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## Racial and Colonial Capitalism

In October of 1945 the Fifth Pan-African Congress met in Manchester, England. The purpose of the congress was to articulate and advance an anticolonial agenda for the post-World War II period. Du Bois attended the meeting and was named the congress's international president.

This honorary title was not the result of his leading role in organizing the meeting. Other leaders from the emerging African liberation movements, such as Kwame Nkrumah<sup>1</sup> and George Padmore,<sup>2</sup> played a larger role in making the meeting take place. The title accorded Du Bois, however, was a recognition of his trajectory as a Pan-Africanist intellectual and organizer. In 1945 Du Bois was seventy-seven years old and renowned worldwide for his work against colonialism and for Pan-Africanism, an ideology grounded in the belief that people of African descent, both in the continent and in the diaspora, share a common history and fate. Du Bois lived in an era in which empire and colonialism stood at the center of the world's political, economic, and cultural organization, and in his sociology, empire and colonialism are central categories of analysis.<sup>3</sup> For him the color line was a global historical structure that affected all aspects of life under racial and colonial capitalism.

The best-known articulation of the global character of the color line can be found in the essay "Of the Dawn of Freedom" in *Souls*, in which Du Bois states, "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."<sup>4</sup> Scholars often focus on the first part of the statement—about the color line being the century's problem—and overlook the more global understanding of race and racialization that the remark offers.<sup>5</sup> Du Bois leaves no doubt about this point. The next sentence in that essay starts with, "It was a phase of this problem that caused the Civil War."<sup>6</sup> From the very beginning, Du Bois embedded American racial history in a larger global history of colonial and racial relations.

Du Bois's early insights about colonialism, articulated in such essays as "The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind,"<sup>7</sup> published in 1900, lacked a systemic analysis of the link among racism, colonialism, and capitalism.<sup>8</sup> Yet as early as his 1915 essay "The African Origins of War"<sup>9</sup> and in two of his essays in *Darkwater*—"The Souls of White Folk" and "The Hands of Ethiopia"<sup>10</sup>—Du Bois clearly links war to colonialism, racism, and whiteness as a category of social classification that structures lived experience.

Colonialism and empire also stood at the center of Du Bois's organizing practices. In 1900 he participated in the Pan-African Conference that met in London, and though only thirty-three at the time, he was the one who wrote the conference's "Address to the Nations of the World." It is in this address that he first asserts that the problem of the century is the problem of the color line.<sup>11</sup> Between 1919 and 1927, Du Bois organized four Pan-African congresses. In addition to attending the fifth one, he was also invited to address the Bandung Conference, held in 1955, an event that established the foundations for the Non-Aligned Movement.<sup>12</sup> Although he could not attend because the US government denied him a passport after his 1951 trial, he sent a statement to be read at the conference.<sup>13</sup>

Du Bois was also invited to attend the All African People's Congress, held in Accra in April of 1958. He was unable to attend for health reasons, but his second wife, Shirley Graham—a Pan-African intellectual and activist in her own right—delivered a message from Du Bois to that meeting. Du Bois would die in Ghana in 1963 as a Ghanaian citizen by choice, the culmination of a life of thinking deeply about the destiny of Africa and the Africana diaspora and fighting colonialism and the color line. As the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. asserted in his 1968 speech honoring Du Bois, "He died at home in Africa among his cherished ancestors, and he was ignored by a pathetically ignorant America but not by history."<sup>14</sup>

The global color line and colonialism were clearly central elements of Du Bois's understanding of the modern world, and he put both racism and colonialism at the center of his critique of racialized modernity. Three of his books published in the 1930s and 1940s best articulate his analysis of historical capitalism: *Black Reconstruction*, *The World and Africa*, and *Color and Democracy*. These books ground Du Bois's

global sociology in the interconnection of transnational economic, political, and cultural processes, the centrality of slavery in the emergence of historical capitalism, and the colonial and racial character of contemporary capitalism. With few exceptions, however, sociologists have ignored these books, perhaps because they consider them insufficiently “sociological.” *Black Reconstruction* is viewed as a work of history, while *Color and Democracy* and *The World and Africa* are generally regarded as nonacademic works written to influence public debates. Yet, as renowned political theorist and professor of Black studies Cedric Robinson described it, *Black Reconstruction* is “not simply a historical work, but history subjected to theory.”<sup>15</sup> The same can be said of *Color and Democracy* and *The World and Africa*. *Black Reconstruction* places the southern slave economy in its transnational context. In this work Du Bois argues that the enslaved people in the South were part of the global proletariat and central to the most important global commodity chains of the nineteenth century. *Color and Democracy*, published in 1945, was an indictment of colonialism and a call for decolonization as part of the post–World War II world. *The World and Africa*, published in 1947, was the third and most fully realized of Du Bois’s attempts to bring Africa and the African diaspora into the center of modern world history.<sup>16</sup>

These two later books might be considered “public sociology,” but they are nonetheless informed by and structured around Du Bois’s theoretical understanding of capitalism.<sup>17</sup> In these works, Du Bois develops theoretical analyses of the colonial and racial character of historical capitalism, informed by his encounter with the work of Karl Marx in the late 1920s. This chapter discusses Du Bois’s global and historical sociology, focusing on his original understanding of Marx’s thought, his analysis of capitalism, the global veil, the intersections of race, class, and gender, and the racial state. These dimensions of Du Bois’s sociology are mostly unrecognized by the discipline, and yet they are central to the construction of a contemporary Du Boisian sociology.

### Du Bois’s Encounter with Marx

In his 1944 essay, “My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom,” Du Bois affirms that it was through the writings of Karl Marx that he most

fully understood the economic foundations of human history. In fact, Du Bois's earlier work had already considered the importance of the economy. He first encountered economic and institutional analysis while studying at Harvard and in Germany in the early 1890s. In *The Philadelphia Negro*, he places lack of economic opportunities at the center of his analysis of the predicament of the Black community. In that book, Du Bois emphasized the structural constraints that drastically limited the mobility of African Americans, and analyzed the internal class stratification of the Black community, a recurrent topic in his writings.

This early form of stratification analysis later became central to American sociology, although Du Bois goes beyond later analyses of stratification in that he addressed the political role of the Black elite. But it was only as the result of his encounter with the work of Karl Marx that Du Bois fully incorporated into his work both class analysis—the analysis of the formation of class collective actors and class struggle—and the systemic analysis of historical capitalism.

In *Dusk* Du Bois asserts, “I believed and still believe that Karl Marx was one of the greatest men of modern time and that he puts his finger squarely upon our difficulties when he said that economic foundations, the way that men earn their living, are the determining factors in the development of civilization, in literature, religion, and the basic pattern of culture. And this conviction I had to express or spiritually die.”<sup>18</sup>

Yet Du Bois does not simply adopt Marx's analytical framework. Rather, he merges Marx's ideas with his own analysis of the central role of the color line in structuring modernity. He incorporates Marx's ideas into his thinking in a creative and highly heterodox—vis-à-vis other Marxists—way. In his 1971 “Lectures on the Black Jacobins,” C. L. R. James, the famous Trinidadian anticolonial writer and activist, describes the difference between his and Du Bois's use of Marxism thusly: “He examined what was taking place, mastered all the events and mastered all the writings and so forth that were significant for the revolution, and from that he drew what were the Marxist conclusions. He didn't bring the Marxist conclusions to apply to the material as I was able to do in Britain and in France in 1938. Du Bois used the material and saw that only the Marxist analysis could fit.”<sup>19</sup>

Du Bois's approach extends and differs from Marx's in four fundamental ways. First, Du Bois analyzes capitalism as a global system

structured around colonialism and racialization. For Marx, primitive accumulation—that is, the expropriation and displacement of the peasantry and the extraction of colonial wealth through the use of coerced labor—constitutes a historical precondition for the emergence of capitalism, a particular moment in history rather than an ongoing process. His comments on imperialism in India indicate that for him, colonialism, despite its cruelty, had the progressive historical role of dissolving precapitalist structures and replacing them with capitalist social relations. The spread of capitalist social relations was destined to create a global working class that faced similar life conditions and a similar predicament.

