

Closing the Indigenous Gap: What can a Symbiosis of Du Boisian Sociology and Indigenous History Offer?

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This article argues that, despite the gap in Du Bois own writings, Du Bois' theory of colonialism can be used to analyse Indigenous history to much merit. It argues that an understanding of Indigenous history using Du Bois theories is fruitful for understanding Indigenous history and deepening Du Bois' theories. It discusses the theories that make up Du Bois' main modes of analysis and then applies them to the struggles of Indigenous peoples. It will focus on both Du Bois' economic and psychological theories, namely racial capitalism and double consciousness, and discuss what insights they give us into Indigenous history

INTRODUCTION

Here, it will be argued that Du Bois' theories have much to offer Indigenous history and that Indigenous history has a lot to offer Du Boisian sociology. We will show that the Du Boisian approach is a productive methodology to explore the struggles of Indigenous peoples and that an understanding of those struggles only strengthens Du Bois' theory. This will be argued to be a symbiosis as each will benefit from this proposed relationship. We will use Du Bois' theories of the *colour line* and *double consciousness* as a lens through which to examine the histories of Indigenous people and evaluate what a symbiotic relationship between the two might offer. The Du Boisian framework allows us to challenge norms and assumptions around Indigenous history and much of Indigenous history directly supports Du Bois arguments. In the places where it does not, a symbiosis will be shown not to contradict Du Boisian theory but strengthen it. It will be shown that the Indigenous gap can be closed and that there can be a mutually beneficial relationship between Du Boisian sociology and Indigenous history. We will connect moments and conflicts in First Nation history with Du Bois' rich theoretical base, found both in his published writings and his archive. Throughout this argument, quotes may refer to Indigenous peoples as 'Red', 'Indian' or 'Native Americans'; however, much modern research, including those by Indigenous voices, prefers the term Indigenous so that is we will use in our own writing (Bird 1999). By the term Indigenous we refer to the descendants of the people who first inhabited the North American continent.

THE "INDIGENOUS GAP"

Du Bois is posited to have offered a systematic and comprehensive theory of race (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020, 14). Where his theory of race is notably lacking is in its apparent blind spot to the struggles of Indigenous people (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020, 73). While he does mention Indigenous people intermittently in *Colour and Democracy*, there is a comparative lack of theorisation from Du Bois on this topic (Du Bois, 2007b, 211). This is a gap as his theories operate on a both/and approach to struggles of Black communities and those of the rest of the world (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020, 96). Hence it is a gap that can and ought to be closed.

This is not an entirely novel idea: many have compared the experiences of Indigenous and Black peoples in America, and some have brought elements of Du Bois' thought to the experiences of Indigenous people. Robert Warrior's writing on the intersections of Indigenous and Black experiences in sports and education are interesting (Warrior 2006). Warrior synthesises some of Du Bois' writings on education with parts of the Indigenous peoples'

experience (Warrior 2006, 185). Warrior concludes that that Indigenous and Black experiences are on a 'different, sometimes convergent journey' as each has had different interactions with the same societal forces (Warrior 2006, 194). Kyle Mays' comparative work on the Universal Race Congress (a 1911 anti-racist conference) and transnational progressivism reaches similar conclusions about the potential for symbiosis between Du Bois' writing and the Indigenous experience. May agrees that 'sometimes Black and Native histories flow in parallel; sometimes they intersect; at other times they diverge' (Mays 2013, 258). This is the general academic consensus on the relationship between Black and Indigenous social movements. While some, with Vine Deloria as a notable example, hold that the only real shared experience between Black and Indigenous movements is being against policies created by White people (Deloria 2017), this article will argue that, despite points of diversion and intersection between the Indigenous and Black experiences, the Du Boisian mode of sociology provides a good theoretical base from which to conduct an analysis on Indigenous history. We will further argue that an awareness of Indigenous history can improve Du Bois' theories.

