

SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

The Taney Theme in Du Bois's Political Rhetoric: Researching Textual Patterns as a Digital Political Theorist

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Project (Full version):
www.webdubois.org/lectures/williams-spsasv23.pdf

Summary of Project (This document):
www.webdubois.org/lectures/williams-spsasv23-summary.pdf

This presentation is a work in progress.

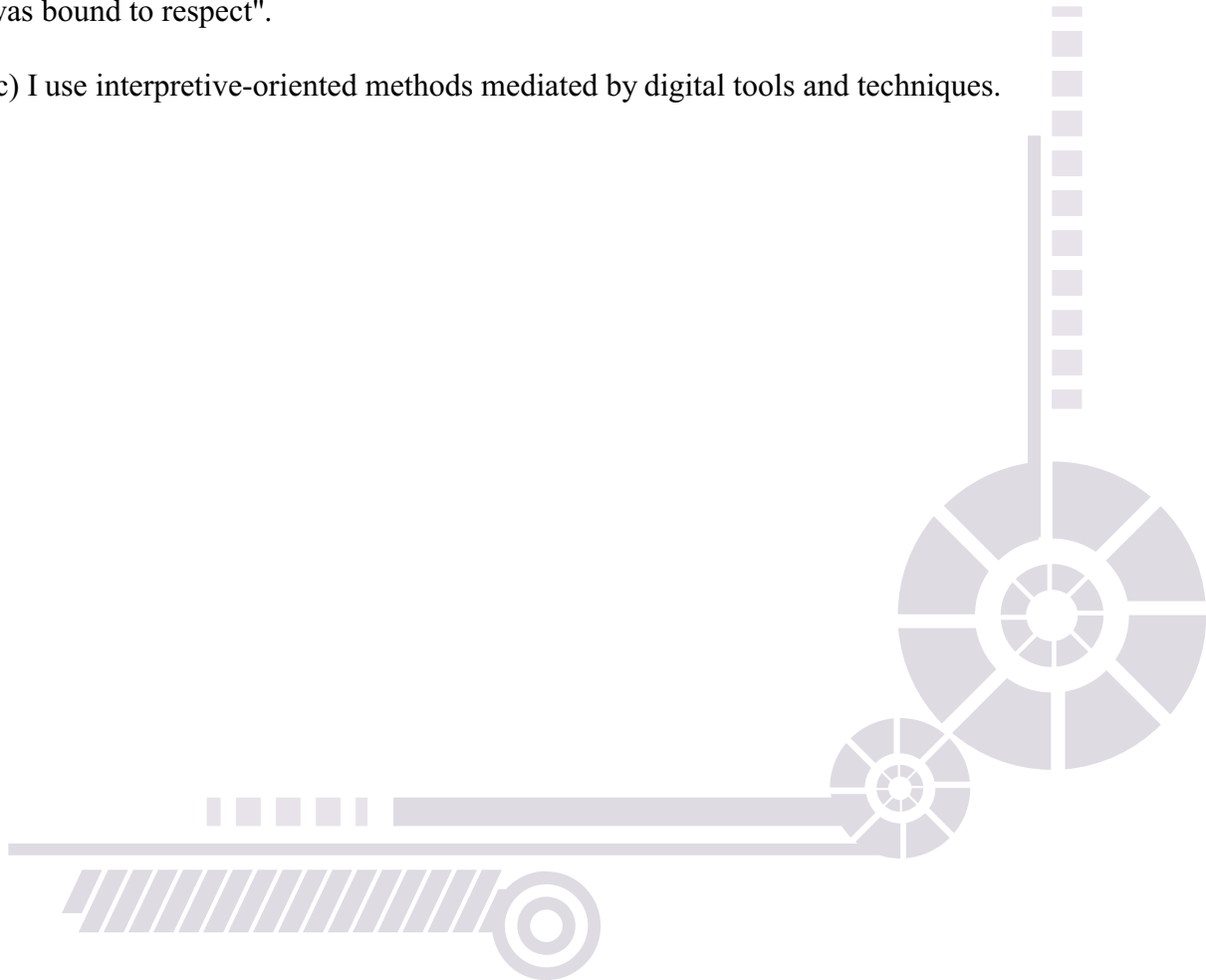


[s1] **Project: Researching the Taney theme (as I call it) in the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois.**

(a) No scholarly discussion of Taney thematic in Du Bois.

