nonetheless, as if we are certain, protected from error only by providence.<sup>18</sup>

One can emphasize, as Schultz does, that the sensibility found in these words, and in preceding ones, represents “the ultimate pragmatist stance—namely, to avoid being dogmatic even about pragmatism. And Obama is in the finest Chicago pragmatist tradition in this appropriation of Lincoln.”<sup>19</sup> However, I would prefer to focus on the view presented in the last sentence. At times we must act as if we are certain, that is, with the commitment of one who is certain, although on reflection we know that there are no guarantees. Although this may appear to undermine fallibilism, it is a quandary not unfamiliar to pragmatists, and of all the classical pragmatists, none more so than William James, perhaps the most existentially inclined of the major pragmatists.<sup>20</sup> For James, our most significant beliefs, religious and ethical ones, may very well require that we suspend disbelief, even as we intellectually recognize that there are no absolutes. (Of course, on a more mundane level we typically act based on habits and beliefs that we treat as fixed or certain. We do this, as Peirce was fond of saying, until doubt sets in.) The issue, then, is how to navigate the tension between certainties, especially those that move us to (moral) action, and the need to question these certainties and engage in inquiry. One could argue that Lincoln’s extraordinary efforts to balance deliberation and common understanding with action of great moment is a deep source of inspiration for Obama. One could also argue, contra Schultz, that the classical pragmatist who would have been most responsive to Obama on this issue was not a member of the Chicago School. William James spent his years in Cambridge, at Harvard.

Obama is aligned with pragmatists and existentialists in his recognition that words ultimately find their meaning in action and in his rejection of certainty. Nevertheless, political and ethical actions often depend on beliefs that are experienced as absolutely correct; for example, segregation is wrong and we must act to stop it, even if it means breaking the law. As committed as Obama is to empathy, deliberation, inquiry, and mutual understanding, he understands their limitations in terms of action, which is what we would expect of a politically and existentially minded pragmatist.

Of course, in the end a sense of mutual understanding isn’t enough. After all, talk is cheap; like any value, empathy must be acted upon. When I was a community organizer back in the eighties [in Chicago], I would often challenge neighborhood leaders by asking them where they put their time, energy, and money. Those are the true tests of what we value, I’d tell them, regardless of what we like to tell ourselves. If we aren’t willing to pay a price for our values, if we aren’t willing to make some sacrifices in order to realize them, then we should ask ourselves whether we truly believe in them at all. . . . We can make claims on their behalf, so long as we understand that our values must be tested against fact and experience, so long as we recall that they demand deeds and not just words.

To do otherwise would be to relinquish our best selves.<sup>21</sup>

Of course, realizing our best selves is not only about deeds. It is also about a commitment to seek what works, that is, to engage problems at hand without ideological blinders. In the epilogue to *Dreams*, Obama reports a conversation that he and his sister, Auma, have with a historian, Dr. Rukia Odera, during the last days of his visit to Kenya. He had asked his sister if she knew of any good books on the Luo, his father’s tribe, and she had suggested he talk to Odera. When the three meet, the conversation turns to the question of why black Americans are often disappointed when they travel to Africa. Odera argues that the problem is that Americans come looking for something authentic. Instead, what they find are complex cultures dependent on interactions with other peoples. Their conversation

is important, because, I suggest, Odero's views were actually Obama's at the time that he finished *Dreams*; or perhaps more accurately, they are views that have resonated with him over the years. (It is important to bear in mind that this is Obama's version of the conversation and that he explicitly warns us in the introduction that "the dialogue is necessarily an approximation.")<sup>22</sup>

Now, if you and your sister behave yourself and eat a proper share of this food, I will offer you tea. Kenyans are very boastful about the quality of their tea, you notice. But of course we got this habit from the English. Our ancestors did not drink such a thing. Then there's the spices we used to cook this fish. They originally came from India, or Indonesia. So even in this simple meal, you will find it very difficult to be authentic—although the meal is certainly African.<sup>23</sup>

Odero then makes a rather striking point about colonialism, that if colonialism had not occurred, Africans might have avoided getting trapped in older ways of doing things. "Without the white man, we might be able to make better use of our history. We might look at some of our former practices and decide they are worth preserving. Others, we might grow out of. Unfortunately, the white man has made us very defensive. We end up clinging to all sorts of things that have outlived their usefulness."<sup>24</sup> So the development of useful practices can be undermined by an understandable but misplaced, because no longer useful, defensiveness about colonialism. This is a claim that a philosophical pragmatist would, no doubt, find congenial. The conversation continues with Obama's sister asking Odero how we should adapt. She responds, "I leave such answers up to policy makers. I'm only a historian. But I suspect that we can't pretend that the contradictions of our situation don't exist. All we can do is choose."<sup>25</sup>

