

**The Textual Patterns of Political Themes:
Regular Expressions and Concordancing
for Digital Political Theorists**

— PRESENTATION VERSION —

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This project (full paper version):
<http://www.webdubois.org/lectures/williams-apsavr24-full.pdf>

Conference presentation version:
<http://www.webdubois.org/lectures/williams-apsavr24-conf.pdf>

Related project on Du Bois's Taney theme:
<http://www.webdubois.org/lectures/williams-spsav23.pdf>

[c1] My project involves both content and method

(a) Content

- My work on W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963) and **Du Bois's use of Justice Roger Taney's infamous statement in the Dred Scott Supreme Court case (1857).**
- Du Bois's thematic use of Taney as a normative critique of social and racial oppression.

(b) Method

- Multi-disciplinary and digitally-based techniques: **concordancing a corpus via regular expression search protocols.**

(c) Such tools and techniques:

- Allow me to **trace political concepts and their themes across collections of texts by means of seeking the varied textual patterns** by which authors might express their ideas synonymously and metaphorically.
- Without the method it would be very difficult to generate the content of this project.

[c2] Digital political theory vis-à-vis (computational) digital humanities

(a) **My techniques do not use more conventional computational DH techniques.**

- I am not predicting next word (e.g., not like an auto-complete feature).
- I am not using statistical techniques to summarize or model the corpus.

(b) **Interpreting a Taney-evocative passage typically requires more than one sentence,** perhaps even a surrounding paragraph, in order to provide the elements that justify a claim for it to be part of the Taney theme in Du Bois's thinking.

(c) Regexing via concordancer enhances our capacity to read more texts somewhat more closely.

- We can attend to **the richness of the author's words and voice.**
- That is, we can attend to the intricacy and complexity of the words woven in arguments and thus retain more of the voice of the author.

(d) Regexing via concordancer can be applied to other authors and their works.

[c3] Chief Justice Roger Taney

(a) US. Supreme Court **Chief Justice Roger B. Taney** in the 1857 U.S. Supreme Court ruling on *Scott v. Sandford* wrote:

enslaved persons and their descendants, whether free or not

"had no rights which the white man was bound to respect"

(U.S. Supreme Court 1857: ¶¶ 34, 36).

(b) I could find **no scholarly discussion of the Taney thematic in Du Bois's writings.**

(c) I use interpretive-oriented methods mediated by digital tools and techniques.

[c4] Definitions

- (a) **Taney statement:** Du Bois used the quotation by Taney (with slight changes: "the", "a") OR cited other writers who did use the Taney statement

- (b) **Taney variant:** Du Bois modifies the original Taney quotation, typically by changing who is dominating and who is subordinate.

- (c) **Taney theme:** Considering the instances of the statement and its variants together.

- (d) Interpretive note: **Du Bois did not say explicitly that he was creating a Taney theme**, but he did include Taney's words in various social critiques.

- (e) For my project: I am seeking **textual evidence to ground an interpretive construct—a Taney theme**—to warrant my claim that Du Bois applied Taney and the variants as part of his social critiques.

[c5] Taney statement and four examples from Du Bois

SYNTAGMATIC AXIS [following Gates 1988]

	Subordinate Group(s)				Dominant Group(s)		
P A R A D I G M A T I C	[Taney :: enslaved persons] they had	no	rights	which	the white man	was	bound to respect
	[DISF] Negroes & paupers have	few	rights	which	society leaders	are	bound to respect
	[GBF] failure to recognize that the mass of men had	any	rights	which	the better class	were	bound to respect
	[CDCP] colored & black folk inhabiting colonies owned by white nations, who will have	no	rights	that	the white people of the world	are	bound to respect
X I S	[DARK] It is the husbands, brothers, & sons... [who do NOT]... acknowledge that women have	➡	rights	which	men	are	bound to respect

[Source: R. W. Williams' spsas23 presentation: <http://www.webdubois.org/lectures/williams-spsav23.pdf>]

[c6] Implications of the Taney theme

Such a shifting of dominant and subordinate groups. . .