(b) Chief Justice Roger B. Taney and 1857 U.S. Supreme Court ruling on Scott v. Sandford. Taney wrote: that enslaved persons and their descendants "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect".

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



[s2] Definitions

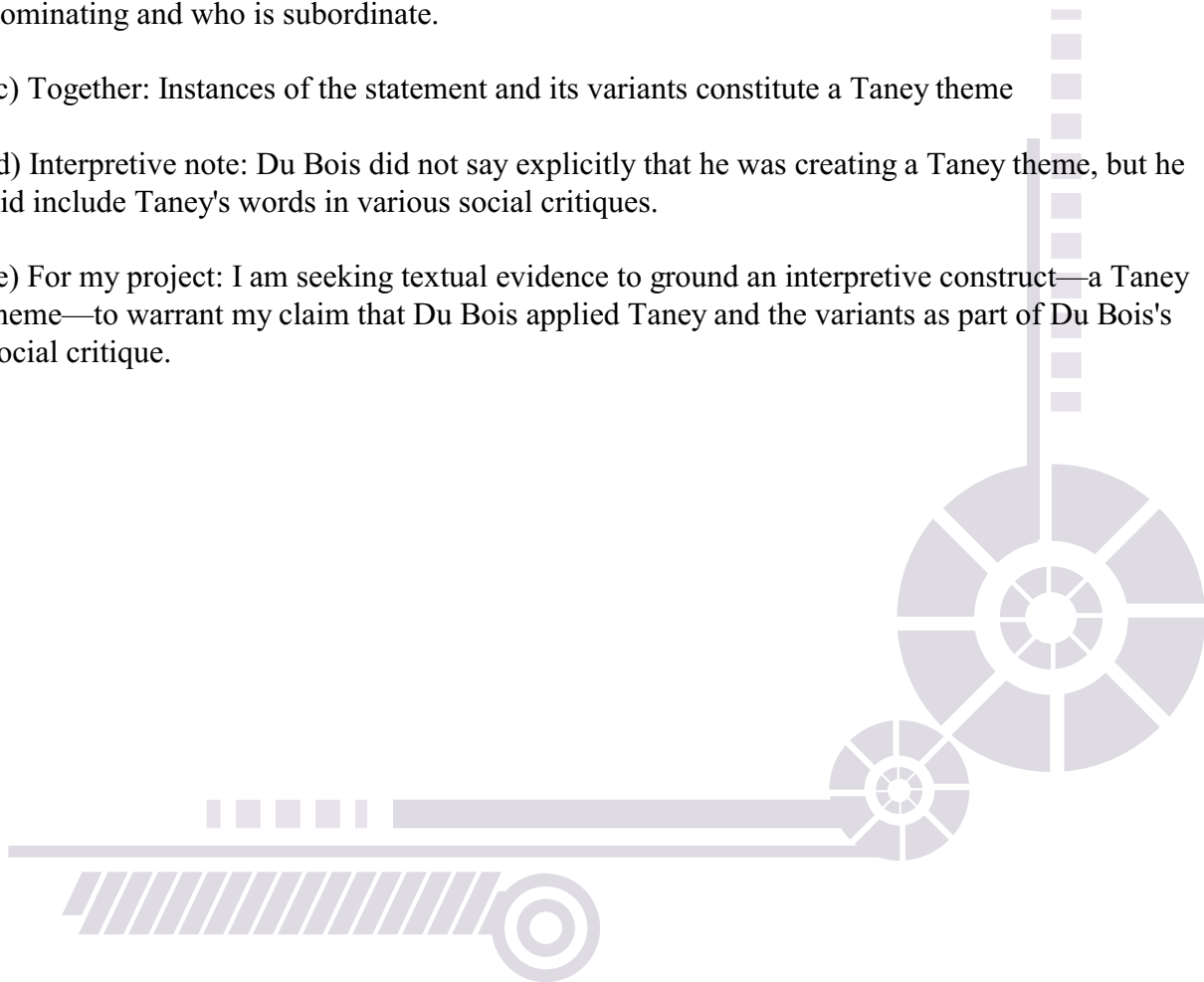
(a) Taney statement: Du Bois used the quotation by Taney (with slight changes: "the", "a") OR cited other writers who did use the Taney statement

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

(c) Together: Instances of the statement and its variants constitute a Taney theme

(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.

