

The Enduring Global Color Line:
W.E.B. Du Bois, U.S. Empire, and Structural
and Individual-Level Racism in the Modern World-System

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Abstract: In recent years, W.E.B. Du Bois has received renewed appreciation within the social sciences, as scholars have drawn attention to the unrecognized empirical and theoretical advances Du Bois provided sociology. While individuals have rightfully drawn attention to his contributions on, for example, U.S. race relations, scholars have largely neglected his writings on more globally-oriented phenomenon, including colonialism, imperialism, U.S. Empire, and race relations at the global level. In this article, I detail Du Bois' contributions on globally-oriented phenomenon, and I demonstrate the continuing importance of his ideas. More specifically, I argue that world-systems theorists and researchers should incorporate Du Bois' insights in order to better conceptualize the intersections between race and class at the global level, as well as broader global political-economic dynamics in the 21st Century. In particular, I argue that we can utilize Du Bois' writings to understand structural- and individual-level racism throughout the modern-world system. In doing so, I draw attention to how white-dominated societies, particularly the U.S., continue to financially dominate the world and maintain institutional control of prominent multilateral bodies such as the United Nations. In addition, I show how U.S. state functionaries continue to utilize racist and neo-colonialist tropes to justify and guide their imperial activity abroad. To illustrate, I use the example of contemporary U.S. foreign policy in Venezuela, and I pull from both interviews with high-ranking U.S. state diplomats, including former ambassadors and members of the State Department, and formerly classified U.S. embassy cables detailing U.S. foreign policy practices throughout the world.

Introduction

Over the last few years, the life and work of W.E.B. Du Bois has received much deserved reconsideration. As Aldon Morris (2016) and others have shown, while Du Bois was the first American sociologist who actually collected data and empirically tested theory, recognition as such has, not coincidentally, eluded him. Many of Du Bois' ideas were appropriated by other scholars without attribution, including by Robert Park, and, while Du Bois taught courses and mentored graduate students at Atlanta University, he was often deprived of the funds and esteem given to the University of Chicago and its sociological practitioners (Morris 2016; Wright II 2016). Yet, even despite this, many early Chicago School members spent little time in the social worlds they wrote about and thus collected little serious data.

Although Du Bois has not received recognition proportionate with his contributions to the development of sociology, many of his ideas are not entirely absent from the social sciences. Several prominent sociological theory readers contain, for example, his writings on the concepts of the double consciousness and the veil (e.g. Calhoun et al 2012). These concepts have assisted social scientists in making sense of race relations within the U.S., as well as the social psychology of oppressed groups, including, but not only, African-Americans. Nonetheless, Du Bois is not often placed upon the same metaphorical pedestal as the "fore-fathers" of the discipline: Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber.

Yet, while Du Bois contributed much empirical work concerning the development and state of race relations in the U.S., such as in *Black Reconstruction in America*, Du Bois also directed considerable attention to global dynamics. Du Bois himself spent time abroad, and his writings betray the often-parochial focus we even continue to find in much contemporary American sociology. In "The Souls of White Folk," for example, Du Bois drew attention to the

hypocritical disjuncture between U.S. democracy promotion abroad and the racial limitations on democracy that existed at home. In addition, while Du Bois' notion of the color line has mostly been understood in the U.S. context, Du Bois continually underscored the importance of race at the global level. Du Bois (1903) centralized the importance of European colonialism in the construction of racist systems of thought, and he linked these systems of thought with continued exploitation throughout the world, famously asserting that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line — the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea."

Although Du Bois is beginning to receive the recognition he deserves, his writings on global dynamics and his post-colonial thought have not nearly received as much acclaim (Anievas et al. 2014; Weiner 2018). This is unfortunate. As Du Bois and others thereafter have demonstrated, racist ideologies emerged out of the European colonial process. Indeed, they emerged as a justification for that process involving exploitation of peoples and resources outside of the European metropole (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Golash-Boza 2016). Du Bois thus recognized that the color-line was a phenomenon that initially manifest at the global level, and, as European colonialism deepened, racist thought constituted international relations between Europe and much of the rest of the world.

Since Du Bois' writings, social scientists have increasingly examined global society. The most prominent, sociological body of thought concerning power at the global level includes world-systems theory (WST). Taking influence from Marxist scholarship, Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) developed WST in order make sense of global relations of power, and, in particular, the division of labor apparent between particular countries and regions of the world. Du Bois himself

also took influence from Marx, but he saw that Marx did not centralize issues of race and colonialism, so much as class, both at the domestic and global level.

WST adherents have also largely underscored the utility of Marxist concepts. Such researchers have fruitfully recognized global patterns of economic exploitation and inequality, and how an international division of labor characterizes our contemporary world. WST no doubt possesses a rightful and central part within social scientific efforts focused on relations between countries and regions of the world. The centrality of race, however, has often escaped world-systems analyses, or has become seemingly rendered subordinate to the questions of where a country fits into the global class hierarchy (core/semi-periphery/periphery). Wallerstein, among others, have surely recognized the importance of race, the existence of racism and racist hate groups, and the use of racist justifications for European colonial domination (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991). However, WST does not yet contain a robust analysis of how racist ideologies and racism as a structural phenomenon continue to shape the modern world-system. If they do recognize this, the enduring significance of race seemingly does not appear as central to WST as existent neo-Marxist categories, such as the core, semi-periphery, and periphery, which generally double as the bourgeoisie and proletariat, albeit with a middle category (the semi-periphery).