(a) **expanded the historical and geographical scope of the original Taney statement** beyond its U.S. ambit, circumstances, and tremendous political and social consequences;

(b) implied that **various forms of social relationships could be criticized as unjust by means of an analogous argument**, which held that, in ways similar to slavery being heinous and dehumanizing (but not necessarily in the same manner or to the same extent), some social groups were denied rights based on human equality, and thereby subordinated;

(c) implicated, or at least might suggest to readers, that there was **a basis for cross-national and inter-group solidarity** among and between oppressed groups and communities; and thereby

(d) **might motivate readers and audiences to challenge oppression via rhetorical appeals** to logos and pathos.

[Source: Williams's spsas23 presentation:

<http://www.webdubois.org/lectures/williams-spsav23.pdf>]

[c7] Chronological listing by publication year

(a) Writings presented in the table above (containing »bound to respect«).

- 1901: SPWN: "The Spawn of Slavery: The Convict-Lease System in the South" [p.742]
- 1909: JBN: *John Brown* [ch.IX=p.264; ch.XI=p.373]
- 1910: EOTN: "Evolution of the Negro" [¶ 5]
- 1911: SEBS: "Social Evolution of the Black South" [p.3]
- ca.1911-12: DISF: "Disfranchisement" [Section 6]
- 1917: OCWF: "Of the Culture of White Folk" [¶ 29]
- 1920: DARK: *Darkwater* [ch.II; ch.VI]
- 1924: GBF: *The Gift of Black Folk* [ch.4=p.136, p.143]
- 1935: BREC: *Black Reconstruction* [ch.1=p.10; ch.6=p.167; ch.14=p.593]
- 1945: CDCP: *Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace* [ch.1=p.9]
- 1956: n56-01-02: "Let's Restore Democracy to America" [p.947]
- 1957: BFT-1: Black Flame Trilogy, v.1: *The Ordeal of Mansart* [p.110]
- 1961: USNF: "United States and the Negro" [p.11]

[Note: All references to Du Bois's writings are listed alphabetically by abbreviated titles within the Works Cited section below.]

(b) For 60 years Du Bois used Taney in his critiques of various types of oppression.

This is my evidence for a Taney theme.

[c8] Research techniques & tools assisting me as a digital political theorist

OR: How did I locate those passages?

(a) Corpus and corpus creation

(b) The concordancer (software program)

(c) Regular expression (regex) search protocols

(d) **Advantages of these methods**

- Accesses numerous texts as one assemblage
- Affordances of regexes

(e) **Disadvantages of the methods**

- Corpus creation is time-consuming
- Standardization of corpus
- Regexes must be thoroughly tested

[c9] Corpus

(a) Description: A collection of texts (printed, transcribed) by one or more authors.

(b) Corpus creation:

- For what purposes?
- What texts to include?
- Editorial decisions on what to do about misspellings, typos, unconventional spellings, illustrations, photographs, charts, tables, etc.
- **Corpus creation requires much time and scholarly attention to individual documents.**

(c) My corpus of Du Bois's texts (plain-text files):

- About 235 items, including 19 published books, social science research, political and social commentary, correspondence, and unpublished works.
- **Non-representative collection of Du Bois's total works.**
- About 3,000,000 words.

(d) For more details, read Appendix A in the long-form paper:

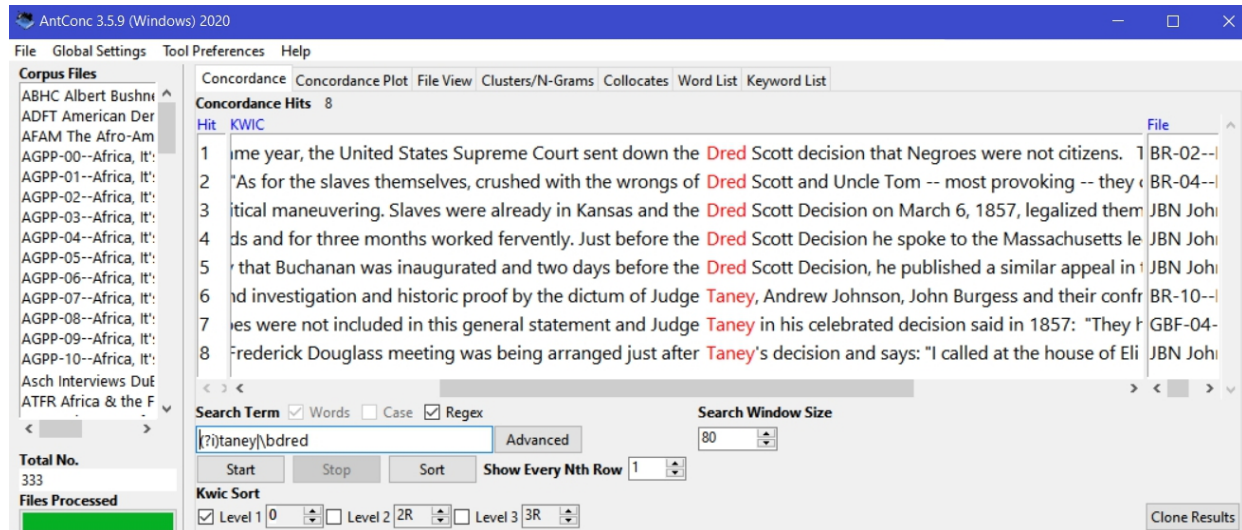
<http://www.webdubois.org/lectures/williams-apsavr24.pdf>

[c10] Concordancer software

(a) Description: Software (toolkit) to conduct research on a text and corpus

(b) Screen capture of AntConc 3.5.9.

Figure 1: The Interface of AntConc 3.5.9 (2020) [Regex {zre-1}: (?i) taney|\bdred]



(c) For more details, read Appendix B in the long-form paper:

<http://www.webdubois.org/lectures/williams-apsavr24.pdf>

[c11] Regular expressions (regexes)

(a) Description: A **search protocol to match text patterns**, including characters in various writing systems, and non-printable characters, that occur in documents, lines, and variables.

(b) **Uphill learning curve, but versatile and well worth the climb** (IMO).

For more details, read Appendix C in the long-form paper:

<http://www.webdubois.org/lectures/williams-apsavr24.pdf>

(c) **Useful regexes to address to find Taney statement and Taney variants:**

{zre-1} `(?i) taney| \bdred`

{zre-2} `(?i) bound to respect`

{zre-3} `\bbound\W+(?:\w+\W+){0,10}?respect\w*`

{zre-4} `\brights\W+(?:\w+\W+){0,10}?\brespect\w*`

[c12] My argument for this presentation

(a) **More passages exist in which Du Bois evokes Taney without using the "rights" ... "bound to respect" couplet.**

(b) Why search for Taney-evocative passages?

- We can explore **how Du Bois expressed himself in his own voice.**
- How did Du Bois use **rhetorical devices as a public intellectual?**

(c) Recalling the Taney statement (U.S. Supreme Court 1857: ¶¶ 34, 36):

Enslaved persons and their descendants, whether free or not, "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect"

(d) **Criteria for discerning Taney-evocative passages:**

- A racial or other form of social hierarchy that involves and domination and subordination.
- Some mention of the specific word "rights", or in a broader sense, some mention of examples of civil and political rights (e.g., equality, liberty).
- An imperative and/or normative aspect similar to "bound to".
- Some dimension of "respect" per se or its synonyms, such as recognition or consideration.

(e) To interpret any passage as Taney-evocative likely will require reading the surrounding text so as to understand how all four criteria are included and/or implied by the match.

- The matches will require disambiguation.

[c13] Linguistic justifications for research techniques

(a) Onomasiology:

- We convey an idea or a set of ideas in more than one way.
- Alternately: A concept is expressed as a word or phrase, but the concept's expression is not limited to that one word or phrase.
- By extension the theme's expression is not, or may not be, limited to one set of phrases.
- Thesaurus is to onomasiology as a dictionary is to semasiology
[thesaurus : onomasiology :: dictionary : semasiology]
- References: Grondelaers *et al.* 2007; Gunnell 2011; Halliday 2004; Hampsher-Monk *et al.* 1998; Richter 1995; Skinner 1989.