Du Bois, on the other hand, argues that colonialism and racism are structuring elements of historical capitalism. For Du Bois, as opposed to Marx, the process of accumulation based on the coerced labor of workers of color and the extraction of resources from the colonies is not just a moment of primitive accumulation but is constitutive of racial and historical capitalism. Slavery and the plantation economy were the historical base upon which the industrial economy of the nineteenth century was built. But the Industrial Revolution did not eliminate either forced labor or colonial dispossession. Rather, it was contemporaneous with a new period of colonial expansion and the exacerbation of global racism.<sup>20</sup> In Du Bois's view, there is no possible equalization of the conditions of workers worldwide because historical capitalism as a global system is structured on the racial and colonial differences between workers.<sup>21</sup>

The second aspect in which Du Bois goes beyond Marx is in his analysis of race and subjectivity. Marx assumed that the proletariat would become conscious of its common class interests and become a class for itself, a historical actor destined to bring down capitalism. For Du Bois, however, the global color line shapes subjectivity and the self, and the lived experience of class groups is racialized. As we have shown, Du Bois explains how the consciousness of racially excluded groups is constructed as a result of their encounter with the veil. Du Bois also analyzed the lived experience and forms of consciousness of whites, showing that they are blind to life and humanity behind the veil and to their own position of domination.<sup>22</sup> Du Bois extends his analysis to ad-

dress the fragmented nature in which the colonial world appears to the colonizer. Du Bois points out how the colonizer is blind to the brutality involved in the production of the colonial commodities they enjoy.

The third way in which Du Bois departs from Marx's analytical frame follows from the previous two. That is the point that class, for Du Bois, always intersects with colonialism and the global color line. Du Bois emphasizes the racialization of the class structure and how race fractures class interests and hinders collective action. For example, in *Black Reconstruction* he shows how the white working class in the American South was central both to the maintenance of slavery and to the ending of the Reconstruction period, and in *Color and Democracy* he asserts that the European working classes were the backbone of colonialism. At the same time, he argues that resistance to racist and colonial exploitation takes place along racial and anticolonial lines. For Du Bois, class struggle is always racialized.

The fourth difference between Marx's and Du Bois's approaches has to do with the analysis of political power and the state. For Marx, the state represents the political power of the dominant classes. Du Bois, however, took his analysis in a different direction. He regards the state and global power as racialized class power in which the dominant strata are both class groups and racial groups. For example, in *Black Reconstruction* he argues that the end of Reconstruction brought about the reunification of the white bourgeoisie and the white poor as a dominant bloc whose combined power led to the rebuilding of southern white political power. And in *Color and Democracy* he argues that the colonial state was based on the class alliance between fractions of the European colonial bourgeoisie and the white working class.

Du Bois arrives at Marxism through his disenchantment with liberal pragmatism, but he merges Marx's thought with his own previous analysis of the centrality of the color line in structuring modernity. Hence, he is not constrained by Marxist categories of analysis. Marx begins his analysis of capitalism from the perspective of the free factory worker. By contrast, Du Bois begins his analysis of historical capitalism from the perspective of the enslaved and the colonial laborer. The central point of his analysis is that capitalism is a global social formation based on colonial relations and the exploitation of racialized labor.

## Racial and Colonial Capitalism

Du Bois writes *The World and Africa* to tell the story of a continent that has been erased from history. In this book, he puts African history in the context of large regional and global processes. Du Bois argues that throughout history the peoples of Africa were part of political, cultural, and economic developments in Europe and Asia.<sup>23</sup> In his analysis Du Bois makes two key methodological points. The first is the centrality of history in his sociology. For Du Bois, it is impossible to understand the present without understanding its historical construction; his sociological thinking is rooted in history. Second, he asserts the importance of what today we call relational analysis. Du Bois's analysis shows how different African political, economic, and cultural institutions were the product of long histories of contact, trade, conflict, and cultural exchange between peoples. Thus, for example, while he emphasizes the Africanness of Egypt and its role in the development of European culture, he also shows how the Egyptian society and politics were also the product of long histories of contact and change as a result of Egypt standing at the crossroads of different political and cultural regions in both Africa and Asia.

Du Bois argues that social relations and structures of power in pre-capitalist Africa were more fluid than they became under racialized modernity. Prior to this historical epoch, there was not a clear, stable, world-hierarchical structure. Nor was there a stable scheme of classification of peoples. That changed with European expansion and the emergence of racial and colonial capitalism. It is in this analysis of Africa in the context of world history that Du Bois argues that slavery and colonialism were central to the rise of Europe-centered capitalism: "This then was the history of the slave trade, of that extraordinary movement which made investment in human flesh the first experiment in organized modern capitalism; which made the system possible."<sup>24</sup> Du Bois asserts the centrality of Black labor in the emergence of modernity:

The Negro race has been the foundation upon which the capitalist system has been reared, the Industrial Revolution carried through, and imperial colonialism established. If we confine ourselves to America we can-



not forget that America was built on Africa. From being a mere stopping place between Europe and Asia or a chance treasure house of gold, America became through African labor the center of the sugar empire and the cotton kingdom and an integral part of that world industry and trade which caused the Industrial Revolution and the reign of capitalism.<sup>25</sup>

Du Bois's assertion reveals that Black people are the first modern subject. Race is the first social construction of modernity, an imagined but violently real social construction. In Du Bois's historical and relational account, capitalism was always a global and racialized social formation that would not have existed as we know it without slavery, colonialism, and racism. If for Marx capitalism emerges with the rise of wage workers in factories, for Du Bois it emerges with the rise of slavery in colonial plantations.

Du Bois addresses recurring arguments—made in his time and ours—that colonialism is not central to European capitalism. He shows the evolution of different forms of colonial capital accumulation and the emergence of different class segments driving the accumulation process. But he argues that although the particular groups that benefit from colonialism changed, the extraction of wealth and profit from the colonies remained central for capital accumulation. As he asserts in *Color and Democracy*,

Much has been said, for instance, of the fact that colonies do not pay the mother country, in the sense that usually the direct payments of the mother country to the colony exceeds [*sic*] the money returns of the colony to the country which owns it. This is true today, although in the sixteenth century it was not true. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the object of colonial territory was the direct return in gold, silver, jewels, and luxuries. Why, then, does the mother country today not only wish to retain the colonies but also is willing to fight expensive wars for such retention and for increasing the colonial area?

The answer to this question has often been that raw material in colonial regions is of such value that countries must control it in order to retain their "place in the sun." This was true in the eighteenth century, when cotton, sugar, tobacco, were the monopolies of empires owning colonies which raised these materials. But here again this was once true

but is not universally true today. It has been shown recently that only 3 per cent of the more valuable raw materials of the world are in colonial areas. Still empires want colonies. The answer to all this seeming paradox is the fact that colonies are today areas for the investment of capital in which the investor can make a rate of profit far beyond that which comes to him from domestic ventures.<sup>26</sup>

Du Bois asserts that one characteristic of racial and colonial capitalism is widespread economic inequality between its regions, with the colonized parts of the world enduring extended poverty. The wealth of Europe, for Du Bois, is intrinsically linked to the poverty of the colonies. “Colonies are the slums of the world,” he asserts. “They are today the places of greatest concentration of poverty, disease, and ignorance of what the human mind has come to know.”<sup>27</sup> And he adds, “Extreme poverty in colonies was a main cause of wealth and luxury in Europe.”<sup>28</sup> Marxist theories of imperialism recognize the role of colonialism in shaping peripheral economies. Yet Du Bois’s argument differs from them in that he does not see imperialism as a stage in the development of capitalism but instead sees capitalism as a global colonial system from the start, one that takes different shapes at different times. The forms of using racialized and colonial labor change, but capital accumulation is predicated on the continuous racialization of global labor and the exploitation of colonial workers.