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how the post-colonial and global writings of Du Bois can help global scholars make sense of contemporary manifestations of structural racism and racist ideologies at the global level. Whereas many sociologists deploy the concept of structural racism to make sense of the structural-level patterns that reproduce racial inequalities at the state level, Du Bois insightfully understood that “the color line” extended into the global world. His thinking can help us, then, to understand these contemporary processes and how they can become integrated within, for example, WST and other theoretical frameworks utilized to

understand global dynamics. Later in this article, I detail how white-dominated societies continue to exercise structural-level power throughout the world-system

What is more, as a U.S. citizen, Du Bois keenly understood how a racist ideology suffused U.S. foreign policy, as it had suffused European colonial policies. The U.S., of course, displaced the British as the world's leading superpower following World War II. As the prospects for colonialism also withered following WWII, U.S. imperial modalities took different form. U.S. state elites embraced the idea that they were destined to spread their particular vision of democracy and human rights throughout the world. These inclinations have not yet withered away. Based on my own empirical work on U.S. foreign policy in Venezuela, I will show how racist and neo-colonialist tropes continue to characterize how high-ranking U.S. state actors understand political, economic, and cultural dynamics in nations outside the U.S. Just as a racist ideology justified European colonial power, racist patterns of thought continue to characterize U.S. foreign policy.

In the remainder of the article, I detail some of Du Bois' writings on the relationship between the Global North and the Global South, including more contemporary manifestations of U.S. global power. I argue that scholars focused on global dynamics, particularly world-systems researchers, can usefully incorporate Du Bois' insights into their work in order to develop a more robust analysis of how racial and class power dynamics intersect at the global level. In doing so, I show how Du Bois' thought helps us to recognize how structural racism characterizes relations between countries, and how a racist and neo-colonialist ideology, which Du Bois recognized at the turn of the 20th century, continues to pervade U.S. state practices abroad.

World-Systems Theory and Power at the Global Level

At the global level, politics and economics interested Du Bois. Yet, his insights concerning the development of a global world have largely went unsung by contemporary scholars focused on these developments (see Anievas et al. 2014; Weiner 2018 for exceptions). Foremost among international relations, Du Bois centralized the issue of power and the disproportionate amount of influence some countries and regions have wielded over others, a perspective which I detail in the following section. As already noted, though the most prominent, social scientific perspective that hones in on the distribution of global power includes world-systems theory (WST) and its adherents. Indeed, there are a few that might dispute the importance of WST, but, just as one point of consideration, one should note that there is no other specific, theoretical research program that retains its own section within the American Sociological Association (ASA) – Political Economy of the World-System (PEWS), as well as its own accompanying journal, *Journal of World-Systems Research*, which also remains directly affiliated with the ASA. This all said, WST remains a key feature of contemporary sociology, particularly for those interested in global dynamics.

So, in brief, how do WST researchers generally understand global relations?

WST researchers generally assert that the world involves an international division of labor composed of three groups of countries: the core, the semi-periphery, and the periphery (Wallerstein 1974). These three designations correspond with where countries fall within the international division of labor. The core includes those countries that possess strong and diversified economies and largely export high-tech products, including, for example, automobiles, machinery, and medical supplies, as well a number of services, including financial and accounting services. These countries are home to many of the world's most financially

successful corporations, which exploit labor and resources in both the periphery and semi-periphery. These countries include those in Western Europe, and several European settler colonial states (i.e. Australia, Canada, the U.S., and New Zealand). By contrast, the periphery includes those countries that were formerly colonized by European imperial powers, including countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These countries are often reliant on few foreign exports, such as raw materials and textiles, and they are also often reliant upon foreign aid from core countries. Their currencies often pale in value in relation with the Euro and the U.S. dollar. As a result, they remain heavily reliant upon foreign currency, which exporters demand from importers within the periphery. Lastly, the semi-periphery sits between these two regions and shares features of both the core and the periphery. Some countries that WST researchers identify as located within the semi-periphery include Brazil, China, India, and Russia. These countries possess financially successful corporations that often exploit resources and labor in other countries, but they also possess weaker currencies than core countries, lack the level of infrastructure featured in the core, and remain dependent on trade with and foreign direct investment from countries located throughout the core.

Following this conceptual framework, WST researchers have examined a range of global phenomena involving politics and economics. Just a quick perusal of the most recent issues of the *Journal of World-Systems Research* (JWSR) shows that WST researchers have a broad array of foci – from populism to nuclear war to counter-hegemonic social movements. Yet, throughout many of these analyses, priority is given to the global class dimension that many countries find themselves within. In other words, many WST researchers view our global world as primarily involving a class hierarchy depending on the productive capacities that are primarily utilized within each particular country. WST researchers continue to examine various aspects of the

modern world-system and how some countries possess more income/wealth than others, but there is often little explicit emphasis on structural-level racism at the global level and how racial ideologies contribute to the perpetuation of unequal relations between white-dominated countries (i.e. Western Europe and settle colonial states) and countries that largely possess black and brown peoples (i.e. the formerly colonized world). In a word, WST could say much more about racial capitalism in global perspective. Looking to Du Bois and his emphasis on racial and class dynamics at the global level, though, we can assist WST and other globally-oriented scholars in fully grappling with the intersections between racial and class inequalities made manifest at the global level.

Du Bois and the Global World

One of the most widely recognized Du Boisian concepts includes the color line. Alongside the concepts of the veil and double consciousness, scholars have used the concept of the color line to illuminate the inequalities that exist between white individuals and persons of color, particularly in the U.S., where Du Bois primarily lived throughout his life. Yet, while Du Bois deployed the concept of the color line to understand U.S. processes, he clearly did not intend to limit this concept to the U.S. alone.

Du Bois (1903: 19) wrote that the “problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line — the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.” In doing so, Du Bois acknowledges that racism as a social relation is not only confined to the U.S., but remains a truly global phenomenon. Though not often recognized as a scholar of globalization, Du Bois predated much of the scholarship focused on

issues of globalization and international relations, including WST and even earlier theoretical frameworks focused on “Third World” dependency.

