



Lecture: Wednesday,
October 15, 2025, 12:00pm

Joseph L. Smith, “On the Black Hand Side: Cornel West and the Black Prophetic Critique of Pragmatism”

Cornel West is one of the foremost Black public intellectuals to engage classical American pragmatism as exemplary of the democratic possibilities in American culture. West also insists on grounding his work in the Black prophetic tradition, portraying the two traditions as complementary resources for confronting Black suffering and deepening democracy. Yet such a framing risks obscuring profound tensions. When Black thought is positioned as an additive to pragmatism rather than taken on its own term, the radical demands of the Black prophetic tradition—demands that unsettle the very philosophical frames offered by American pragmatists—are muted. This talk reconsiders West’s critiques of classical pragmatism from the vantage point of the veil, demonstrating that a fuller reckoning with the incompatibilities between these traditions opens new possibilities for radical democratic thought.

Dr. Joseph L. Smith is Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Africana Studies at SIU. He received his Ph.D. in Philosophy from SIU (2020), LL.M. in International Economic Law from Xiamen University (2021), and M.A. in Black Theology from Union Theological Seminary in NYC (2006). Smith's teaching and research interests include Black Male Studies, Africana Philosophy, Foucault Studies, Prison Studies, and the emergence of the Breton-Woods Institute, WTO, and Trade Agreements.

Center for Dewey Studies • Morris Library Basement, Room 0044



Center for Dewey Studies Lunchtime Talks

<http://deweycenter.siu.edu>

The Center for Dewey Studies is the home of research, publishing, and outreach focused on the life, work, and legacy of the American philosopher and educator John Dewey. Our Lunchtime Talks feature speakers researching Dewey and related thinkers, work in the pragmatist tradition, and work in a broadly Deweyan spirit.



Scan to learn more