DU BOISIAN SOCIOLOGY

Du Boisian sociology is, at its core, a critique of racialised modernity. It is the argument that 'racialization, racism, colonialism, and coloniality are structuring elements of the modern world' (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020, 187). For Du Boisian sociologists, these are not inevitabilities of human interaction but symptoms of a specific period in human history that must be illuminated and analysed. Du Boisian sociologists argue that modernity and racism are intertwined and that it is this racism in the colour line that is 'problem of the Twentieth Century' (Du Bois 2007a, 3). It is the understanding of racialisation as core to modernity that makes Du Boisian sociology so particularly apt for an analysis of Indigenous history. First Nations' history is crucial to any understanding of racialised modernity as many correctly point to 'discussions about whether the Indians had souls or not' (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 244) as the beginning of coloniality. Du Boisian sociology is therefore well placed to analyse Indigenous history as Indigenous history plays a crucial role in the stories Du Bois is exploring. His theoretical framework will be shown to be ripe for symbiosis.

THE COLOUR LINE AND SETTLER COLONIALISM

Du Bois' theory of the colour line is the argument that modernity is dominated by a structure that separates and divides people through and by race. A brief note of his found in his archive best encapsulates this theory. In it he muses that:

There is a world-wide colour line, it hides behind poverty and class, its methods are old, it is the gravest modern menace, it refuses to recognise civilisation, it is a religion, it is spreading, it must be fought, it must be studied, it must be attacked more. (Du Bois 1919)

What is especially notable about this description from Du Bois is his charge that the colour line 'refuses to recognise civilisation' (Du Bois 1919). The argument that modernity is constructed around the unrecognition of civilisation appears initially confusing but the history of Indigenous and Black Peoples will be shown to support this. Du Bois argues specifically that civilisation as concept is used to other Black people and denigrate their achievements through racialisation. He highlights this bifurcation clearly in *Colour and Democracy* when he argues that 'even black people in India and Africa were labelled as "white" if they showed any trace of progress' (Du Bois 2007b, 34), and the hypocrisy of the hugely varied treatment of mixed-race people depending entirely on their success. This is something that American settler colonists engaged in on a massive scale in their treatment of Indigenous peoples upon arrival. The mass othering and dehumanisation of Indigenous people was, according to the early 19th century historian Francis Parkman, because 'he will not learn the arts of civilisation' (Parkman 1908, 48). This example is just one of many that employ such justifications that strengthen Du Bois' claims about racialisation and colonialism. An analysis of it therefore strengthens Du Bois own arguments by vindicating them.

This othering and denigrating of Indigenous civilisations is still a common occurrence in both Canadian and American politics today. First Nations tribes in Canada are faced with a lack of clean water that, if they were treated like other Canadian citizens, would be viewed as a human rights catastrophe. Instead, because of historic treaties and attitudes towards Indigenous Peoples, some reserves have been on boil water orders for over five years, and in one case, 27 years.¹ This sort of denigration extends into depictions in the media. PragerU (2018), as a part of its attempt to defend American history, published videos only four years ago, accusing First Nations peoples of being violent and barbaric in their treatment of other First Nations peoples and animals. This is a very clear example of a bifurcated treatment and a use of racialisation as a tool. When Steven Crowder denounces Indigenous people as having a lifestyle of 'barbarism and borderline evil', he is performing exactly what Du Bois claimed the colour line relied on almost 100 years ago. For Crowder to accuse them of barbarism, while, in the same video, defending Columbus, who presided over brutality and violence against Indigenous people in his voyages, demonstrates the disingenuous use of civilisation as a conceptual tool for colonial othering (Tinker and Freeland 2008, 26). In fact, the main thrust of the video is to argue that some First Nation tribes were so barbaric that Columbus' rule and invasion was legitimate. Telling this story without any consideration for the 'barbarism' that Columbus himself then engaged in towards Indigenous people, and without defining barbarism, proves Du Bois' point that understandings of barbarism and civilisation are politically useful tools. It supports his argument that these are not neutral terms but things that are used by the powerful to control those they have colonised.