Similar to world-systems and dependency theorists, Du Bois identified as a Marxist. However, Du Bois found Marxism lacking a robust analysis that involved both class and racial dynamics. Marx condemned slavery of black populations in the U.S., and often wrote about British imperial dynamics, but much of his work remained focused on issues such as the extraction of surplus value and other class dynamics, rather than examining the intersection between race and class at the domestic or global level.

Du Bois, by contrast, centralized racial dimensions, domestically and globally, and saw this as his contribution to advancing Marxist analyses. According to Du Bois, the success of European colonial regimes, and the development of global capitalism itself, depended upon the exploitation and oppression of “darker races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea” by white populations located in Western Europe and the white settler colonial states, including, most notably, the U.S. World-systems researchers also recognize this. Both Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (1991) understand racism as directly corresponding with the rise of global capitalism, as do other prominent sociologists of race, such as Howard Winant (2000). Of course, distinctions between “civilized citizens” and “foreign barbarians” had previously existed, as Du Bois also recognized, but a systematic ideology concerning distinctions between white European populations and “darker races” had not yet been “scientifically” codified or deployed in any systematic way to justify such domination. Du Bois and world-systems researchers thus concur on this point: racist systems of thought were utilized in order to justify colonial models of rule, wherein Europeans – English, French, Belgian – economically and politically dominated populations throughout Africa, the Americas, Asia, and the islands of

the world by exploiting labor and resources, and by appointing individuals from the metropole who rendered political decisions in a dictatorial, anti-democratic manner, only answering to their own government. Colonialism did not simply rest upon an economic justification, but rather a cultural justification, rooted in what was then understood as science.

Du Bois (1920, 1951) lived during and after the era of widespread European colonialism, and he recognized the development a “new imperialism” in development. Du Bois asserted that a new form of imperialism was developing in the post-colonial period, wherein white-dominated governments extended capitalist and exploitative relations throughout the world. As European powers exploited peoples in Africa and Asia for material profit, Du Bois (1915: 708) quite bluntly recognized that “the ‘Color Line’ began to pay dividends.” But, it was not just European capital and U.S. capital that benefited from global exploitation. Du Bois recognized that workers in Europe and the U.S. also benefited from these relations. Albeit in a lesser manner than capital, European and U.S. workers benefited from globally exploitative relations through their increased ability to consume cheap products from abroad. As a result, Du Bois pointed out that European and American largesse ultimately depended upon the exploitation of “darker races” abroad, even following the abolition of slavery. Indeed, although Du Bois did not term it as such, his work predates the dependency school, as well as WST, which all have centralized concepts of neo-colonialism, wherein territories and governments possess sovereignty in name, but remain exploited by corporate elites and corporate capital situated in the U.S. and Western Europe.

Racist ideas, of course, justified slavery in earlier centuries, but Du Bois also saw a racist ideology continuing to justify unequal global relations between the U.S. and Europe, on the hand, and countries throughout the formerly colonized world. As Europe was beginning to lose global power following the decimation generated during World War II, Du Bois saw the U.S.

coming to play a dominant role throughout the world. The U.S. Empire did not begin, of course, with the uniquely dominant position the U.S. found itself in after WWII. Instead, U.S. imperial practices began with “the founding” of the country: the genocide of native populations, and, thereafter, the extension of its boundaries from the original colonies along the Atlantic Coast to encompass the vast amount of its land today. As Du Bois (1920) recognized, the U.S. “whetted her sword for mongrel Mexico and mulatto South America” during its expansion, both by acquiring territories on the mainland, as well as engaging in warfare during, for example, 1898 in order “to liberate” Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico from Spain.

Following the end of colonialism, though, Du Bois recognized that the U.S. would still aim to exert global control as it became the world’s most dominant superpower, as did the former European empires. In 1951, following World War II and amid the Red Scare Era, Du Bois (1951: 3) asserted that colonialism had “not disappeared, even though its back is broken in India and China ... American business is desperately trying to restore the essentials of colonialism under the name of free enterprise and western democracy; and are plunging the world into destruction for false ideals and misleading fears” about communism. Du Bois saw the U.S. perpetuating what European colonial powers ultimately sought to achieve: economic exploitation of populations of color for the benefit of economic elites. More broadly, Du Bois also understood that the U.S. aimed to economically, politically, and culturally control the world, through its particular vision of democracy which tethered freedom to capitalist pursuits.

In doing so, Du Bois recognized that the U.S. regarded itself as the global guardian of freedom and democracy. He found this, however, maximally hypocritical. He wrote that instead “of standing as a great example of the success of democracy and the possibility of human brotherhood, America has taken her place as an awful example of its pitfalls and failures, so far

as black and brown and yellow peoples are concerned” (Du Bois 1920: 28). Even further, Du Bois (1920: 28) pointed out that for “two or more centuries America has marched proudly in the van of human hatred,—making bonfires of human flesh and laughing at them hideously, and making the insulting of millions more than a matter of dislike,—rather a great religion, a world war-cry: Up white, down black; to your tents, O white folk, and world war with black and parti-colored mongrel beasts!” All together, then, before WST and other theoretical frameworks centralized imperialist and neo-colonial dynamics, Du Bois had identified them, and recognized how the U.S. had displaced former European colonial powers to become the world’s lone superpower. He recognized that European economic success was built upon the domination of “darker races,” first through slavery and thereafter through colonial rule. In the 20th century, and as colonialism formally dissipated, Du Bois recognized how the U.S. and, to a lesser extent Western Europe, continued to dominate the world through free trade and the U.S.’s own particular vision of political rule, which involved the defeat of communism, and the promotion of liberal democracy. These ideas continue to possess more relevance than ever as the U.S. Empire persists, and, as I demonstrate below, remains rooted in both structural- and individual-level manifestations of racism.