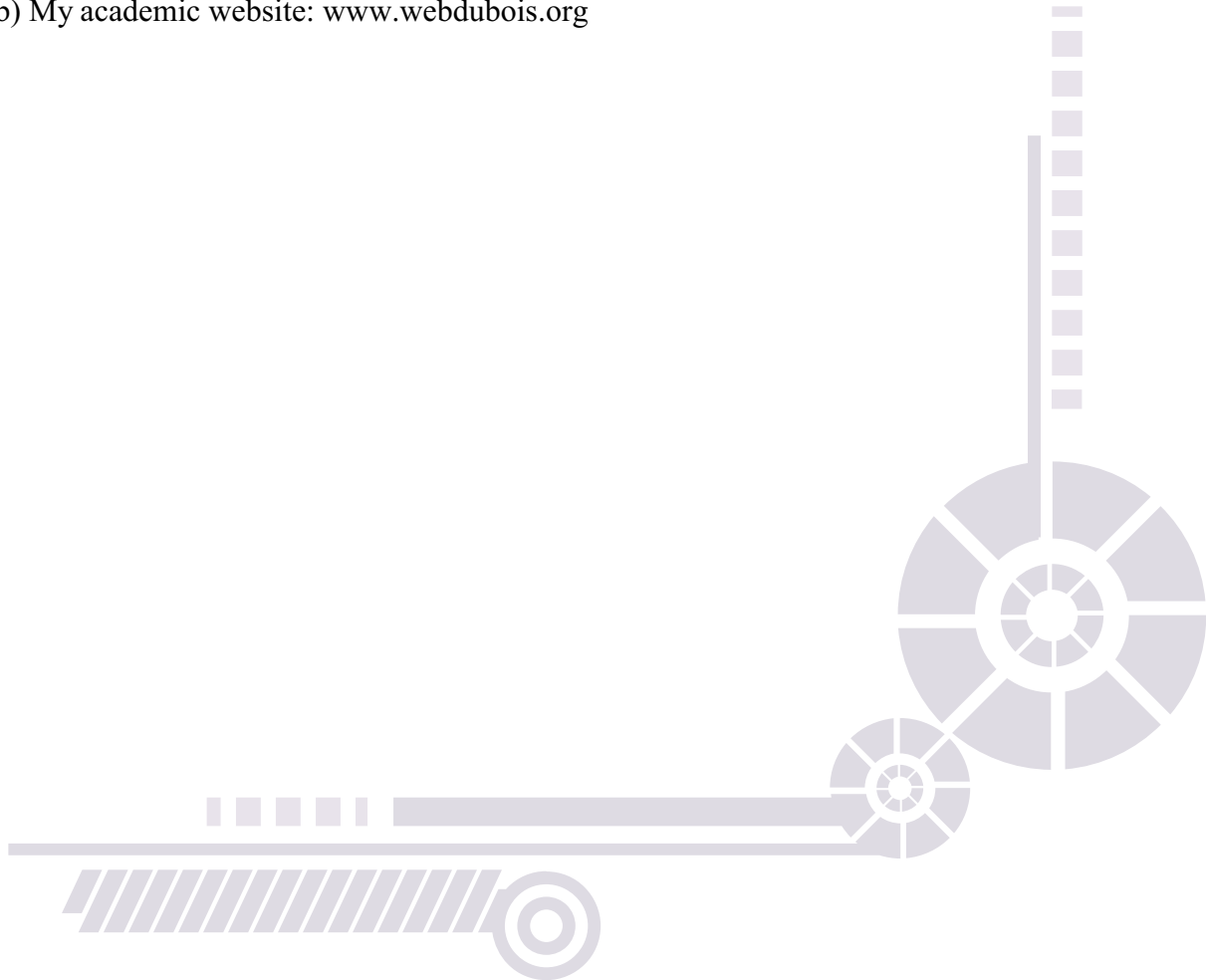
(e) For my project: I am seeking textual evidence to ground an interpretive construct—a Taney theme—to warrant my claim that Du Bois applied Taney and the variants as part of Du Bois's social critique.



[s3] **I have been studying Du Bois for many years.**

(a) W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963): African American scholar, activist promoting civil rights, Pan-Africanism and in later year including Marxian inspired class analysis into his critique of racism and White supremacy.

(b) My academic website: www.webdubois.org



[s4] **I do not recall first reading Du Bois's passage involving Taney.**

(a) Du Bois alluded to Taney without mentioning him by name in *Darkwater* (DARK 1920).