When we are faced with cultural contradictions, problems, there are times when all we can do is choose. Could James or Sartre have put it more succinctly? What about a complex moral issue? How are we to deal with it? Odero continues,

For example, female circumcision is an important Kikuyu custom. With the Masai also. To a modern sensibility, it is barbaric. . . . But you cannot really have half a circumcision. This leaves no one satisfied. So we must choose. The same is true of the rule of law, the notion of independent inquiry—these things may conflict with tribal loyalties. You cannot have rule of law and then exempt certain members of your clan. What to do? Again you choose. If you make the wrong choice, then you learn from your mistakes. You see what works.<sup>26</sup>

Odero's comments provide an example of what this book has tried to show: the ways that pragmatism can be amalgamated with existentialism. She has managed to combine neatly elements of the two traditions. (Or perhaps we should say, Obama's recollection combines them neatly.) In light of Odero's remark regarding seeing what works, it's worth noting a major lesson that Obama appears to have learned from his father's difficult life. His father was a man of principle, a notoriously stubborn man, and his failures could in large measure be attributed to his uncompromising commitment to principles, which undermined his ability to compromise and make choices, to see what works. It also undermined his father's capacity to place himself in the other guy's shoes, a common expression of Obama's (and a very Jamesian and Meadean sensibility).<sup>27</sup>

The imperative to place ourselves in the perspectives of others—whether those from other cultures or those within our own—is at the heart of Obama's cosmopolitanism. As we have seen in *Transcendence*, empathy, which involves taking the perspectives of others, is

actually a more complicated notion than sympathy, although related to it. In *Audacity* Obama makes a distinction between empathy and sympathy that mirrors the one developed in Chapter 4. In this discussion he insists that there is a moral imperative to find common ground, a claim that echoes ideas addressed in the same chapter.

That last aspect of [the late U.S. senator Paul Simon's] character—a sense of empathy—is one that I find myself appreciating more and more as I get older. It is at the heart of my moral code, and it is how I understand the Golden Rule—not simply as a call to sympathy or charity, but as something more demanding, a call to stand in somebody else's shoes and see through their eyes. . . . I believe a stronger sense of empathy would tilt the balance of our current politics in favor of those people who are struggling in this society. After all, if they are like us, then their struggles are our own. If we fail to help, we diminish ourselves. . . . [Empathy] calls us all to task, the conservative and the liberal, the powerful and the powerless, the oppressed and the oppressor. We are all shaken out of our complacency. We are all forced beyond our limited vision. No one is exempt from the call to find common ground.<sup>28</sup>

The conversation with Rukia Odero did not end with her comments about seeing what works. It concludes with Obama citing her one last time and then making an observation of his own.

“[My daughter's] first language is not Luo. Not even Swahili. It is English. When I listen to her talk with her friends, it sounds like gibberish to me. They take bits and pieces of everything—English, Swahili, German, Luo. Sometimes, I get fed up with this. Learn to speak one language properly, I tell them.” Rukia laughed to herself. “But I am beginning to resign myself—there's nothing really to do. They live in a mixed-up world. It's just as well, I suppose. In the end, I'm less interested in a daughter who's authentically African than one who is authentically herself.” It was getting late; we thanked Rukia for her hospitality and went on our way. But her words would stay with me, bringing into focus my own memories, my own lingering questions.<sup>29</sup>

Obama is the product of a childhood that should have, and appears to have, nurtured the kind of cosmopolitanism addressed in this book. He not only understands the appeal and reality of cultural transcendence but also respects cultural pluralism. The question of how to respect and affirm a people's “story,” while accepting that “stories” change through contact and communication, is one of the threads that runs through *Dreams*, and it runs through Obama's oratory as well. There is no way of addressing this tension, or other parallel tensions, on a purely conceptual level. It is a practical problem, and its “solution” requires “correct” forms of praxis, which entail different responses in different circumstances. Regarding the discovery of the “correct” forms of praxis, what Obama shares with William James is a will to believe. The right practices are possible in part because we believe (or hope) that they are possible.

Will Barack Obama turn out to be the pragmatic cosmopolitan that I have sketched in this Afterword and discussed in this book? Time will tell. However, even if Obama turns out to be a figure of this sort, it may very well be that the time is not right for the politics that he offers. Virtually nothing is certain, except perhaps that at the other side of Barack Obama's presidency we will have a well-written insider's account of a story that is only beginning to unfold.