Structural Racism at the Global Level

Before V.I. Lenin, Rosa Luxembour, Kwame Nkrumah, and others examined imperialism in the 20th century, Du Bois had set down foundational thoughts concerning how imperial forms of rule were already changing from a colonial to a neo-colonial mode that would primarily involve economic domination by European- and American-based corporations. Like Lenin and other scholars of imperialism, Du Bois recognized that European and U.S. capitalists

ultimately pursued economic fortune through their overseas expansionary efforts, as they could not feasibly invest all their surplus within their home countries. Of course, political and economic elites cloaked all of their pursuits with claims of political development and the cultivation of democracy, but, according to Du Bois, their ultimate aim was to enrich themselves, and, in doing so, to provide their own domestic working classes with just enough material incentives so they would not challenge the existing capitalist model.

Du Bois, like other scholars today, recognized that racism was not simply an attitudinal phenomenon, but that racism constituted social relations between groups: their access to resources, their access to institutions, and the general esteem awarded to individuals as part of status group within a social hierarchy. In other words, Du Bois recognized that racism was a systemic phenomenon that became rooted in social structures and social institutions, not just in the individual dispositions of societal inhabitants. Indeed, “scientifically” codified, racial hierarchies developed out of the European colonial pursuit. Thereafter, though, racism as a social system developed dynamics of its own, and became a system that benefited not only white political-economic elites, but also white citizens writ large, who also generally embraced a racial hierarchy that placed them above persons of color.

Many scholars have rightfully examined the systemic nature of racism, and how it has constituted social relations between racialized groups in many locations. Du Bois, however, remained attuned to these dynamics both at the domestic and global level. If, at the turn of the 20th century, colonial and neo-colonial relations typified international relations between, on the one hand, Western Europe and English white settler colonies (i.e. Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the U.S.), and, on the other hand, countries throughout the Global South, do these

sorts of dynamics still characterize relations between these two sets of countries? In other words, does the color-line still persist at the global level at the turn of the 21st century?

Structural Economic Considerations

Du Bois' insights concerning the relationship between the Global North and the Global South are more relevant than ever, as the global color-line, I will show, persists well into the 21st century. Racism as a structural-level phenomenon continues to characterize global dynamics in a multitude of ways. No doubt, economic relations between the Global North and Global South are of great importance, and surely shape additional sorts of relations between, for example, the U.S. and countries throughout Latin America. It makes sense to begin, then, with recognition of how racism as a structural-level phenomenon finds expression in global economic processes.

Colonial and neo-colonial relations primarily involve the extraction of resources and profits from colonies/neo-colonies by foreign-controlled corporations. Whereas purely colonial relations between countries have largely disappeared, neo-colonial relations persist into the 21st century. One of the key characteristics involving neo-colonial relations includes economic domination by foreign-controlled corporations. During the colonial period, Western European countries staked claims to resources throughout territories in the Global South. The U.S., and other English settler colonies, also began to invest much capital and control resources throughout the Global South. U.S. corporations, for instance, played an economically dominant role in many Central American nations, like Guatemala, where the United Fruit Company became the country's largest employer and largest landowner by the 20th century.

These dynamics generated a path-dependent process wherein resources and employment prospects in the Global South remained dominated by foreign corporations in many formerly colonized countries moving into the post-colonial period. Yet, despite the end of colonial

relations and the arrival of formal independence, inequality and poverty remain key features of the Global South, in contrast with Western Europe and the U.S., where a portion of the working-classes have received enough remuneration and access to social services, to live long and generally healthy lives. According to the World Bank (2019), for instance, the countries with the lowest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita all fall within the Global South, with eighteen of them in Africa (e.g. Liberia, Malawi, Uganda), one in the Caribbean (Haiti), and one in the Middle East (Afghanistan). By contrast, sixteen of the countries with the highest GDP per capita include countries in Western Europe and the English settler colonies (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the U.S.). Similarly, the Central Intelligence Agency (2019) reports that among the twenty countries with the highest level of inequality as measured by the GINI coefficient, all of them fall within the Global South, that is, while the twenty countries with the lowest level of inequality fall within Europe, with very few exceptions.

We can take a closer look, as well, at some of the economies of the most impoverished countries to understand their unique dynamics. A key question we might examine to gain a better understanding of the extent of neo-colonialism, includes the domination of key industries within formerly colonized countries by foreign corporations. In Malawi, a former British colony, for instance, tobacco remains one of the country's largest industries and one of its primary exports, ultimately providing the country with much of the foreign exchange required to import additional products from abroad. Some scholars have even deemed Malawi "the most tobacco-dependent country in the world" (Smith 2018). And while British American Tobacco (BAT) uniformly dominated tobacco cultivation during colonialism, several transnational tobacco companies (TTCs) continue to dominate the industry by setting the prices that tobacco growers can sell their products at, including BAT, but also other TTCs such as Philip Morris and the China National

Tobacco Corporation, and effectively controlling the entirety of the domestic tobacco industry (Otañez, Mamudu, and Glantz 2007; Smith and Lee 2018). Similarly, in Haiti, apparel is now the country's main industry accounting for 90% of its exports. And, like Malawi, this industry remains dominated by companies such as Gildan, Hanes, and Levi Strauss, all of which remain headquartered within the white-dominated world of "the core" (Edwards Jr. 2015).