Therefore, Du Bois' sociological tools are useful to the analysis of Indigenous history as the colour line is alive and well, especially in conservative media. If we understand racialisation as a politically impactful decision, using Du Bois' framework, and not a natural observation, this allows us to challenge assumptions and power structures that underline the treatment of Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, a Du Boisian sociology that includes an analysis of the racialisation of Indigenous people is only more persuasive as it can highlight the roots of racialisation better. By closing the Indigenous gap here, we present a more persuasive Du Boisian Sociology that can explore how the colour line has affected Indigenous peoples.

RACIAL CAPITALISM AND PIPELINES

Du Bois' focus on the economic motivations behind the colour line is also useful for our discussion of Indigenous history. He emphasises that the goal of colonialism is 'private profit from low wages of coloured workers and low prices for priceless and unusually desired raw materials all over the Earth' (Du Bois 1954, 3). Du Bois' analytical tools allow us to challenge assumptions regarding the 'development' of Indigenous communities globally. He guides us to cast a critical eye over the economic goals of colonialism, as Du Bois is clear that it is at its core an extractive relationship. Du Bois demonstrates in his archive an understanding that trade and international relations under the colour line, despite being free in theory, can still be deeply exploitative. His most powerful argument for this is his comparison between nominally free nations in post-colonial economic relations and nominally free slaves in post-emancipation America. He writes 'there are many countries which have nominal independence which are under almost as control by other nations as formerly' (Du Bois 1954, 1). He argues that those analysing post-colonial nations are often 'misled by names and thus failing to assess realities' (Du Bois 1954, 1).

This has particular use as a framework when discussing the current construction of natural gas pipelines. The Coastal GasLink (CGL) website, an ongoing natural gas pipeline construction project in British Columbia, provides some good examples.² The website strongly emphasises that CA\$1.5B has been awarded to Indigenous businesses but beyond a few letters they have little evidence for their bold claim that they are 'proud of the strong relationships and agreements' they built. This is because despite 'agreement' being the term used, CGL are on First Nation, in particular Wet'suwet'en, land against the will and the interest of those people. The eviction notice signed, handed to and enforced against CGL is a clear example of this (Wickham 2021). Here, just as Du Bois describes in the post-colonial case, it is easy to be

¹ <<https://canadians.org/fn-water/>>

² <<https://www.coastalgaslink.com>>

'misled by names'. However, if we follow Du Bois example and examine the 'realities', the CGL is a clear threat to the First Nations' way of life. It is deeply damaging to their communities but is being pushed through because it would be very profitable for the Canadian government and natural gas corporations. As the Wet'suwet'en chiefs state in their eviction letter, there are clear threats to the First Nations way of life posed by both the ecological damage of pipeline construction and the threat of 'man camps' (Wickham 2021). Hence, in examining the realities of economic relations, and not being misled by names, it becomes clear that the external presentation of an agreement and mutually beneficial relationship is a lie. It is instead an extractive relationship in which Indigenous land is being defiled for economic gain by the Canadian government. Therefore, the Du Boisian framework leads us to challenge the presentation of Indigenous–settler relations.

However, Du Bois' economic framework is somewhat limited in this case as he does not appear to have the tools to discuss the specific difficulties of First Nation struggles in Canada. What is especially notable about First Nation sovereignty is that while it is technically acknowledged in Canada by the *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* case, Indigenous peoples do not have even have all the rights afforded to the post-colonial states that Du Bois theorises. While the Supreme Court of Canada eventually found and established the right to 'Aboriginal title', they came to no conclusions about question of self-governance (*Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* 1997). This means that while Du Bois offers us an economic framework that is generally useful, it lacks specificity for the First Nations struggles as, in Du Bois' focus of analysis, the post-colonial subject is at least afforded self-determination in theory. Indigenous people instead have their attempts at sovereignty further limited by policies imposed by internal colonial institutions like the Bureau of Indian Affairs that Du Bois' theories do not explore.