## Notes

1. Mitchell Aboulafia, "Obama's Pragmatism (or Move Over Culture Wars, Hello Political Philosophy)," *Talking Points Memo*, December 17, 2008, [http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/talk/blogs/mitchell\\_a/2008/12/obamas-pragmatism-or-move-over.php](http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/talk/blogs/mitchell_a/2008/12/obamas-pragmatism-or-move-over.php).

2. Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2004).

3. Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006).

4. I do not pretend to prove in the Afterword that Obama is a philosophical pragmatist. Rather, I want to suggest that at minimum there is a noteworthy family resemblance between Obama's ideas and pragmatism. No doubt there are important implications for American politics if Obama is indeed a philosophical pragmatist. I would be remiss in not stating that pragmatism is itself a concept that may be treated in terms of the notion of family resemblance. Although we need not go so far as to say that there are as many pragmatisms as there are pragmatists, surely there are discernible differences between leading figures' brands of pragmatism. I need no more than mention Rorty here, whom I consider a pragmatist, even if many Deweyans would prefer not to see him in the same philosophical camp as Dewey.

5. Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

6. Obama, *Audacity*, 94–95.

7. Russell Baker, "A Revolutionary President," *New York Review of Books* 56, no. 2 (February 12, 2009): 7.

8. Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 440–441, 441n17.

9. Obama, *Audacity*, 93.

10. It might be argued that Obama can't possibly be a philosophical pragmatist in the Deweyan mold because Obama is a serious reader of Reinhold Niebuhr, one of Dewey's arch philosophical and political adversaries. The first point to be made is the obvious one: Dewey is not the only significant pragmatist. And even if we are talking about Dewey, the fact that one shares philosophical sensibilities with a thinker doesn't mean that one shares all of his or her views. In Obama's case, although he shares much with Dewey, he appears to be closer to Niebuhr on questions of religion and human nature. This said, it is important to recognize that although Niebuhr and Dewey had serious disagreements, there is an argument to be made that Niebuhr (and Dewey) actually overstated the extent of them. In his detailed biography of Niebuhr, Richard Fox tells us in discussing Niebuhr of the mid-1930s,

What Niebuhr's analysis actually revealed, despite his intention, was how close his own prophetic faith was to Dewey, how far away it was from Barth. His starting point, like Dewey's, was man's drive for meaning and his quest to realize ideals in history. His religion and Dewey's were . . . religions of human power. . . . Like Dewey he was a pragmatist, a relativist, and a pluralist at heart. He hated absolutism of any kind. . . . Mill and Dewey were his intellectual comrades-in-arms in the campaign to root human values securely in a scientific era. They were his colleagues in toppling all absolutisms, whether imposed by defenders of the past or created by worshipers of the future. (Richard Wrightman Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1985], 165–166)

Properly speaking one should not apply the term "relativist" to Dewey. This term makes sense only in the context of the acceptance of absolutism, which Dewey was determined to leave in the dust. Robert Westbrook in *John Dewey* makes a point similar to Fox's.

But what is often overlooked . . . is the degree to which Niebuhr's criticisms were advanced from within a set of assumptions and commitments he shared with Dewey. (Common ground, it should be said, overlooked not only by many historians but, usually, by Niebuhr and Dewey themselves). Many, if not all, of the supposedly irreconcilable differences between Niebuhr and Dewey were differences of emphasis. In the end, these mattered a great deal in the development of liberal-democratic thought, but this importance should not obscure their nature. (524)

Westbrook actually cites Fox's work as one of the best correctives to misleading accounts of the Niebuhr-Dewey debate (524n47).

11. Bart Schultz, "Obama's Political Philosophy: Pragmatism, Politics, and the University of Chicago," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 39, no. 2 (2009): 127–173. Originally published online, February 19, 2009, <http://pos.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/39/2/127>.

12. *Ibid.*, 161.