On top of economic domination from abroad, many Western European and U.S. corporations remain some of the world's most financially successful companies. Corporations such as Walmart, Royal Dutch Shell, Volkswagen, and BP head the Fortune Global 500. Yet, while some of these companies are headquartered in Europe, the hegemonic standing of the U.S. is clear. For instance, U.S. corporations comprise nearly half (42%) of the top 50. Many of these corporations operate all throughout the world, dominating the share of the market in a number of locations. Walmart, for instance, is now not only the top employer in Mexico, but the largest private employer in Latin America (*Mercopress* 8/5/2010). In addition, Amazon, another U.S.-based corporation, is beginning to dominate ecommerce all throughout the world, including in India, where it now possesses 30% of the ecommerce market share (Koetsier 2018), and, in Japan, where Amazon recently displaced Rakuten as the largest ecommerce retailer (*The Economist* 4/14/2018).

And yet, while U.S. corporations - and to a lesser extent Western European corporations - continue to be the largest employers and continue to dominate many markets abroad, individuals continue to pursue immigration to the U.S., in addition to other countries throughout the world. This is quite telling. While many economists asserted that foreign investment would lead to economic growth, these developments have not motivated quite as many individuals to leave the Global South. Individuals have sought to immigrate to locations where economic remuneration

for the working classes remains much larger than it is in many parts of the Global South. Indeed, those countries with a negative net migration rate continue to only include those countries located in the Global South, in addition to several formerly communist countries in Eastern Europe, such as Albania, Latvia, and Moldova (CIA 2019). Some countries in the Global South, to be sure, have positive net migration rates such as Bahrain and Costa Rica, but the U.S., alongside other English white settler colonies and Western European countries, all feature positive net migration rates, illustrating how economic benefits have continued to accrue to the white-dominated world in the post-colonial period.

Structural Political Considerations

Structural racism, however, is not rooted in economic dynamics alone, but in a number of prominent institutions which confer crucial resources upon select groups. Since World War II, governments throughout the world have developed multilateral institutions with the job of rendering decisions that all citizens throughout the world must abide by. Some of these institutions include the United Nations; the Organization of American States; the International Monetary Fund; and the World Bank. These are bodies that multiple governments remain affiliated with and whose authority is expected to supersede their respective nation-states.

Similar to examining participation in domestic governmental bodies or the upper echelons of corporate units, we can also look at participation and involvement within global political bodies as an indication of what actors possess institutional control. In doing so, one quickly recognizes that former European colonial powers as well as the U.S. maintain disproportionate amounts of control, in contrast with those formerly colonized countries throughout the Global South. The UN, for instance, possesses a Security Council composed of

five permanent members that retain veto power over any UN resolution, that is, in addition to ten temporary members that wield no such veto power over UN resolutions. These five permanent members include China, France, Russia, the U.S., and the U.K. While four of these countries represent the Global North, only one country, China, is found within the Global South.

While the U.S., for one, remains constrained by four other global powers within the UN, the U.S. alone exercises veto power within the IMF and the WB, perhaps the world's two most powerful financial groups. Decision-making in these two bodies is contingent upon state levels of funding for these organizations, and, what is more, decisions rendered within the IMF possess a clear relationship with how particular countries' UN voting patterns align with the U.S. And so, while some countries can numerically limit U.S. power within the UN, the overall influence of the U.S. remains visible even outside the bounds of the UN and bends towards the U.S. Dreher and Johnson (2007), for instance, have found that countries whose voting patterns in the UN more closely align with the U.S. receive far fewer conditions on their IMF loans than other countries. And, when one considers the voting scheme within the IMF, this is not at all surprising. The weight of one's vote is tethered to how much funding a government has provided to the organization. As a result, the U.S. possesses over 17% of the vote share in the IMF, and, given that decisions require 85% of the votes, it remains the only country that wields veto power.

In the end, the formerly colonized world, which includes countries that disproportionately include individuals of color, remains marginalized within many global bodies. No doubt these countries can participate, and they of course can, for example, speak before UN General Assembly. However, the fact remains that only a handful of countries dictate their decisions, namely the U.S. Indeed, even where countries possess only one vote, such as within the UN General Assembly, leaders recognize that their votes will impinge upon U.S. decision-making

within additional bodies like the IMF. In fact, in recent years, Trump has made the relationship between voting alongside the U.S. in bodies like the UN, and the distribution of U.S. foreign aid allocations, quite clear. In December 2017, for instance, Trump asserted that he would consider cutting off aid to countries that opposed designating Jerusalem as Israel's capital within a UN resolution. And so, U.S. domination, in particular, within global bodies that ostensibly represent all countries throughout the world, implicitly and, even now at times, explicitly persists.

The U.S. Empire and Its Functionaries

As social scientists have demonstrated over the past several decades, racism is not solely a social psychological phenomenon devoid of a structural and institutional basis (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Golash-Boza 2016; Seamster and Ray 2019). Rather, racism remains rooted in social institutions, including political bodies and the economic sphere, among other areas of social life. However, racist views are not undeserving of analysis, and such views undoubtedly contribute to the solidification and perpetuation of structural and institutional racism. That a racist ideology justified and suffused European colonial practices is well-documented throughout the literature. As Du Bois recognized, the development and conceptualization of the existence of race was founded within the experience of, and justified, European colonialism. As modes of imperialism have changed, though, since the colonial period, do we still see an explicit racist ideology justifying contemporary forms of imperialism?

While this paper cannot speak to justifications for U.S. policies in all locations, the analysis below focuses on how racist and neo-colonialist views continue to justify imperial policies in Latin America, particularly Venezuela, in the 21st century. There is no other country within the Americas that has challenged U.S. regional leadership more so over the course of the

past two decades than Venezuela. Over this period, Venezuela has been headed by socialist leaders, who have explicitly sought to combat U.S. imperialism, combat U.S.-led neoliberal capitalism, and create a multi-polar world by aligning with other anti-U.S. governments, including countries within and beyond the hemisphere.