This is a qualitative difference between the experiences of Indigenous peoples and others, but Du Bois' own blind spot on this issue does not preclude his theory from being useful. His pre-existing analysis emphasises prioritising economic relations over symbolic ones, and this leads us to challenge the presented picture of current Indigenous–settler relations regardless of Du Bois' own lack of discussion on the issue. A Du Boisian analysis can investigate the complexities of Indigenous–settler inter-governmental relations precisely because Du Bois constructed a framework to examine the myths of post-colonial economic relations. Here then, a symbiosis is productive as Du Bois methodologies are well suited to the challenges facing Indigenous peoples.

LAND

Du Bois' analysis, however, does not emphasise the displacement of land that is a crucial element of the Indigenous struggle. While he does discuss the theft of land and its illegitimacy as a form of income, he fails to acknowledge who the land was taken from when he says that Black labour 'made this land rich and prosperous' (Du Bois 1960, 2). This misses the importance of, as Tuck and Yang describe it, 'land [being] recast as property and as a resource' (Tuck and Yang 2012, 6) as a process instead of an essential characteristic of land. This is a key part of the 'entangled triad structure of settler–native–slave' (Tuck and Yang 2012, 1) that Tuck and Yang place as crucial to understanding settler colonialism. Du Bois' theories do not meaningfully consider the Indigenous part of this triad, leaving the colour line theory somewhat analytically stunted. This does not render it worthless as an analytical structure outright, but by not theorising the importance of land, Du Bois misses ways to strengthen his argument. Indigenous theorisations of 'place-thought' (Watts 2013) place land as animate and internally connected to the production of knowledge, in contrast to Western understandings of land as inanimate and separate from knowledge. This would only strengthen Du Bois arguments about modernity and the colour line being attached to the 'refusal to recognise civilisation' (Du Bois 1919) as presenting alternative epistemological structures that have been erased by colonial thought patterns supports and develops his argument. The experiences of First Nations' people clearly can be integrated in a mutually beneficial way into Du Bois' arguments: a colour line that properly considered the role of Indigenous people would only be more convincing in its discussion of racialised modernity. It is, therefore, clear that Du

Bois' theories can be used to better understand the struggles of Indigenous people and that, in turn, Indigenous struggles can be used to better understand the world.

DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

Du Bois' theories of the psychological side of colonialism can also form a useful symbiosis with Indigenous history. Double consciousness as a concept was constructed by Du Bois around his own experiences of racialised subjectivity as a Black man but it also is relevant to discussions of First Nations' experience of racialisation. It will be demonstrated that, while Du Bois' psychological theories require some *stretching* to incorporate Indigenous experiences, they still have much to offer and that a stretched double consciousness is more impactful. By *stretching*, we mean the application of theory beyond its originally intended target in the Fanonian sense (Fanon 1986).

It is first important to establish what Du Bois' theory of double consciousness is. For Du Bois, racialisation operates through a variety of psychological structures that influence the thoughts of the racialised people. Double consciousness has three major components: 'the veil, twoness and second sight' (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020, 28), but we will focus on *the veil* and *second sight* as these are the most relevant areas to our discussion. The veil is the internal, psychological one-way mirror between the races that creates the 'double self' of an American and a Black person, and second sight is the different vision, both of themselves and wider society, that is afforded to racialised people (Du Bois 2007a, 14).

Double consciousness as an analytical tool can also be applied to Indigenous peoples, even though, we will argue, it is experienced in somewhat different ways and therefore requires some stretching. In essence, there is a difference, as the veil between White and Indigenous is constructed differently than that between Black and White. This creates a more complicated double consciousness, as Black theorists do not have to deal with the concept of indigeneity and how it can muddy double consciousness. As Tuck and Yang highlight, indigeneity has a 'subtractive nature' (Tuck and Yang 2012, 13). This nature, and moves to innocence, all work to create a less clear distinction between Indigenous peoples and settlers. This challenges their identity in different ways to that experienced by Black people, as settlers do not claim to be Black to protect their complicity in the colonial project. This is not a problem for Black theorists as the question of Black identity is contested differently. The source of this difference in treatment is the specific importance of settler nativism to the colonial project. Blackness is not treated in this way because Black people play a different role in colonial relations.