Whereas Marx emphasizes that capitalism is based on wage labor and the free extraction of surplus labor, Du Bois argues that racial and colonial capitalism is based on different coercive forms of extracting profits. These different views are the result of a third methodological point of Du Bois’s global and historical sociology: the standpoint from which one looks at social and historical changes. Du Bois looks at capitalism from its margins, from the perspective of the colonized, enslaved, and racially excluded workers. This standpoint allows Du Bois to provide a richer account of the development and functioning of historical capitalism, an account that ends up modifying and enriching the Marxist analytical frame.

For Du Bois racialization is a fundamental yet changing structure of global power. Referring to England’s opposition to the slave trade in the nineteenth century, Du Bois argues, “Eventually, Negro slavery

and the slave trade were abandoned in favor of colonial imperialism, and the England which in the eighteenth century established modern slavery in America on a vast scale, appeared in the nineteenth century as the official emancipator of slaves and founder of a method of control of human labor and material which proved more profitable than slavery.”<sup>29</sup> England’s turn against the slave trade did not mean the end of colonialism and racism. The forms of exploitation and coercion of racialized and colonial labor changed through history, but did not disappear.

Another characteristic of racial and colonial capitalism is its inherent and constant violence. Violence is the outcome of dispossession, the result of the attempt to control the colonies and subdue rebellion, and also the outcome of competition between colonial powers for colonies or spheres of influence. Of the consequences of dispossession, Du Bois asserted, “The colonial system caused ten times more deaths than actual wars. In the first twenty five years of the nineteenth century famines in India starved a million men, and famine was bound up with exploitation. Widespread monopoly of land to deprive all men of primary sources of support was carried out either through direct ownership or indirect mortgage and exorbitant interest. Disease could not be checked: tuberculosis in the mines of South Africa, syphilis in all colonial regions, cholera, leprosy, malaria.”<sup>30</sup> Violence was also used openly for the purpose of control. Writing in 1947, Du Bois is as explicit as one can be in his description and condemnation of colonial violence: “There was no Nazi atrocity—concentration camps, wholesale maiming and murder, defilement of women or ghastly blasphemy of childhood—which the Christian civilization of Europe had not long been practicing against colored folk in all parts of the world in the name of and for the defense of a Superior Race born to rule the world.”<sup>31</sup> The violence of the colonial system, though, was not only directed towards the colonized. Colonial competition was, for Du Bois, the cause of the two world wars of the twentieth century. As he states, “But imperialism does not stop there; it not only promotes civil war, strife and jealousy within the colony, but it is, as we have seen, a main cause of struggles between powers to possess colonies.”<sup>32</sup>

In *Color and Democracy*, Du Bois lists a large number of conflicts that took place between 1792 and 1939 and attributes them to six factors:

rivalry for colonies, spheres of influence, colonial conquest, internal-group conquest, colonial revolts, and strife within colonies. He recognizes that it is very difficult to establish the causes of specific conflicts but maintains that the dynamic of colonialism is one that leads to permanent violence and conflict. This violence affects the colonizer and the colonized differently. As he asserts, “Many persons naturally will dissent from cataloguing several of these wars as colonial or caused by the strife for colonies. Strict interpretation might reduce the list, but with the greatest logical reduction we nevertheless have a formidable array of wars which took place in an era dominated largely by organized pacifism, but, as the event proved, pacifism designed ‘for white people only.’”<sup>33</sup> Racial and colonial capitalism was, then, for Du Bois, a system based on structural and actual violence against the colonized and a system that generated war between colonial powers.

In *Color and Democracy*, Du Bois also reveals prescience about the emerging postcolonial world, pointing to the weight of debt and the political limits of peripheral countries within a neocolonial power structure. He writes, “So long as the chief business of free nations today is to tax and starve their peoples so as to pay their debts to the empires, and so long as these imperial debts do not always represent actual hire of real wealth so much as speculation, legal claims and threats of aggression, just so long world politics will be bedeviled by hunger and hate.”<sup>34</sup> This statement anticipates the neoliberal globalization of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In this vein, Du Bois warns the newly independent states that following the Western path of development will lead to new forms of oppression. In a letter to the All African Peoples’ Congress that met in Accra in 1958, Du asserts that the West

offers a compromise, but one of which you must beware: She offers to let some of your smarter and less scrupulous leaders become fellow capitalists with the white exploiters, if in turn they induce the nation’s masses to pay the awful cost. This has happened in the West Indies and in South America. This may yet happen in the Middle East and Eastern Asia. Strive against it with every fiber of your bodies and souls. A body of local private capitalists, even if they are black, can never free Africa; they will simply sell it into new slavery to old masters overseas.<sup>35</sup>

And in *Color and Democracy* he anticipates how racial minorities in developed capitalist countries will be excluded in the newly emerging neocolonial order.

Beyond the colonies and the free nations which are not free, is the plight of the minorities in the midst of both the great and minor nations. There are the Jews of Europe, the Negroes of the United States, the Indians of the Americas and many other smaller groups elsewhere. They form often little nations within nations, who are encysted and kept from participation in the full citizenship of their native lands.<sup>36</sup>

One of the absences in Du Bois's work is an examination of the predicament of indigenous peoples and a full analysis of settler colonialism. Although he insists throughout his work that colonialism and empire affected the world as a whole, his worldview is one that emphasizes the exploitation of workers of color and is silent concerning the experience of dispossession of indigenous people. The Black experience in the United States, the Africana diaspora, and Africa are the main perspectives from which Du Bois looked at the world. Yet in *Color and Democracy* he asserts, "The Indians of the Americas are for the most part disfranchised, landless, poverty-stricken, and illiterate, and are achieving a degree of freedom only as by the death of individuality they become integrated into the blood and culture of the whites."<sup>37</sup>

Du Bois decries this policy of forced assimilation and cultural disappearance. In both *The World and Africa* and *Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace*, he argues that one of the worst consequences of colonialism is the destruction of the culture of colonized people.

## The Global Veil

Racial and colonial capitalism relies on racial classification and the veil. Du Bois argues that the racial categories and differences that organize our world are the product of the global colonial system of organizing labor. Racial classifications as we know them were created when Europeans marked specific groups of people for slavery or forced labor.

Du Bois acknowledges that physical differences were recognized before European expansion, but these differences did not organize social

relations. In his writings Du Bois mentions different racial types and refers to different physical types, but he maintains that there are no pure types and that there is no relation between physical type and culture or development. In *Color and Democracy*, he asserts that there is “no African race and no one Negro type. Africa has as great a physical and cultural variety as Europe or Asia.”<sup>38</sup>

Du Bois argues that racism and race are the product of the European need to legitimize the system of colonial exploitation and displacement, yet at the same time they are social forces that structure lived experience and social relations within historical capitalism. The category of whiteness emerged to refer to the dominant peoples in historical capitalism. As Du Bois asserts in *Color and Democracy*,

It is the habit of men, and must be if they remain rational beings, to find reasons, and comforting reasons, for lines of action which they adopt from varying motives. First of all, religion rationalized slavery as a method of saving souls, but this bade fair to interfere with profit and investment and soon was changed by the new science to a doctrine of natural human inferiority on the part of the majority of mankind, making them forever inferior and subservient to the ruling nations of the world.<sup>39</sup>

Du Bois develops similar ideas in *The World and Africa*. Elaborating on the idea that both the theory and the science of race emerged with slavery and capitalism, he asserts,

In order to establish the righteousness of this point of view, science and religion, government and industry, were wheeled into line. The word “Negro” was used for the first time in the world’s history to tie color to race and blackness to slavery and degradation. The white race was pictured as “pure” and superior; the black race as dirty, stupid, and inevitably inferior; the yellow race as sharing, in deception and cowardice, much of this color inferiority; while mixture of races was considered the prime cause of degradation and failure in civilization. Everything great, everything fine, everything really successful in human culture was white.<sup>40</sup>

For Du Bois, racial thinking did not disappear when slavery formally ended, and its roots endured in modern Europe and America. He ar-

gues, “The slave trade; that modern change from regarding wealth as being for the benefit of human beings, to that of regarding human beings as wealth. This utter reversal of attitude which marked the day of a new barter in human flesh did not die with the slave but persists and dominates the thought of Europe today and during the fatal era when Europe by force ruled mankind.”<sup>41</sup> The dominant ways of seeing and classifying human beings are a direct product of slavery and colonial capitalism and inform and structure how we think about and understand the world. In order to maintain their cultural and political hegemony, the dominant white ruling classes developed forms of “scientific” knowledge designed to transform historical inequalities and injustices into natural law.