The U.S. has, of course, responded to the challenges from Venezuela with a number of its own strategies, from public condemnation of Venezuelan leaders, to urging countries throughout Latin America not to enter into economic agreements with the country, to the use of economic sanctions. One of the primary ways, though, that the U.S. has systematically sought to hamper Venezuela and embolden its opposition, has been through democracy promotion programs. Since the 1980s, the U.S. has developed several state programs designed “to promote democracy” in select countries all throughout the world (Carothers 1999; Mitchell 2016; Robinson 1996). Under the auspices of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); the Department of State; and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and its associated groups, the U.S. provides funding and technical assistance to political parties, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and states and governments all in an effort to promote and consolidate its vision of democracy. Some of these programs involve conducting seminars for leaders from political parties on, for example, how to run campaigns and how to build party platforms; they involve providing periodic funding for programs run by NGOs focused on, for example, civil liberties, women’s rights, and private property rights; and they involve providing funding to legislatures to facilitate dialogue between political parties (Carothers 1999; Mitchell 2016).

These are diverging views on the politics behind these programs and their ultimate aims. For instance, neo-Marxist scholars like William Robinson (1996) and James Petras (1999) assert that these programs support political parties that embrace neoliberal capitalism, and, as a result,

these programs ultimately aim to promote neoliberal economic policies above all else. On the other hand, democracy promotion practitioners, U.S. state bureaucrats, U.S. politicians, and several political scientists believe in the efficacy of these programs and their ability to generate democratic change. For instance, the Bush II administration asserted that its policies, led in part by USAID and NED, paved way for the end of the undemocratic Shevardnadze regime in Georgia, and the success of the Rose Revolution (Mitchell 2009).¹ My purpose here, however, is not to adjudicate between these two, or any other, perspectives on U.S. democracy promotion. Rather my purpose here is to highlight how racist and neo-colonialist views continue to justify instances of U.S. democracy promotion, just as they justified previous colonial policies in episodes past.²

Contemporary Venezuela has featured two leaders over the past two decades that have challenged the U.S.: Presidents Hugo Chávez and, now, Nicolás Maduro. And while there are serious democratic issues within the country today, there is no doubt that Chávez was routinely elected in generally free and fair elections, and genuinely supported by the Venezuelan people, from 1998 until his death in 2013. Throughout Chávez's time in his office, elections were continually monitored and verified by both domestic and international observers, including the European Union, as well as the Carter Center, which is located in the U.S state of Georgia and operated by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter. Some individuals criticized the manner in

¹ Mitchell (2009), however, disagrees with the Bush administration's analysis of the democratic transition in Georgia and the alleged consequentiality of the administration's involvement within it.

² Although the U.S. did not formally create democracy-promoting institutions until the 1980s, the U.S. indeed engaged in similar practices at earlier points in time. In the Philippines and Puerto Rico, for instance, following the Spanish-American War, the U.S. refused to allow for independence in part because U.S. leaders believed that Filipino and Puerto Rican citizens did not truly understand how to conduct democratic politics. As a result, the U.S. developed "educational programs" for Filipino and Puerto Rican elites in the ways of democracy. In addition, the CIA formerly ran many of the programs that now fall under USAID and the Department of State direction, including providing support for particular political parties throughout the world. While the U.S. now formally documents these programs and runs them in a more bureaucratic manner, the CIA often simply provided funds outright to political parties and media outlets that it supported.

which Chávez ruled and some of the policies his government undertook. Yet, there is little question about the support he received from the Venezuelan populace.

Nonetheless, during the years that Chávez maintained the presidency, the U.S. operated a multiplicity of “democracy promotion” programs within the country, primarily through USAID, and the NED and its associated groups, including the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute for Foreign Affairs (NDI). Through these programs, the U.S. assisted the Venezuelan opposition in its efforts to unseat Chávez and his allies. In doing so, the U.S. sought to transgress the judgments of Venezuelan citizens, who voiced support for their president. Instead, the U.S. attempted to cultivate rejection of Chávez and assisted the opposition with continued funding and support. This indeed represents the sort of neo-colonialist pattern in the realm of politics that remains evident today, wherein the U.S. privileges some political actors over others, regardless of whether or not they actually retain the support of their own populace. In many places such as Venezuela, the U.S. deems only particular political actors as worthy of support, and, given the economic largesse the U.S. can offer, it is hardly inconceivable that U.S. support could seriously distort electoral playing fields abroad, that is, by providing some political actors with many more resources to promote their campaigns and secure votes than others.

The U.S., unlike former European colonial powers, does not select a citizen directly from the U.S. to rule over countries throughout the Global South in a dictatorial manner, as the British Empire, for instance, did. Still, the U.S. aims to shape the electoral playing field by throwing its support behind only those actors that the U.S. deems to be the political players that should operate governments throughout the world. In Venezuela, this has included center-right politicians that have challenged Chávez during presidential elections and shown warmth towards the U.S. For instance, during the 2006 presidential campaign, the IRI provided opposition

presidential candidate Manuel Rosales with several technical specialists to help run his campaign (Cablegate 12/04/2006). The U.S. also continually urged opposition politicians and activists to unite behind one opposition candidate, that is, so that they would not splinter their vote and could have a better chance at defeating Chávez. One former ambassador told me, for example, that she continually met with political party leaders and urged them to do this. She said that she had “met with the opposition – I can’t tell you how many times. I told them they need to come up with a plan and needed to unite. There were 50 opposition parties registered!” In doing so, high-ranking U.S. state diplomats strategized with opposition leaders so they could possibly defeat Chávez. Nonetheless, Rosales, for his part, was ultimately unsuccessful in the 2006 election, but this did not deter the U.S. from continuing to support the opposition in the ensuing years.