Deloria conceptualises this by arguing that Indigenous and Black people are both animals to the 'Whites' but Black people were considered 'draft animals, Indians wild animals' (Deloria 2017, 83). For Deloria, 'the white is after Indian land and resources' whereas the problem for Black people 'is not one of legal status, it is one of culture and social and economic mobility' (Deloria 2017, 83). This points to a different construction of the veil as Whites must be able to construct Indigeneity in a way that legitimates their occupation of Indigenous land but still construct a veil of sorts. Deloria shows this in saying that, from their conversations with White people and their Indigenous ancestry, 'evidently most tribes were entirely female for the first three hundred years of white occupation' (Deloria 2017, 9), because everyone who claimed Indigenous heritage would claim to be related to a princess. This is not therefore a genuine construction as White people do not actually want to be Indigenous, they want to fulfil certain myths about 'Indian princesses'. This is therefore a different veil to that experienced by Black people: it manifests itself beyond the claims of ancestry and into policy. This lack of a 'one drop' rule for Indigeneity is emblematised in the exception to the Racial Integrity Act that Tuck and Yang discuss (Tuck and Yang 2012, 13). By allowing exceptions to one drop rules only for those who claimed 'one-sixteenth or less' of Indigenous blood the American veil made clear its complicated relationship to whiteness and indigeneity (Racial Integrity Act 1924). This sort of ideological belief that being Indigenous is a 'stage of development' legitimates policies like that that proposed by Pratt of 'kill the Indian, and save the man' (Pratt 1892). The veil for First Nations' people is therefore a distinct but analogous experience due to the different roles that Black and Indigenous people have played and do play in colonial

power matrices.

AN ANALOGOUS VEIL

However, Du Bois' concept of the elements of double consciousness, and particularly the veil can still apply to indigeneity and the experiences of Indigenous people despite the different construction of race. It is notable that Deloria begins his manifesto with a discussion of the power of White presentation and understanding of Indigenous people. He feels that 'our foremost plight is our transparency', and that the unrealities of White understandings of Indigenous experiences 'face us as Indian people' (Deloria 2017, 8). This echoes Du Bois' concept of the veil as a 'one way mirror' (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020, 28). For both Du Bois and Deloria, their existence is coloured by the perceptions of White people and those perceptions have real weight. Deloria describes the frustration of 'experts painting us as they would like us to be' and how this makes being Indigenous 'in a very real sense to be unreal and ahistorical' (Deloria 2017, 8). This mirrors Du Bois expressing the sadness 'of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity' (Du Bois 2007a, 14). In both cases, their views of themselves are deeply coloured by the opinions that White people hold of them.

This is the veil as it projects White people's own opinions of Black or Indigenous people onto them. Hence, there is an analogous veil experienced by Indigenous people. It has different projections and fosters different myths, but it still performs the same function. Independent of Du Bois' theorisation, Indigenous voices echo his sentiments about their own struggles for liberation. The opinions of White people foster reflection that Indigenous actors must struggle against. This example shows that Du Bois theory has use beyond Black experiences, despite not being really intended as such. This should be viewed as a success of Du Bois and evidence that there is much to be gained from a symbiotic relationship between Du Boisian theory and Indigenous history. Closing the gap here proves that the theory of the veil is applicable regardless of race. It supports the argument, against Deloria, that there is common ground between Black and Indigenous as they have analogous experiences. Therefore, again, Du Bois' theories can gain from including and being aware of the different permutations of racial myths as his sentiments are echoed independently by Indigenous theorists.

SECOND SIGHT

Furthermore, the concept of second sight can also be applied to the knowledge that Indigenous people have, especially around environmental issues. Second sight for Du Bois was not just an expression of Black people seeing themselves through others' vision, but also a gift that allowed Black people to see social truths that may be obscured for others (Itzigsohn and Brown, 2020, 32). For Du Bois, second sight allows racially excluded people to see beyond the veil and is an analytical method that prioritises lived experiences (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020, 42). This sort of vision, which gives racially excluded people the ability to see past obfuscating forces, can be extended to the experiences of Indigenous people. Importantly, this is not essentialism, but a theory by Du Bois that those who are racially excluded may be best posed to theorise relations without the distorting effects of the veil. We will link this to the epistemic exclusion of Indigenous knowledge as by highlighting where Western and Indigenous epistemic traditions diverge, the second sight of Indigenous peoples becomes clearer.