Ability, self-assertion, resentment, among colonial peoples must be represented as irrational efforts of “agitators”—folk trying to attain that for which they were not by nature fitted. To prove the unfitness of most human beings for self-rule and self-expression, every device of science was used: evolution was made to prove that Negroes and Asiatics were less developed human beings than whites; history was so written as to make all civilization the development of white people; economics was so taught as to make all wealth due mainly to the technical accomplishment of white folks supplemented only by the brute toil of colored peoples; brain weights and intelligence tests were used and distorted to prove the superiority of white folk.<sup>42</sup>

Writing *Black Reconstruction* and *The World and Africa* was Du Bois’s way of challenging these colonial forms of knowledge. In this way, Du Bois’s work prefigures contemporary postcolonial and decolonial analyses.

Broadening his early analysis of the veil, which he began in *Souls*, Du Bois links the phenomenology of lived experience to the global historical processes of capitalist expansion, colonialism, and racialization.<sup>43</sup> Du Bois relies on his analysis of double consciousness to reflect on the lived experience of colonized people and the world of white people from a global perspective. In *The World and Africa* and *Color and Democracy*, Du Bois underscores the constant opposition and resistance of colonized people to racism and colonialism. He argues that the colo-

nial powers tried to represent the colonized as docile and colonialism as civilization, in keeping with the “white man’s burden,” but Du Bois emphasizes the fact that from the very beginning, the colonized people rebelled against colonial oppression. As he asserts, “Almost unnoticed, certainly unlistened to, there came from the colonial world reiterated protest, prayers, and appeals against the suppression of human beings, against the exclusion of the majority of mankind from the vaunted progress of the world.”<sup>44</sup>

Du Bois lists numerous rebellions of enslaved people that occurred between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries and argues that while these are often portrayed as unconnected events, they in fact convey a consistent resistance to colonialism: “The slave revolts were the beginnings of the revolutionary struggle for the uplift of the laboring masses in the modern world. They have been minimized in extent because of the propaganda in favor of slavery and the feeling that the knowledge of slave revolt would hurt the system.”<sup>45</sup> Du Bois does not deny the differences between or the specificities of these rebellions, but he emphasizes the common thread that unifies them all—the opposition to a system that denies the humanity of people of color.<sup>46</sup>

One of Du Bois’s major contributions in *Black Reconstruction* is the analysis of the lived experience of the rebelling enslaved people. By analyzing the subjectivity of the enslaved Du Bois addresses the lived experience of emancipation. Thus, talking about the effects of Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, Du Bois asserts that enslaved people understood it and reacted to it on the basis of their religious beliefs: “The Proclamation made four and a half million laborers willing almost in mass to sacrifice their last drop of blood for their new-found country. It sent them into transports of joy and sacrifice. It changed their pessimism and despair into boundless faith. It was the coming of the lord.”<sup>47</sup>

This is a point noted by C. L. R. James in a series of lectures on *The Black Jacobins* that he delivered in 1971. James compares his book to *Black Reconstruction* and emphasizes Du Bois’s descriptions of the ideas and feelings of the enslaved people as they joined the fight for their emancipation. As James writes, “Du Bois is poetic and dealing there with psychological matters, which in reality are a contribution to an understanding of what took place. The blacks who entered, this is what



they entered with in their mind.”<sup>48</sup> The analysis of concrete forms of historical subjectivities helps Du Bois to address the notorious problem in Marxist theory of the link among structural analysis, the emergence of class consciousness, and the formation of collective actors. For Du Bois, as later for British Marxist historian E. P. Thompson, the formation of collective actors is rooted in communities, traditions, and everyday lives.<sup>49</sup> But unlike Thompson, who studied the emergence of the English working-class communities and identities, for Du Bois, collective Black identities in the American South were based on the lived experience of slavery and racism rather than class.

Du Bois further proposes that rebellion of enslaved Black people was key to determining the course and outcome of the Civil War, particularly when enslaved people ran away from plantations to join the northern armies. He argues that at the beginning of the war the enslaved were passive, as they did not know how the war would unfold and what they could expect from the northern armies. Yet, as these armies advanced into southern territories, enslaved people began running away from the plantations, an action Du Bois describes as a general strike: “This was not merely the desire to stop work. It was a strike on a wide basis against the conditions of work. It was a general strike that involved in the end perhaps a half million people. They wanted to stop the economy of the plantation system, and to do that they left the plantations.”<sup>50</sup>

Du Bois asserts that this strike won the war for the North, as the running away of the formerly enslaved helped undo the southern economy and provided soldiers to a northern army that was challenged by white resistance to the draft. As he states,

It was not the Abolitionists alone who freed the slaves. The Abolitionists never had a real majority of the people of the United States back of them. Freedom for the slave was the logical result of a crazy attempt to wage war in the midst of four million black slaves. . . . Yet, these slaves had enormous power in their hands. Simply by stopping work, they could threaten the Confederacy with starvation. By walking into the Federal camps, they showed to doubting Northerners the easy possibility of using them as workers and as servants, as farmers, and as spies, and finally, as fighting soldiers. . . . It was the fugitive slave who made the slaveholders face the alternative of surrendering to the North, or to the Negroes.<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, as Black labor rebelled against slavery, white labor became the backbone of the racist social order. In *Black Reconstruction* Du Bois argues that a white racial subjectivity was key to explaining both the reluctance of white workers to support abolitionism and the failure of Reconstruction. Du Bois states that racial division led to the emergence of a caste psychology that is central to contemporary capitalism. This caste psychology forms the base of what he calls the “psychological wage” of whiteness. White workers received public recognition and deference while Blacks were subjected to public humiliation.

It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. . . . On the other hand, in the same way, the Negro was subject to public insult; was afraid of mobs; was liable to the jibes of children and the unreasoning fears of white women; and was compelled almost continuously to submit to various badges of inferiority.<sup>52</sup>

Racial difference and inequalities may have originated in the need to exploit labor, but they were perpetuated and constantly reproduced through social interaction and the construction of racial subjectivity. The resulting social system is one in which race trumps class in the assignment of social status, the formation of identities, and the development of collective action. Ultimately, the lived experience of being the favored segment of the working class is structured around the veil, the not-seeing of the predicament of the other.

Colonialism affected the European labor movement in the same way in which racism affected the white working class in the United States. Du Bois shows how the global veil leads to blindness in the dominant groups just as his analysis of the veil and whiteness in the United States pointed to the blindness of whites towards the existence of life, humanity, and resistance behind the veil. He asserts, “Because of colonialism, Socialists have long been unable to be true to their principles. The questions of Egypt and India, Kenya and Palestine, made it impossible for Ramsey MacDonald, Lord Olivier, Sidney Webb and many others to follow out their Socialist principles.”<sup>53</sup>

Despite the colonizers' belief that they are promoting civilization, the colonized rebelled from the first moment in defense of their lifeworlds, their work, their dignity, and their humanity. The colonizer is unable to see this because the inherent violence of colonialism is kept hidden. As Du Bois contends, "If in the end the colony is kept at work, made to pay interest, and turns out materials at low cost, few persons at home are going to ask how this was accomplished; and the men who bring this to pass, no matter at what cost or by what disreputable means, stand to receive wealth and honor. Under this veil, cheating, lying, murder, and rape, force, deception, bribery, and destruction, become methods of achieving imperial power, with few questions asked."<sup>54</sup>