Throughout the mid-2000s, USAID had the explicit aim of tearing supporters away from Chávez, particularly within urban neighborhoods, where Chávez received much support. These working-class areas of major cities are where darker-skinned Venezuelans primarily live. These dynamics exist in contrast with a light-skinned political-economic elite whose members can often directly trace their roots back to Europe.³ USAID, for instance, established community programs in these urban neighborhoods that sought to promote community ideals like participatory democracy. However, they established these programs with opposition political parties, who helped them locate opposition party activists in the area. Thereafter, they would help opposition activists create seemingly neutral organizations, so that they did not appear to be linked with the political opposition, and thus could attract Chávez supporters to their meetings. The ultimate purpose of these community groups, though, was to slowly introduce Chávez

³ Chávez himself routinely spoke of his indigenous and African heritage, and extolled indigenous and Afro-Caribbean communities within the country. Indeed, the opposition often portrayed Chávez more dark-skinned than he actually was, and even publicly likened him to a gorilla.

supporters to opposition ideals and to put them into direct contact with opposition activists, who would attempt steer them away from Chávez and into the opposition.

Throughout all of these programs, the U.S. message was rather clear: “the politician that you have supported, you really shouldn’t support.” Instead, the U.S. through USAID sought to convert Venezuelans into anti-Chávez voters. Indeed, U.S. state functionaries believed that Chávez was manipulating the populace, buying them off with social development projects, and offering them false promises of participatory democracy and socialism. As a result, U.S. state functionaries believed it was up to the U.S. to show Venezuelans their true interests, and that they should support center-right politicians, who represented a different sort of politics than what Chávez offered their country.

Some might point out that this paternalistic relationship between a white-dominated, settler colonial society, and a Latin American society, in itself demonstrates structural-level racism at the global level. I agree. As a result of U.S. economic largesse, the U.S. can fund “democracy promotion” programs in Venezuela, and potentially tilt domestic politics in a particular direction. Yet, beyond these structural-level dynamics, many U.S. state functionaries have also articulated racist and neo-colonialist justifications for their “democracy promotion” practices in contemporary Venezuela.

U.S. state functionaries who have designed “democracy promotion” programs have often depicted and treated Venezuelan citizens as a backwards people that cannot think for themselves, and, as a result, require U.S. tutelage and education in the democratic ways of the U.S. Of course, the U.S.-based understanding of democracy remains rooted in a liberal democratic vision of politics. This vision prioritizes civil and political rights, including, for example, private property rights, the right to vote, and freedom of speech, but offers little in the way of social and

economic rights, which the Venezuelan government under Chávez pledged to prioritize. What is more, many U.S. state functionaries even recognize the racism and contempt for poorer populations that exists among many leaders and members of the Venezuelan opposition, which is generally led by rich, light-skinned elites who can trace their ancestry directly to the Spanish colonial period. Even despite this, though, the U.S. continued to support these individuals.

In an interview, a former member of the U.S. Department of State and USAID, who helped design “democracy promotion” programs in Venezuela under Chávez told me that he worked with the opposition despite their overtly racist perspectives. This individual stated that the U.S. Department of State and USAID had a plain objective in Venezuela, and this

“objective was that you had thousands of youth, high school, and college kids ... [of the] middle-class that were horrified of this Indian-looking guy in power. They were idealistic. We wanted to help them to build a civic organization, so that they could mobilize and organize. How do you organize yourselves to vote? This is different than protesting.”

In this passage, this high-ranking U.S. state diplomat recognizes that the Venezuelan opposition, particularly its student front, was through-and-through composed of middle-class individuals who were “horrified” by an indigenous-looking president leading their country. Yet, even despite their overt racism, the U.S. planned to help these middle-class students build civic organizations so they could help to organize and defeat Chávez at the ballot box, rather than simply engaging in periodic street protests with little long-term aim.

Another individual who contracted with USAID to carry out U.S. programs in Venezuela revealed that he believed it was the U.S. duty to show Venezuelans how to do democracy properly. He stated that it was the U.S. duty to spread Jeffersonian democracy throughout the

world. This vision of politics, of course, is derived from U.S. politician Thomas Jefferson, who himself owned slaves and advanced a liberal vision of democratic politics rooted in the rights of the individual. This vision deeply contrasts with the more collective form of economic and participatory democracy encouraged by the Venezuelan government under Chávez. Similarly, a former U.S. ambassador to Venezuela during the years of Chávez's rule asserted that Chávez routinely attacked what the U.S. sought to cultivate abroad: "a conventional Western-style democracy." Ethnocentric and neo-colonialist views are plainly apparent. Taken together, U.S. diplomatic leaders in Venezuela generally sought to establish U.S. superiority in the realm of politics. That is, although there are many variants of democracy (e.g. direct, participatory, representative, Jeffersonian, etc.), the U.S. wanted to impart its own vision of democracy within Venezuela, and promote those actors that also embraced this vision. Though these practices are not colonial, they still represent the neo-colonial sort of paternalism that continues to characterize U.S. relations with many Latin American countries, and beyond.

What of Chávez, though? How did U.S. state functionaries understand his behavior? While no one monolithic understanding of Chávez and his behavior emerged, many state functionaries offered patronizing and oftentimes stereotypical views of Chávez, seemingly derived from existing white racial frames that have historically portrayed Latino citizens as emotionally-driven, "hot-headed," and irrational (Feagin 2009; Krenn 2006). Indeed, within secret embassy cables, Chávez is often described by high-ranking members within the U.S. State Department as "bizarre," "hot-headed," "a megalomaniac," "rambling," and other choice words – that is, instead of attempting to understand the actual logic behind Chávez's policies and why Venezuelan citizens supported him and his social agenda across a decade and a half.