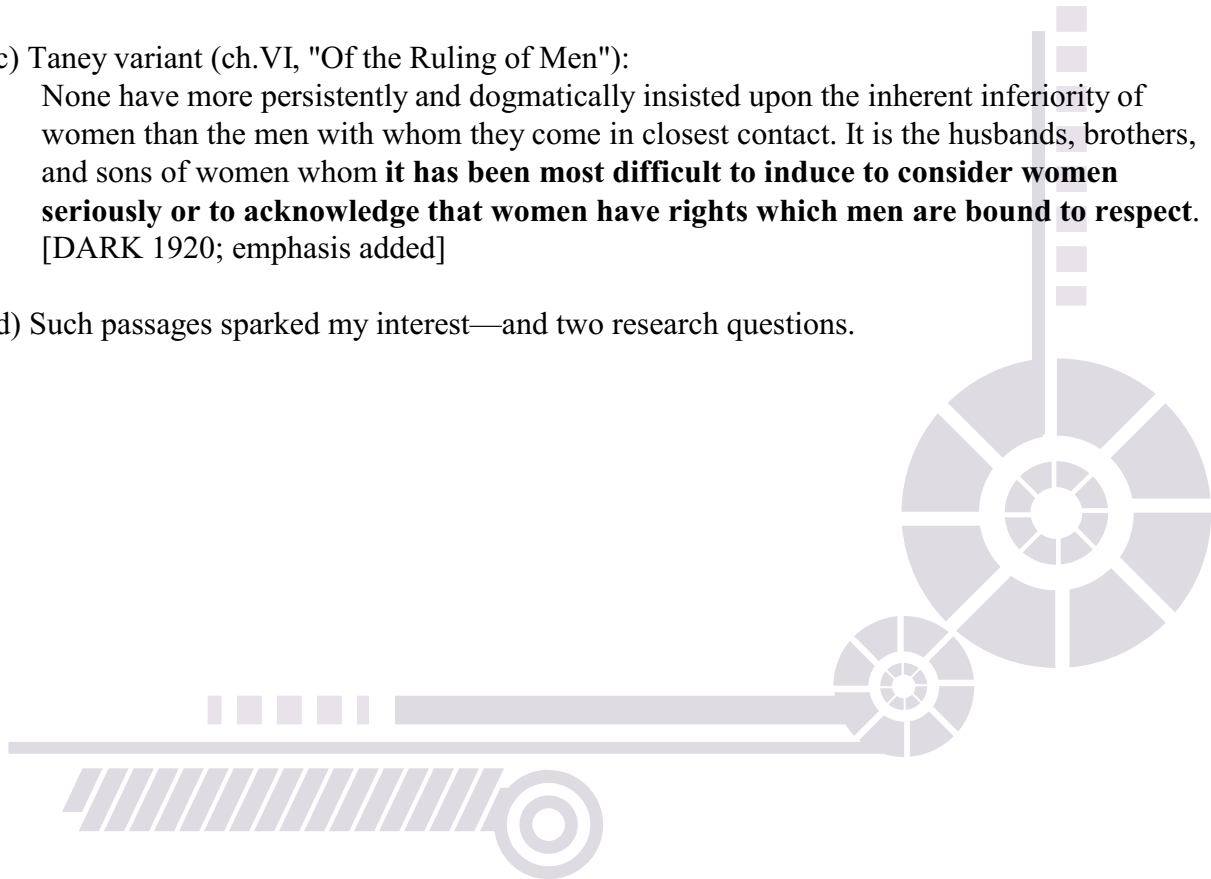
(b) Taney statement with slight alterations of the original (ch.II, "The Souls of White Folk"):

This theory of human culture and its aims has worked itself through warp and woof of our daily thought with a thoroughness that few realize. Everything great, good, efficient, fair, and honorable is "white";.... [. . .] [A] White Man is always right and **a Black Man has no rights which a white man is bound to respect.** [DARK 1920; emphasis added]

(c) Taney variant (ch.VI, "Of the Ruling of Men"):