An original contribution of Du Bois is the analysis of how the world appears fragmented to the population of colonial metropolises. This analysis parallels Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism. For Marx, this concept referred to the fact that workers encounter the commodity as an entity independent and separate from them, hiding the fact that the commodity is the product of the worker's labor. Du Bois's analysis, on the other hand, focuses on how colonial commodities, used for conspicuous consumption in Europe and America, hide the brutality of the exploitation, destruction, and displacement that were required to create them.<sup>55</sup>

Because of the stretch in time and space between the deed and the result, between the work and the product, it is not only usually impossible for the worker to know the consumer; or the investor, the source of his profit, but also it is often made impossible by law to inquire into the facts. Moral judgment of the industrial process is therefore difficult, and the crime is more often a matter of ignorance rather than of deliberate murder and theft; but ignorance is a colossal crime in itself.<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, in assessing the ignorance of the consumers of colonial commodities, Du Bois imagines a British upper-middle-class woman playing the piano—one of the marks of European civilization—in her home and asks to what extent such a person is responsible for the crimes of colonialism:

It will in all probability not occur to her that she has any responsibility whatsoever, and that may well be true. Equally, it may be true that

her income is the result of starvation, theft, and murder; that it involves ignorance, disease, and crime on the part of thousands; that the system which sustains the security, leisure, and comfort she enjoys is based on the suppression, exploitation, and slavery of the majority of mankind. Yet just because she does not know this, just because she could get the facts only after research and investigation—made difficult by laws that forbid the revealing of ownership of property, source of income, and methods of business—she is content to remain in ignorance of the source of her wealth and its cost in human toil and suffering.<sup>57</sup>

For Du Bois, as for Walter Benjamin, the marks of civilization are also marks of barbarism.<sup>58</sup> Du Bois, however, links Benjamin's famous condemnation of European culture to its colonial and racist context. The illusion of civilization and legitimate wealth is sustained only through willful ignorance as to the origin of the material sources of that wealth. The originality of Du Bois's sociology is that it combines the analysis of both the colonial and racialized economic structures of historical capitalism and the coloniality of the cultural categories that structure social life and knowledge formation—and does so in a historical, relational, and nondeterministic way.<sup>59</sup>

### Intersectionalities

The veil and the color line are central to the analysis of another aspect of historical capitalism in which Du Bois modifies and extends Marx's analysis: the intersectionalities that characterize the lived experience and identities of different segments of the working class. In *Black Reconstruction*, the intersection of class and race is a central aspect of Du Bois's analysis. The first three chapters focus on the classes central to the slave-based economy: the Black Worker, the White Worker, and the Planters.<sup>60</sup> In his analysis of these different classes, Du Bois shows how the institution of slavery created deep racial fault lines that traversed class lines.

The first chapter of *Black Reconstruction* analyzes the position and experiences of the Black workers, that is, the enslaved. Du Bois, like C. L. R. James in *Black Jacobins*, considers the enslaved worker of the southern plantations an integral part of global commodity chains

linking the southern and northern United States, emerging European manufacturing regions, Africa, and the Caribbean. In this respect, the enslaved people of the American South were part of a global proletariat, but their experience as part of that group was determined by their status as slaves, their lack of freedom, and the lack of recognition of their humanity.

The second chapter of *Black Reconstruction* examines the white worker. The chapter shows how white labor in the North detached itself from the fight against slavery. Immigrant workers in the North were often initially opposed to slavery but soon came to regard Black enslaved people as competitors. For the northern working class, the detachment from the Black emancipatory struggle is accompanied by a perception of the enslaved that denies their humanity. Therefore, Du Bois argues, two labor movements emerged: one centered on the emancipation of Black enslaved people and another centered on improving the working conditions of the white immigrant working class. Due to the potential of labor-market competition between white workers and freed slaves, these two movements never converged.<sup>61</sup> This tension may have been grounded in labor-market competition but was experienced as racial animosity. In Du Bois's words,

These two movements might easily have cooperated . . . but the trouble was that black and white laborers were competing for the same jobs, just of course as all laborers always are. The immediate competition became open and visible because of racial lines and racial philosophy. . . . This situation, too, made extraordinary reaction, led by the ignorant mob and fomented by authority and privilege; abolitionists were attacked and their meeting places burned; women suffragists were hooted, laws were proposed making the kidnaping of Negroes easier and disfranchising Negro voters.<sup>62</sup>

In the same way that the northern working class detached itself from the struggle against slavery, in the South the white poor identified with their whiteness rather than with the enslaved, with whom they may have shared a common class interest. The white poor in the South provided the labor power necessary to control the enslaved and avoid slave rebellions. Du Bois argues that in the South, "Slavery bred in the poor white

a dislike of Negro toil of all sorts. He never regarded himself as a laborer, or as part of any labor movement. If he had any ambition at all it was to become a planter and to own 'niggers.' To these Negroes he transferred all the dislike and hatred which he had for the whole slave system. The result was that the system was held stable and intact by poor whites."<sup>63</sup>

Class is central to Du Bois's analysis, but in ways that are very different from Marx's. The Marxist framework could not account for the class structure of the United States (or the class structure of racial and colonial capitalism in general). Du Bois modifies Marx's class analysis by introducing the analysis of the intersections of race and class, and the fractures that these intersections create along class lines. In doing so he creates a theoretical understanding of capitalism that goes far beyond Marx's framework and the later additions by European Marxist theorists. For Du Bois, race and racism are constitutive of historical class relations and identities. As he writes,

The theory of laboring class unity rests upon the assumption that laborers, despite internal jealousies, will unite because of their opposition to exploitation by the capitalists. . . . Most persons do not realize how far this failed to work in the South, and it failed to work because the theory of race was supplemented by a carefully planned and slowly evolved method which drove such a wedge between the white and black workers that there probably are not today in the world two groups of workers with practically identical interests who hate and fear each other so deeply and persistently.<sup>64</sup>

Moving beyond the United States, Du Bois also addresses the intersection of race and class in his analysis of the politics of colonial metropolises. In *Color and Democracy*, he argues that colonialism was based on the support of the white working class for the colonial system: "Organized labor in the United States and Europe has seldom actively opposed imperialism or championed democracy among colonial peoples, even when this slave labor was in direct competition with their own. The Social-Democratic party of prewar Germany once openly declared that the wages and working-conditions which it asked for white labor did not include any such demand for yellow labor."<sup>65</sup>

In reflecting on the likely politics of European unions and labor parties after the end of World War II, Du Bois argues that the possibility of addressing the demands of the working class depended on the continuous extraction of profits from the colonies and predicts that labor parties will thus support colonialism. He asserts,

When, for instance, during and after this war the working people of Britain, The Netherlands, France, and Belgium, in particular, are going to demand certain costly social improvements from their governments—the prevention of unemployment, a rising standard of living, health insurance, increased education of children—the large cost of these improvements must be met by increased public taxation, falling with greater weight than ever heretofore upon the rich. This means that the temptation to recoup and balance the financial burden of increased taxation by investment in colonies, where social services are at their lowest and standards of living below the requirements of civilization, is going to increase decidedly; and the disposition of parties on the left, liberal parties, and philanthropy to press for colonial improvements will tend to be silenced by the bribe of vastly increased help by government to better conditions. The working people of the civilized world may thus be largely induced to put their political power behind imperialism, and democracy in Europe and America will continue to impede and nullify democracy in Asia and Africa.<sup>66</sup>

These predictions proved correct. European and American labor did not support the postwar anticolonial struggles, nor the realization of a more egalitarian world order. Racism and coloniality trumped class interest. Colonial powers, whether reluctantly or by force, ultimately gave up their colonies, but, as we have seen, Du Bois intuited how new forms of neocolonialism, such as financial indebtedness and the political limits imposed on newly independent countries, could perpetuate racialized global inequalities. To what extent the standard of living of the Global North, particularly that of its elites and labor aristocracies, depends on the continuation of neocolonial policies is an empirical question. But the continuation of mechanisms of neocolonial exploitation and extraction highlights the fact that these activities remain profitable for sectors within the core countries of the world system.