Particularly around discussions around climate, there are many cases of epistemic exclusion of Indigenous theories that eventually are proven to be the most beneficial. This is a process that Kyle Whyte describes: 'Indigenous peoples see their knowledges as containing important insights about how to negotiate today's environmental issues' (Whyte 2017, 157). Their relationships to nature, Whyte argues, involve more reciprocity and this affords them, in the Du Boisian sense, a second sight. The history of controlled burns in America is one of the best examples of this. Initially banned in 1850 by the Federal Government, the traditionally Indigenous practice of small, controlled fires has, over time, been re-entered as a government wildfire prevention strategy (Levy 2005). Whyte provides many examples of this sort of Indigenous second sight, wherein Indigenous groups see beyond the veil and recognise the failures of more extractive policies around the environment (Whyte 2017).

Therefore, the second sight of Indigenous people allows them to see the flaws of the American government's relationship to nature.

Second sight is a useful concept then in supporting Indigenous perspectives. It helps to explain the excluded nature of traditional Indigenous forms of knowledge and its applicability on Indigenous perspectives proves the validity of Du Bois' psychological tools in being used beyond Black communities. Furthermore, the specific nature of Indigenous people's second sight shows that the concept of second sight can go beyond simply the epistemological. There is a deeply practical element to Indigenous knowledge around the environment that ought not just to be reduced to a sort of vision. Ongoing programs in Canada point to the use of traditional forms of Indigenous knowledge not just in theorising the climate crisis but monitoring and preventing its damages (Landrie-Crossland and Morse, nd). Hence, Du Bois' framework has value to the Indigenous experience, and value is added to his framework through an inclusion of Indigenous experiences in his models.

Double consciousness as a concept is therefore, despite some areas where it must be 'stretched', a useful tool in analysing the Indigenous experience. It gives us tools to think about racial alienation and the ways that it can influence the unconscious. The surprising echoing of Du Bois' theories by unconnected Indigenous theorists speaks to the analytical strength of his theories and their usefulness in discussions of race. His tools here equip us to challenge epistemic exclusion and better understand the effects of racial alienation. Unlike in his economic theories, the lack of inclusion of Indigenous people into his models should not be considered a gap in the same sense as his economic theories. There is little left unexplained before the inclusion of Indigenous history and voices as his theories here purport to be more specific to Black people, but their explanatory power is improved by considering racism's general psychological effects. It enables us to see the veil in its different forms and consider how systems of racialisation manifest across different racial myths. A Du Boisian sociology that is equipped, through symbiosis, to explain the different manifestations of racialisation is only a more useful one.

CONCLUSION

It is therefore clear that Du Bois' methodologies and analytical structures can achieve symbiosis with Indigenous experiences. In this symbiosis we can find a stronger Du Boisian sociology that is better equipped to explain beyond the Black experience. Hence, while Du Bois himself misses parts of the Indigenous experience, his methodology and analytical structures can be very useful in discussions of Indigenous history. In both his economic and psychological analysis, points of interesting overlap can be found. Additionally, Indigenous history itself is clearly very useful to Du Bois' own arguments. Despite the different experiences of First Nations people, their struggle supports Du Bois' arguments. They enable a deeper understanding of the roots and contours of American racism and enable Du Boisian sociologists to better claim to have comprehensive models of racism.

With a deeper appreciation and understanding of Indigenous experiences, Du Boisian sociology is only improved. Du Bois can enrich our study of Indigenous history, while Indigenous history can enrich his theories. A Du Boisian sociology that properly accounts for and theorises the stories of Indigenous people is a sociology that can far better explain and justify its claims about racialised modernity. Du Bois himself states that 'there is but one coward on earth, and that is the coward that dare not know' (Du Bois 1898, 23) and to not know the stories of Indigenous people's is certainly cowardly.

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