(b) Distributional hypothesis

- Words that are closer to each other are hypothesized to be more related and to contribute to their meanings.
- Justifies my use of words near the search terms are potentially constitutive of the search term's meaning and/or application.
- As part of my method: synonyms or near synonyms may be derived from the search word's context.
- In practice: Proximity of useful words will vary within or across sentences.
- References: Firth 1968; Harris 1964; also Gavin *et al.* 2019; Manca 2012; Sahlgren 2008.

[c14] Work flow to search for Taney-evocative passages

(a) We **choose one or more search terms**, including synonyms, based on the original Taney statement as well as our examination of the co-text in the concordancer.

- Case 1: "rights" with regard to "respect"
- Case 2: Synonyms of "rights" vis-à-vis synonyms of "respect" [political recognition]
- Case 3: Synonyms of "rights" vis-à-vis synonyms of "bound to" [normative imperative]
- Case 4: Synonyms of "bound to" vis-à-vis synonyms of "respect"

(b) We **craft regexes** accordingly, then test them.

(c) We **run the regexes** via a concordancer.

(d) We **disambiguate the match results**, if any matches are located, which is an interpretive process and may require reading the surrounding sentences.

[c15] Case 1: "rights" with regard to "respect"

(a) Create a unidirectional regex.

```
{zre-5} (?i)\brights?(?:.){0,60}?\brespect
```

- Similar to {zre-4} except that it uses a dot metacharacter (matches alphanumeric characters).

(b) One of the matches:

Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace (CDCP 1945).

"Where the white resident contingent is relatively large, as in South Africa and Kenya, the caste conditions are aggravated and the whites become the colony while the **natives are ignored and neglected except as low-paid labor largely without RIGHTS THAT THE COLONISTS NEED RESPECT.**" [CDCP 1945: ch.02=p.22; emphasis added]

[c16] Regex {zre-5} also locates . . .

(a) . . .this match from *Darkwater* (1920):

Granted that government should be based on the consent of the governed, does the consent of a majority at any particular time adequately express the consent of all?

Has the minority, even though a small and unpopular and unfashionable minority, no RIGHT TO RESPECTful consideration? [DARK 1920: Ch.VI; emphasis added]

(b) The quotation from *Darkwater* I will argue is Taney-evocative, especially because of the context in which Du Bois wrote it.

- The phrase "right to respectful consideration" refers to a minority, which, when considered in relation to the majority specified in the previous sentence, implicated that a group was subordinated to a dominating majority within the U.S.A.

[c17] Case 2: Synonyms of "rights" vis-à-vis synonyms of "respect"

(a) Examples of "rights":

free, freedom, liberty, liberation, equal, equality, equalitarian, egalitarian

(b) Examples of "respect":

recognition, recognize, consider, consideration, respectful, respectfully

(c) One possible bidirectional regex to craft:

```
{zre-6}    (?i)\b(free|libera?t|equal|egalit)\w*(?:.){0,50}?(?:recogni|consider|respect)\w*|(recogni|consider|respect)\w*(?:.){0,50}?\b(?:free|libera?t|equal|egalit)\w*
```

(d) The regex located this passage from "Will the Peace Bring Racial Peace" (1944):

<p>Nothing can be done about this situation until we face fairly the question of color discrimination in the South; until the social, political, and economic EQUALITY OF CIVILIZED MEN IS RECOGNIZED, despite race, color, and poverty. </p> [WPRP 1944: p.45; emphasis added]

(e) This passage to me is less obviously Taney-evocative, but still hints at it. Du Bois explicitly did indicate racist oppression and did stipulate the respect of rights in the form of equality. He did not seem to indicate a normative imperative tantamount to "bound to".