Du Bois also presented an incipient analysis of the intersections of race and gender. This has been a source of controversy in the assessment of both his politics and his scholarship. On the one hand, Du Bois was aware of the importance of addressing gender issues in the struggle for emancipation. In his essay “The Damnation of Women,” he asserted, “The uplift of women is, next to the problem of the color line and the peace movement, our greatest modern cause. When, now, two of these movements—women and color—combine in one, the combination has deep meaning.”<sup>67</sup> Yet he articulated his position from what political theorist Joy James describes as a masculinist worldview, that is, a worldview that centers male normativity. James criticizes Du Bois for his relationship to women activists and scholars who were his contemporaries and for the ambivalence of his representations of women. James summarizes this tension by arguing, “It is disingenuous to minimize Du Bois’ significant contributions towards women’s equality. It would also be deceptive to ignore his problematic literary representations of and political relationships with influential African American women activists.”<sup>68</sup> And later on, she adds, “Profeminism permitted Du Bois to include women in democratic struggles; paternalism allowed him to naturalize the male intellectual.”<sup>69</sup> This same tension is present in Du Bois’s sociological analysis of race and gender. Du Bois was ahead of male scholars and public intellectuals of his time in his analysis of gender issues and advocacy of women’s rights. But his analysis of the intersection of race and gender was characterized by serious limitations and was not a central element of his writings.

Du Bois’s essay “The Damnation of Women” presents a critique of women’s oppression and gender roles. For him the predicament of women derives from the tension between motherhood and independent work. The source of this tension is the subordination of women in the household. As he states, “The world wants healthy babies and intelligent workers. Today we refuse to allow the combination and force thousands of intelligent workers to go childless at a horrible expenditure of moral force, or we damn them if they break our idiotic conventions. Only at the sacrifice of intelligence and the chance to do their best work can the majority of modern women bear children.”<sup>70</sup> Du Bois describes the conventions on women and work prevalent in his time as idiotic and states clearly that women have a right to economic independence and to



decide on their own about motherhood. But he does not break with the conventions that equated womanhood and motherhood.

The predicament he describes is that of all women, but Du Bois goes on to argue that race, as well as class, makes a difference when it comes to the experience of women. Du Bois argues that the experience of African American women is unique, as they bear the brunt of both exploitation and the legacy of slavery; furthermore, they suffer under the combined weight of gender and racial violence.<sup>71</sup> Du Bois is eloquent in his condemnation of the violence to be found at the intersection of racism and patriarchy, stating, "I shall forgive the white South much in its final judgment day: I shall forgive its slavery, for slavery is a world-old habit; I shall forgive its fighting for a well-lost cause, and for remembering that struggle with tender tears; I shall forgive its so-called 'pride of race,' the passion of its hot blood, and even its dear, old, laughable strutting and posing; but one thing I shall never forgive, neither in this world nor the world to come: its wanton and continued and persistent insulting of the black womanhood which it sought and seeks to prostitute to its lust."<sup>72</sup> Du Bois also emphasizes the agency of African American women: Despite the suffering, exploitation, and violence they have endured, they led the struggle for emancipation and were the main agents of community institution building: "Black women (and women whose grandmothers were black) are today furnishing our teachers; they are the main pillars of those social settlements which we call churches; and they have with small doubt raised three-fourths of our church property."<sup>73</sup>

In Du Bois's analysis class is also deeply related with race and gender. Du Bois recognizes that African American women have always worked and were not expected to stay at home. The consequence of this historical predicament was threefold: "The economic independence of black women is increased, the breaking up of Negro families must be more frequent, and the number of illegitimate children is decreased more slowly."<sup>74</sup> For economic reasons, Black women had to work and, in many cases, earned more than Black men. This, combined with existing ideas about gender roles, led to the breakup of poor and working-class Black families. Du Bois makes clear that this is the result of economic conditions rather than racial differences and points to similar trends that have been observed among white groups in similar situations.

Ever since the publication of the Moynihan report in 1965, the structure of the Black family has been a recurrent theme in studies that discuss the “pathologies” of poor Black families and neighborhoods.<sup>75</sup> This was not the case for Du Bois. In his opinion, the work of women reflected their strength and independence. Furthermore, Du Bois argued that the Black family presented a model for how the needs of working-class families would be addressed in the future. Du Bois develops this point in “The Freedom of Womanhood,” a chapter of his 1924 book *The Gift of Black Folk*. In that chapter, Du Bois argues that Black women, in working for a living and finding ways to care for the family, are showing all women the way forward. He states, “In our modern industrial organization the work of women is being found as valuable as that of men. They are consequently being taken from the home and put into industry and the rapidity by which this process is going on is only kept back by the problem of the child; and more and more the community is taking charge of the education of children for this reason. In America the work of Negro women has not only pre-figured this development but it has had a direct influence upon it.”<sup>76</sup> For Du Bois the labor of Black working-class women and the ways of organizing their families pointed towards the future organization of the modern industrial system. And he emphasizes the right of women to economic and personal development, asserting, “The future woman must have a life work and economic independence. She must have knowledge. She must have the right to motherhood at her own discretion.”<sup>77</sup>

In considering Du Bois’s sociological work one can paraphrase Joy James’s summary of his gender politics. On the one hand, it would be a mistake to deny his contribution to an early analysis of the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. On the other hand, it would also be a mistake to exaggerate his contribution, or to place him at the center of the development of gender intersectional analysis. To be sure, Du Bois considered gender issues more than most other male scholars and public intellectuals of his time. He was certainly ahead of both his contemporary American sociologists and the discipline’s founding fathers (and many contemporary sociologists as well). But the analysis of gender was not as integral to his writings as such issues as the color line, empire, colonialism, and class, and he did not embed

his analysis of gender intersectionality within his broader analysis of global racial capitalism.

More important, Black women intellectuals and activists had already introduced work on gender intersectionality. Du Bois was familiar with this work although he fails to properly and fully acknowledge it. In “The Damnation of Women” he cites Anna Julia Cooper’s famous statement that only when Black women achieve emancipation will all Black people achieve emancipation.<sup>78</sup> But although Du Bois quotes Cooper, he does not mention her by name. Rather, he attributes her famous phrase to someone he describes as “one of our women.”<sup>79</sup> Similarly, while Du Bois was familiar with Ida B. Wells’s work on lynching, he does not credit her in his writings.<sup>80</sup>

Acknowledging the work of Cooper and Wells would not only have been an act of justice and recognition; it would have improved Du Bois’s work. His analysis of gender intersectionality addresses women’s work outside the home, but he does not address the work of women at home. Anna Julia Cooper’s essay “What Are We Worth?”—part of her book *A Voice from the South*—develops an early analysis of reproductive work as creating value. Cooper does not articulate her analysis in those terms, but that is what she does.<sup>81</sup>

Addressing Cooper’s argument could have helped Du Bois construct a more sophisticated analysis of women’s work inside and outside the home and a more sophisticated critique of gender roles. Instead, his analysis of gender roles remains limited by his equating womanhood with motherhood. Cooper’s work could also have helped Du Bois to criticize the productivist ethos of racial and colonial capitalism that is so central to the many forms of racial and colonial violence he describes in his work. Similarly, had Du Bois addressed the work of Ida B. Wells, he could have developed a more sophisticated analysis of the intersection of racial and gender violence.

Despite its important limitations, Du Bois’s sociology recognized the centrality of the study of the intersectionalities of race, class, and gender. Furthermore, his refusal to identify the structure of the Black family as a pathology remains highly relevant to contemporary debates. Therefore, it would be a natural extension of his work to include a full analysis of race, class, and gender intersectionality in a contemporary Du Boisian sociology.

