Intro to Pragmatism, Classics of Pragmatist Thought

Pragmatism is probably the first, but certainly the most important genuinely North American philosophical tradition. The classical writings of Peirce, James, Dewey set the stage for a completely new orientation in epistemology, moral and political theory, psychology and many other fields. Basic to all Pragmatist writers is the belief that the active and interactive human being in its natural and social environment has to stand at the center of reflection. They thus emphasize volitional, procedural, social, and evolutionary aspects of knowledge of any kind. Given this focus on practically involved intelligent agents, political pragmatists like Dewey, Addams, Locke explore the natural origins, revisability and legitimacy of moral and political norms. They develop the idea of a critical use of knowledge and its connection to non-violent democratic conduct. Neopragmatists (Rorty and Putnam) explore the philosophical and political implications of critical thinking.