13. J. David Greenstone, *The Lincoln Persuasion: Remaking American Liberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

14. Schultz, “Obama’s Political Philosophy,” 171. Greenstone taught at the University of Chicago until his death in 1990. Obama didn’t begin teaching at the University of Chicago Law School until 1992. Nevertheless, he may very well have been exposed to Greenstone’s ideas through friends and colleagues. Schultz tells us that “[Cass] Sunstein, whom Obama has now tapped to head the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, was part of the faculty consulting group that assembled *The Lincoln Persuasion* for publication after Greenstone’s untimely death. Even if Obama has never read this book, he has clearly been exposed to its ideas many times over from colleagues who were part of the community of inquirers who produced it. And this is not to mention [David] Axelrod, a product of Greenstone’s Department of Political Science (he chaired it when Axelrod began his studies) and Greenstone’s College (he was Master of the Social Sciences Collegiate Division when Axelrod graduated)” (171). Of course, none of these connections prove that Obama was familiar with or influenced by Greenstone’s work, but this is somewhat beside the point for Schultz. The question for us is how helpful Greenstone’s Lincoln is for understanding Obama’s pragmatism. (Reference to Sunstein’s participation can be found in Greenstone, *The Lincoln Persuasion*, xv.)

15. Greenstone, *The Lincoln Persuasion*, 278, quoted in Schultz, “Obama’s Political Philosophy,” 166. The sentiment in the last sentence certainly coincides with the interpretation of Mead’s understanding of cosmopolitanism discussed in Chapter 4, although Dewey would have preferred the term “intelligence” to “reason.” Greenstone goes on to say, “For Lincoln, in other words, there was a symbiotic relationship between individual development and the institutional life of a community. Lincoln thought that only a regime devoted to improving the capacities of its members for self-development could rightfully be called the Union. His emphasis on the social dimensions of inquiry, however, also suggests the converse: that the humanitarian cause of individual improvement could flourish only in a republican society large and complex enough to sustain human inquiry and progress” (278).

16. Schultz, “Obama’s Political Philosophy,” 152–153. Schultz claims, “Thus, although he has gone on record as explaining that his most important philosophical influences were Gandhi, King, and Lincoln, it is manifest that in his political realization, increasingly evident in his speeches, the politics of the first two gets subordinated to the politics of the third” (152–153).

17. *Ibid.*, 169–170.

18. Obama, *Audacity*, 97–98; Schultz, “Obama’s Political Philosophy,” 155.

19. Schultz, “Obama’s Political Philosophy,” 155. Schultz is talking about philosophical pragmatism. Obama’s references to pragmatism before this passage appear to refer to a form of political pragmatism, which overlaps with, but is clearly not identical to, philosophical pragmatism.

20. This sentiment is reflected in the words of Fitz-James Stephen, words with which William James chose to close his essay “The Will to Believe.”

Each must act as he thinks best; and if he is wrong, so much the worse for him. We stand on a mountain pass in the midst of whirling snow and blinding mist, through which we get glimpses now and then of paths which may be deceptive. If we stand still we shall be frozen to death. If we take the wrong road we shall be dashed to pieces. We do not certainly know whether there is any right one. What must we do? “Be strong and of a good courage.” Act for the best, hope for the best, and take what comes. . . . If death ends all, we cannot meet death better. (William James, “The Will to Believe,” in *The Writings of William James*, edited by John J. McDermott, 735 [New York: Modern Library, 1968])

21. Obama, *Audacity*, 68–69.

22. Obama, *Dreams*, xvii.

23. *Ibid.*, 433.

24. *Ibid.*, 434.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.* In *Audacity*, Obama states, “And we can be guided throughout by Lincoln’s simple maxim: that we will do collectively, through our government, only those things that we cannot do as well or at all individually and privately. In other words, we should be guided by what works” (159).

27. Alice G. Dewey, John Dewey’s granddaughter, was dissertation adviser to Ann Dunham, Obama’s beloved mother, who helped educate him as a child (although this was before she received her Ph.D.). Todd Purdum reports the following from a conversation that he had with Obama’s half-sister, Maya Soetoro-Ng, about their mother.

“She was sort of unflinchingly and unwaveringly empathetic, you know,” her daughter, Maya Soetoro-Ng, who is nine years younger than Barack, told me over coffee one afternoon in Honolulu. “She had an ability to see herself in so

many different kinds of people, and that is something she was very strict about with us—that absence of judgment, of acrimony. She was always very good at finding a language that the other person would understand, regardless of where they were from, or their socio-economic background. And I think that’s something that’s been given to us, a major gift that’s bestowed on us.” (“Raising Obama,” *Vanity Fair*, March 2008, <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2008/03/obama200803?currentPage=3>).

28. Obama, *Audacity*, 66–68. I don’t want to overplay the similarities between Obama’s words and the arguments developed in *Transcendence*, for *Audacity* is not a work in social theory, moral psychology, or political philosophy. It would be interesting to see how he would develop his insights if he were to write a book on political theory.

29. Obama, *Dreams*, 435–436.