## The Racial State and the Limits of Democracy

An important contribution of Du Bois's sociology was his analysis of the racial state and the racial limits of democracy. Starting his analysis of democracy from the perspective of the Black worker, Du Bois develops an analysis of the class and racial character of the state. For Du Bois, the state is not just Marx's class-dominated state, although he does identify the state as a locus of class power. For Du Bois the state is a racial state, and the politics of class is racial politics.<sup>82</sup> In other words, in a racist society, class power is intrinsically racial. In *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois describes the end of Reconstruction as the reestablishment of white power and political control of the state.<sup>83</sup>

The racial character of the state, in turn, limits the possibilities for democracy. In *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois asserts that the fate of the emancipated slaves stood at the center of the possibility of establishing democracy in the United States after the Civil War. For him, the possibility of a thorough democratization of American politics depended on the economic empowerment of the emancipated Black laborers. As he asserts,

The true significance of slavery in the United States to the whole social development of America, lay in the ultimate relation of slaves to democracy. What were to be the limits of democratic control in the United States? If all labor, black as well as white, became free, were given schools and the right to vote, what control could or should be set to the power and action of these laborers? Was the rule of the mass of Americans to be unlimited, and the right to rule extended to all men, regardless of race and color, or if not, what power of dictatorship would rule, and how would property and privilege be protected?

This was the great and primary question, which was in the minds of the men who wrote the Constitution of the United States and continued in the minds of thinkers down through the slavery controversy. It still remains with the world as the problem of democracy expands and touches all races and nations.<sup>84</sup>

In his analysis of the politics of the newly freed Black population under Reconstruction, Du Bois emphasizes their desire for education

and describes how the newly elected legislatures in the South where the Black population held a majority, such as in South Carolina, developed public schools and public education. Indeed, he asserts that the development of public education was the biggest contribution of Reconstruction-era governments. But for emancipated Black workers to achieve full political participation, formal freedom alone was not sufficient. Emancipated Black workers were still subject to the whims of the ruling white power bloc. Du Bois suggests that the freed people needed access to land so they could have their own economic base to stand on and would not have to depend on the goodwill of landowners, employers, or politicians. As he writes in *Black Reconstruction*, “The Negroes were willing to work and did work, but they wanted land to work, and they wanted to see and own the results of their toil. . . . Here was a chance to establish an agrarian democracy in the South: peasant holders of small properties, eager to work and raise crops, amenable to suggestion and general direction. All they needed was honesty in treatment, and education.”<sup>85</sup>

The possibility of democracy in the United States depended on an agrarian reform that would give the formerly enslaved people “forty acres and a mule,” as the phrase that would go on to become memorable put it. The economic empowerment of Black workers was necessary to both guarantee and solidify Black political power and to allow for a full democratization of American society.

Du Bois presents a theory of democracy that relies on the power of laborers, particularly Black laborers, to assert and protect their own interests. The economic empowerment of the Black laborers, however, depended on accessing political power. For Du Bois, this power could not be based on the union movement, as later social-democratic theories of democracy would argue, because most of the labor movement was racist.<sup>86</sup> Du Bois argues that a united bloc of Black and white laborers could have imposed a program of education and economic empowerment, but again, the working class was deeply and fundamentally divided along racial lines. The intersection of class and race in the lived experience of workers led to profound racial divisions in the labor movement.

A second source of power for the necessary structural transformation of society that would have empowered the Black worker could have been the forceful imposition of a program of reform by the federal gov-

ernment. Du Bois refers to this possibility as the dictatorship of labor: a temporary government based on the northern armies that would favor the economic and political development of Black and white labor and create the basis for substantive democracy to develop. Du Bois argues that this should have been the historical task of Reconstruction and that for a while the Freedmen's Bureau did try to fill this role. But the possibility of a full transformation of American democracy (in both the South and the North) rested on a fragile racial and class alliance. Confronted with resistance from the old planter class in the South at the end of the Civil War, the northern industrial bourgeoisie initially decided to rely on the voting power of the Black population to check the power of the southern elites and stop them from reasserting their power. As he adds, "It was because of this thought that Northern industry made its great alliance with abolition-democracy. The consummation of this alliance came slowly and reluctantly and after vain effort toward understanding with the South which was unsuccessful until 1876."<sup>87</sup>

But Du Bois asserts that this was a problematic strategy for the northern economic elites because it relied on the empowerment of Black labor. Eventually, the northern industrialists came to terms with the new southern elites and left to them the control of southern politics: "Meanwhile, the leaders of Northern capital and finance were still afraid of the return of southern political power after the lapse of the military dictatorship. . . . It was, therefore, necessary for Northern capital to make terms with the dominant south."<sup>88</sup> The consequence of this agreement between the white North and the white South was the abandonment of the recently emancipated Black laborers to the will of the rising white southern political power. Once this happened, it did not take long for the reconstituted southern white ruling bloc to move toward Black disenfranchisement. The result was the end of Reconstruction, the institutionalization of Jim Crow, and the failure to establish full democracy in the United States: "Thus, both the liberal and the conservative North found themselves willing to sacrifice the interests of labor in the South to the interest of capital."<sup>89</sup> The agreement between the northern and southern white elites took place at the expense of Black labor.<sup>90</sup> While the northern bourgeoisie and the southern planters sought to weaken labor in both the North and the South, the concrete form that strategy

took was the disempowerment and disenfranchisement of Black workers. As Du Bois wrote, “It did not go to the length of disfranchising the whole laboring class, black and white, because it dared not do this, although this was its logical end. It did disfranchise black labor with the aid of white Southern labor and with the silent acquiescence of white Northern labor.”<sup>91</sup>

The planters opposed the empowerment of Black labor because they sought cheap labor and because they did not see Black people as equals. Except for the radical abolitionists, the northern bourgeoisie also did not fully believe in racial equality, and thus could easily accept southern complaints about “black laziness” at work and corruption in politics. As Du Bois put it,

It happened that the accusation of incompetence impressed the North not simply because of the moral revolt there against graft and dishonesty but because the North had never been thoroughly converted to the idea of Negro equality. . . . Under such circumstances, it was much easier to believe the accusations of the South and to listen to the proof which biology and social science hastened to adduce of the inferiority of the Negro. The North seized upon the new Darwinism, the “Survival of the Fittest,” to prove that what they had attempted in the South was an impossibility; and they did this in the face of the facts which were before them, the examples of Negro efficiency, of Negro brains, of phenomenal possibilities of advancement.<sup>92</sup>

Reading Du Bois’s analysis of Reconstruction is like reading a history of the present. Du Bois wrote about the Reconstruction period thinking about the continuing civil rights struggle in his time, but his analysis of the process of Reconstruction was prescient about the possibilities and constraints of our “post-civil rights” period. The civil rights movement abolished the political boundaries of the color line, but it only scraped its economic boundaries. And much as in the Reconstruction period, the white sectors that supported the civil rights movement abandoned the movement when the struggle moved from the political arena to the economic and social arenas. The result was partial political and economic inclusion coupled with the marginalization of large sectors of the African American population.<sup>93</sup>

The failure to establish democracy in the United States did not only have local consequences. By 1935, when he published *Black Reconstruction*, it was clear to Du Bois that racial and colonial capitalism was global. The failure of Reconstruction made the United States a part of the rising forces that shaped the late-nineteenth-century world order. As he put it, "The United States was turned into a reactionary force. It became the cornerstone of that new imperialism which is subjecting the labor of yellow, brown and black peoples to the dictation of capitalism organized on a world basis; and it has not only brought nearer the revolution by which the power of capitalism is to be challenged, but also it is transforming the fight to the sinister aspect of a fight on racial lines embittered by awful memories."<sup>94</sup>

In *Color and Democracy*, published in 1945, Du Bois addresses the intersection of class and race in the construction of global colonial power. He contends that colonial policies were the result of the political control of the metropolitan and colonial states by economic elites, and asserts, "There can be no question that most modern countries are in the hands of those who control organized wealth, and that the just and wise distribution of income is hindered by this monopoly. This power is entrenched behind barriers of legal sanction, guarded by the best brains of the country trained as lawyers, appointed to the bench, and elected to the legislature. The retention of this power is influenced tremendously by the propaganda of newspapers and news-gathering agencies, by radio, and by social organization."<sup>95</sup> Du Bois links political power to class power that is organized and maintained through a state apparatus that includes the legal system and public opinion. But class power is limited domestically by the strength of labor. Full class and racial power could be exercised against colonial populations only with the support of the metropolitan white working class. As he explains,

Within the imperial nations, the status of colonies has been determined largely by the attitude of the mass of the working people, whereas in Spain, where workers were disfranchised and had little power, colonial labor conditions prevailed even in the mother country. In the British Empire colonialism could be carried through only when it was applied to alien peoples and not to white people, especially those of English descent. The growing home vote vetoed this.