One U.S. functionary who worked with USAID in Venezuela, for instance, opined that perhaps “machismo” was behind Chávez’s support for, what the functionary saw as, the failed ideology of socialism. Machismo, of course, refers to allegedly overly masculine behavior of Latin American males and their allegedly sexist behavior towards women. Another U.S. Department employee suggested that perhaps Chávez had played “the race card” in order to garner support and achieve power. When asked about his understanding of Chávez’s rise to office, he said

“You know how Latin America works... he comes from a less elite, Indian family. He excels in the military, becomes a paratrooper. For whatever reason [he] becomes outraged about the state of politics in Venezuela, which is not bad and corrupt. [He believes] the darker you are, the less you matter to the state. Is this an MLK or Benito Juárez? A guy who loves liberty? Or is this a guy that says this would be a great vehicle to ride? This is a guy like others that wanted power. Like French revolutionaries, he lost the idea that every human life matters. Once he was on that path and embraced Castro, there’s no way out of that.”

For this individual, Chávez manipulated the Venezuelan populace by suggesting that racial/ethnic minorities were oppressed by a white elite minority. According to this U.S. official, though, Chávez only utilized this narrative to achieve power, and he suggests that Chávez might not have even believed that racial/ethnic oppression existed, but only wanted to push a particular perspective in order to use it as “a vehicle” to reach power, which, according to this U.S. functionary, is what Chávez ultimately desired: power for power’s sake.

If the opposition possessed racist views but still deserved funding and support, and Chávez, as a macho Latino, manipulated racial/ethnic minorities into supporting him by playing

“the race card,” what of Chávez’s many supporters? How did U.S. functionaries conceive of them? First, the above depiction of Chávez and his base of support suggests that U.S. functionaries believed that he was able to successfully manipulate Venezuelan citizens into believing there were racial/ethnic tensions, when, in fact, there were not. This depicts Chávez’s supporters as cultural dupes, who are not aware of their own personal experiences and interests, but rather passive receptacles that Chávez manipulated with his speeches. In fact, in a secret U.S. cable from June 2006, Deputy Chief of Mission Kevin Whitaker, now Ambassador to Colombia, stated that the “effect of Chavez’ rhetorical onslaught is a *frenzied populace* afraid to express anything other than support, genuine or not” for the Venezuelan government (Cablegate 06/19/2006).

In the end, U.S. state functionaries actively sided with overtly racist opposition members, and understood Chávez and his supporters through a neocolonialist, paternalist, and racist lens. Despite the opposition’s overtly racist views, U.S. functionaries still supported the opposition and sought to combat Chávez. All the while, they presented supporters of Chávez as failing to understand their true interests and in need of U.S. tutelage to overcome their blindness. In doing so, U.S. state functionaries embarked upon a newfound-sort of “civilizing mission” in order to help “the natives” to understand the errors of their ways and come forth into civilization by choosing those leaders that the U.S. deemed worthy of political support. U.S. diplomatic leaders depicted Venezuelan citizens as beholden to their emotions, and thus not possessing an effectively rational mind capable of proper discernment. These actors failed to understand the unique possibility that citizens supported Chávez, because he pledged to represent their interests, as citizens understood them, and not U.S. interests or the interests of any other foreign entity.

Discussions and Conclusions

Du Bois was among the first social scientists to recognize the way race and racial ideologies shaped global relations. While other scholars recognized unequal international relations, they often centralized issues of class, instead of fully recognizing how racial capitalism developed and how racist views often justified and direct the foreign policies of powerful actors. Du Bois thus has provided scholars with solid groundwork on which to examine how racist and neo-colonial dynamics persist into the present, that is, alongside unequal economic relations between particular clusters of countries found throughout the world – be it “the core,” the Global North, or however conceptualized.

It remains undeniable that Western Europe and the U.S., and other English settler colonies, continue to dominate the modern world-system. These countries possess most of the financially successful corporations and effectively control many of the international bodies whose decisions all countries are expected to adhere to. White-dominated countries thus continue to wield structural-level power throughout the world. They also wield institutional power within bodies such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the United Nations.

The domination wielded by these societies throughout the modern world-system remains rooted in European colonialism and the development of racial hierarchies. Indeed, the success of many corporations headquartered in Western Europe and the U.S. depends upon the exploitation of individuals in the Global South. Western European and U.S.-based corporations no longer simply exploit the natural resources of countries throughout the world, but they also exploit the labor therein, which, of course, has had ramifications for working-class members within their own countries, particularly within the U.S., which has witnessed a high level of deindustrialization since the 1970s. And while these developments were expected to bring

economic fortune to many populations throughout the world, wages have largely stagnated in places like Bangladesh and Pakistan, and inequality rates have persisted, particularly as a small domestic elite garners the wealth from these operations, all the while working-classes largely exist in squalid conditions both in and out of the workplace.

This analysis has also drew attention to the individual-level racist sentiments that exist among high-ranking members of the U.S. state. Perhaps this is not unsurprising though. With Donald Trump now in the presidency, there is surely no doubt that such sentiments pervade the halls of power. Trump, of course, has referred to countries that primarily possess black populations as “shitholes,” and his former Chief of Staff Steve Bannon asserted that Muslim populations lack democratic proclivities within their “DNA.” Despite all of this, though, it remains necessary to capture those backstage views of prominent U.S. state actors, so that they cannot hide behind public statements designed to convince domestic and global audiences of their benign motivations.

In the end, the overall purpose of this article is to demonstrate the continued utility of Du Bois and his writings. Du Bois rightfully has received much attention in some corners for his attention to racial dynamics within the U.S. However, he found much time to conceptualize and detail global phenomena, including the shift from the colonial to the post-colonial world. Du Bois lived through this period and saw this these dynamics unfold before him. It is my hope that social scientists might fully attend to the accuracy of Du Bois revelations and incorporate them more fruitfully within their research.

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