[c18] Case 3: Synonyms of "rights" vis-à-vis synonyms of "bound to"

(a) Examples of "rights":

free, freedom, liberty, liberation, equal, equality, equalitarian, egalitarian

(b) Examples of "bound to":

bind, binding, bound, ought, need, had to, has to, have to, should, must

(c) One possible bidirectional regex:

```
{zre-7}    (?i)\b(?:free|libera?t|equal|egalit)\w*(?:.){0,50}? \b(?:b
           (? : i | ou) nd|ought|need|ha [dsv]e?\s+to|should|must)\w* | \b(
           ? : b(?: : i | ou) nd|ought|need|ha [dsv]e?\s+to|should|must)\w* (
           ? : .){0,50}? \b(?:free|libera?t|equal|egalit)\w*
```

(d) One of the matches comes from *Black Reconstruction* (1935): ch.02=p20.

But now, first, MUST BE DEMANDED THAT ORDINARY HUMAN FREEDOM and recognition of essential manhood which slavery blasphemously denied. This philosophy of freedom was a logical continuation of the freedom philosophy of the eighteenth century which insisted that Freedom was not an End but an indispensable means to the beginning of human progress and that democracy could function only after the dropping of feudal privileges, monopoly and chains. </p> [BREC 1935: Ch.02=p.20; emphasis added]

(e) Taney-evocative: emphasized slavery and indicated that William Lloyd Garrison as part of the abolitionist movement demanded (normative imperative) that freedom (exemplifying rights), which slavery negated (group subordination of humans) be recognized (be respected).

[c19] Case 4: Synonyms of "bound to" vis-à-vis synonyms of "respect"

(a) Examples of "bound to":

bind, binding, bound, ought, need, had to, has to, have to, should, must

(b) Examples of "respect":

recognition, recognize, consider, consideration, respectful, respectfully

(c) A possible bidirectional regex is:

```
{zre-8} (?i)\b(b(?:i|ou)nd|ought|need|ha[dsv]e?\s+to|should|must)\w*(?:.){0,50}?\b(?:recogni|consider|respect)\w*|(recogni|consider|respect)\w*(?:.){0,50}?\b(b(?:i|ou)nd|ought|need|ha[dsv]e?\s+to|should|must)\w*
```

(d) This regex located two interesting Taney-evocative passages within one paragraph of "Our Visit to China" (OVCH 1959):

<p>Nevertheless our people for three hundred years have HAD TO STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION as American citizens, because most of our folk were in slavery or worked as low-paid serfs for exploiting whites. Many whites joined us in our struggle, and thus our people have gained important victories in our fight for equality in the last two centuries. This battle still goes on and MUST BE CONTINUED UNTIL NEGROES ARE RECOGNIZED as equal to other American citizens. </p> [OVCH 1959: p.1; emphasis added]

[c20] Other regex searches are possible and valuable

(a) Other regexes to seek several of the search terms within sentence boundaries.

(b) Still other regexes to match three words near each other.

(c) **Reasons for applying different regexes to the corpus:**

- Search for as many possible ways that Du Bois might have conveyed the Taney theme.
- This might help to filter out irrelevant matches.

(d) Those other regexes are available in the long-form version of this project:

<http://www.webdubois.org/lectures/williams-apsavr24.pdf>

[c21] In closing

(a) **Thematizing Taney statements and Taney variant passages helps us to understand Du Bois's normative critiques.**

(b) While the Taney variants focused on various social relationships and different historical milieux, **most of the disambiguated Taney-evocative passages focused on U.S. historical cases.**

(c) Considered all together, the Taney-evocative passages extend our understanding of Du Bois's use of intertextual references.

(d) My suggestion that any given passage is Taney-evocative is a **contestable interpretation**—other scholars may agree or disagree. Du Bois might have or have not agreed with me.

(e) Digital political theory provides us one means to do so and allows us to **potentially locate unexplored areas in the writings of Du Bois**, a scholar-activist whose ideas have been discussed, criticized, and promoted for over a century.

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[c22] Acknowledgments

- I wish to thank the organizers of this 2024 APSA Virtual Research Meeting, which has been a valuable means to communicate our ideas and work with others.
- I appreciate the opportunity to present on a panel with Anthony Dean Norton and Nalanda Roy.
- I also thank Agatha Slupek for her role as chair of our panel.

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