In the United States fear of European aggression was back of the Monroe Doctrine, but later the doctrine was continued as the white laborers tried to establish in the United States and under American control outside the United States, colonial labor conditions bordering on slavery. They were following unconsciously the later labor patterns adopted by the Union of South Africa.

Today the American Federation of Labor, with its exclusion of Negro members in many of the powerful unions, is still following that pattern, and this is the reason that the AFL will not make common cause with Russian labor. The CIO is trying to recognize depressed labor in the United States and in colonial areas dominated by the United States, as part of the national labor problem. The Labor party in England, while giving theoretical assent to this attitude, has never had courage to follow it up with action.<sup>96</sup>

For Du Bois, the alliance between the economic elites and the labor movement of the colonial powers allowed for the continuation of colonialism. The racial character of the European states perpetuated the system of global exploitation of colonial workers. And again, as in *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois asserts the need for an economic anchor to achieve democracy. In *Black Reconstruction*, he suggests that access to land would have helped to establish democracy in the United States. In *Color and Democracy*, he emphasizes the need to end colonial rule and the importance of industrial democracy and planning to guarantee full democracy in both the colonial powers and the colonies. These are points that he also made in *Dusk of Dawn*, in which he advocates economic democracy and the need for community control of economic life for Black subsistence and to develop an economic platform for the struggle for racial equality in America.<sup>97</sup>

Du Bois explains the failure of democratization in the United States and globally by analyzing the racial and class character of politics and the state. Because he accounts for the racial bases of political alliances and the fractures that racial divisions cause among workers, Du Bois's analysis of the state is more sophisticated and accurate than Marx's. Du Bois's analysis is also ahead of liberal and social-democratic theorists who consistently ignore racial and colonial exclusions in their analysis of democracy. For Du Bois, there is no true democratization of political

life without addressing the racial character of the state and the question of economic power and economic democracy.

### A Contemporary Du Boisian Global Sociology

Du Bois's sociology emphasizes the colonial and racial character of capitalism. If for Marx the archetypal figure of historical capitalism is the wage worker in the factory, for Du Bois it is the enslaved and the colonial worker on the plantation and in the mines. A contemporary Du Boisian global sociology would expand the four areas we have discussed in this chapter.

First, it would examine historical and contemporary forms of racial and colonial dispossession and exploitation. Although colonial empires have to a large extent disappeared, neocolonialism and coloniality are central features of the contemporary world, making these important subjects of study for Du Boisian sociologists. Furthermore, a contemporary Du Boisian global sociology would have to go beyond Du Bois's own analysis and consider processes of dispossession and displacement of indigenous people and historical and contemporary forms of settler colonialism.

Second, a contemporary Du Boisian sociology would search for the links between global structures and the phenomenology of lived experience. Racial schemes and colonial categories continue to shape subjectivities and identities. A Du Boisian sociology would examine the subjectivity and agency of the subaltern groups of contemporary capitalism, exploring how they construct their world and struggle for dignity, and how the veil blinds dominant groups to the plight of racialized others—others such as racialized workers, migrants, prisoners, and marginalized people. A contemporary Du Boisian sociology would also examine and critique the construction of racial and colonial forms of knowledge in the sciences and the public sphere.

Additionally, a contemporary Du Boisian sociology would analyze the historical and contemporary forms of the intersection of race, class, and gender. It would go beyond Du Bois's own limitations and fully incorporate the analysis of intersectionalities, both in the formation of inequalities and in the interpersonal and experiential dimensions. Furthermore, it would explore also the construction of intersectional solidarities.

Finally, a contemporary Du Boisian sociology would study the historical and present forms of the racial state. It is the task of Du Boisian sociologists to investigate the configurations of racial and class political power that maintain racial inequality and coloniality in the United States and globally. A Du Boisian political sociology should examine the racial logics of state bureaucracies and institutions, to document how they reproduce and recreate racial inequalities. A contemporary Du Boisian sociology would also go beyond Du Bois's and develop an analysis of settler colonial states.

Methodologically, a contemporary Du Boisian global sociology should be guided by a theoretical understanding of racial and colonial capitalism, rooted in historical analysis. For Du Bois, the analysis of contemporary institutions and structures could be conducted only by understanding how history constructs the present. A contemporary Du Boisian sociology does not seek generalizable ahistorical concepts or mechanisms but rather understanding of the structures of exploitation and oppression, as well as analysis of forms of agency and subjectivity, in their historical context. This does not mean that concepts cannot be generalized, but rather that one needs to account for the historical contexts in which concepts are developed and applied.<sup>98</sup>

A Du Boisian global sociology is also relational. It looks at peoples and social and cultural formations in their local and global connections. A contemporary Du Boisian sociology is attuned to the presence of diverse local histories and relational configurations. But local histories cannot be analyzed in isolation. The global system of relations in which they are embedded is fundamental to their analysis. A Du Boisian global sociology seeks to explore the relations between the global characteristics of racial and colonial capitalism and its local concrete manifestations. Much as with the tension between chance and law in Du Bois's theory of agency, Du Boisian sociology accepts the fact that a tension exists between local processes and global pressures. The two are interconnected, although not in a deterministic way. The degree of influence of global structures and the space for local agency must be explored through empirical historical and relational research. Du Boisian sociology thrives in those tensions, tensions that other sociological approaches may try to resolve by taking a position—either for law or chance, for structure or agency, or for global determination or local contingencies.<sup>99</sup>

A Du Boisian global sociology would conduct its analysis from the standpoint of different peripheries and different racialized peoples. Sociological theories emerging from the core are limited because of the presence of the veil and by the inability of scholars to see their positionality. The goal of a Du Boisian analysis is to reconstruct sociological analysis from the perspective of the racialized and colonized subjects of historical capitalism. In this sense, a contemporary Du Boisian sociology is close to the postcolonial sociology proposed by Julian Go.<sup>100</sup> For Julian Go, the goal of postcolonial sociology is to expand the conceptual and epistemological boundaries of sociology by bringing forward perspectives ignored by metrocentric claims to universalism. Go advocates a perspectival realism that would bring multiple standpoints into sociological analysis. A contemporary Du Boisian sociology embraces Go's multiple-perspectives approach, but it purposefully takes the position of racialized people in contemporary capitalism. It does so because this standpoint helps Du Boisian sociologists better understand the structures of oppression and exclusion of racial and colonial capitalism and the subjectivities that emerge in different historical contexts.

A final issue we must address concerns a tension that surrounds Du Bois's work as a global theorist. We have emphasized that for Du Bois the color line was a global structure that transcended the experience of Black communities in the United States. Some scholars take an either/or position on these questions, understanding our focus on Du Bois's global analysis to mean that we are arguing that Du Bois was not concerned with the African American experience of Black communities in the United States. We believe that a "both/and" approach is needed here. Du Bois's analysis was most definitely rooted in the African American experience. That was his initial standpoint, and Black communities in the United States were always central to his scholarship and activism. But Du Bois's analysis of the condition of Blackness transcended the United States and encompassed the whole of the African diaspora. And his concern with the color line addressed the experiences of people of color in the entire world. His life was quintessentially American and at the same time global. Du Bois was an activist fighting for the rights of Black people in the United States and at the same time a Pan-Africanist, and an anticolonial theorist and organizer. His death in Ghana was not a random event but the culmination of a life of global anticolonial thought and praxis.