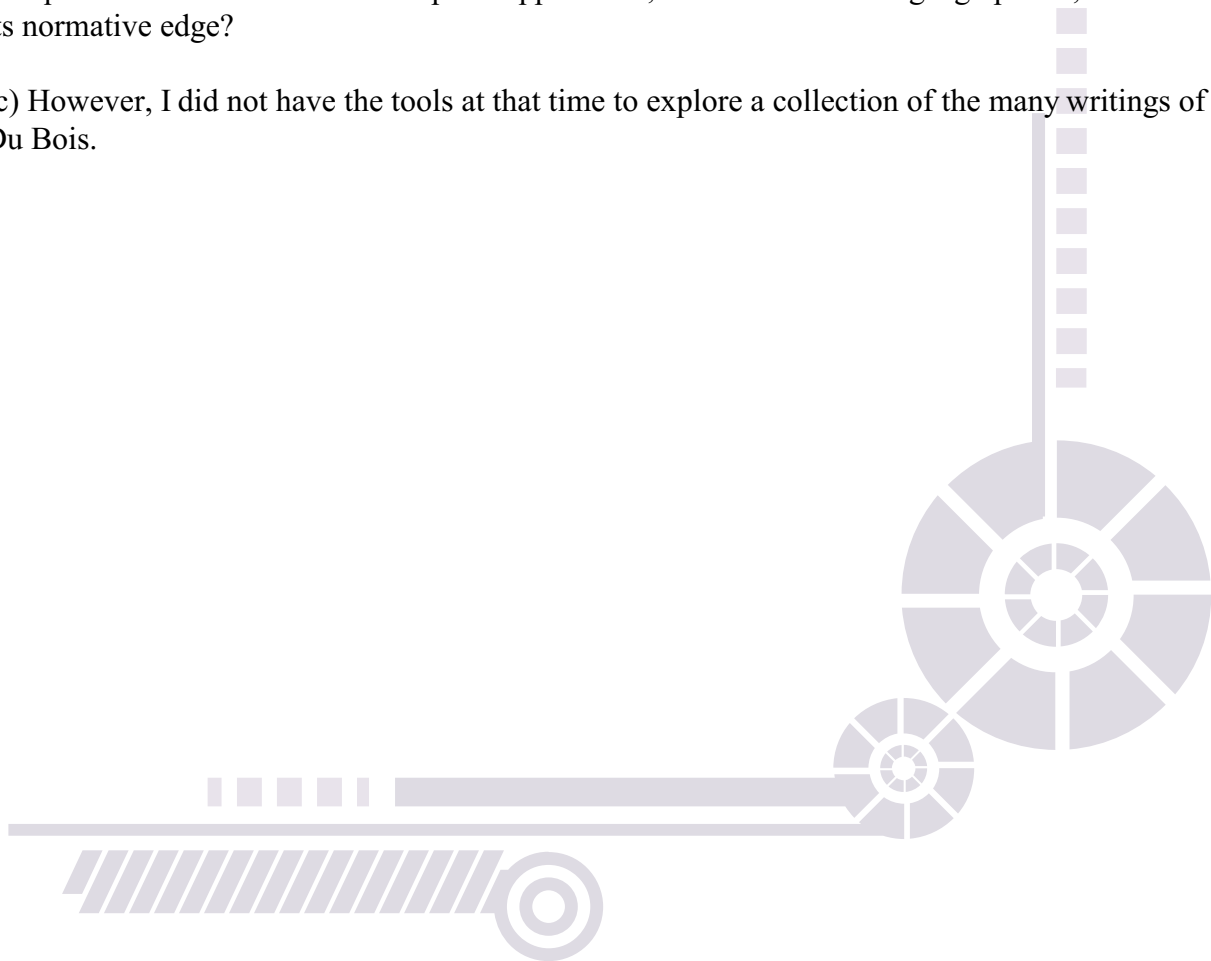
None have more persistently and dogmatically insisted upon the inherent inferiority of women than the men with whom they come in closest contact. It is the husbands, brothers, and sons of women whom **it has been most difficult to induce to consider women seriously or to acknowledge that women have rights which men are bound to respect.** [DARK 1920; emphasis added]

(d) Such passages sparked my interest—and two research questions.



[s5] **Two Research Questions:**

- (a) How did Du Bois apply the Taney statement and its modifications to various social relationships and conditions?
- (b) How might I interpret a Du Boisian critique based on Taney? That is to ask: how did the critique function in terms of its scope of application, both historical and geographical, as well as its normative edge?
- (c) However, I did not have the tools at that time to explore a collection of the many writings of Du Bois.

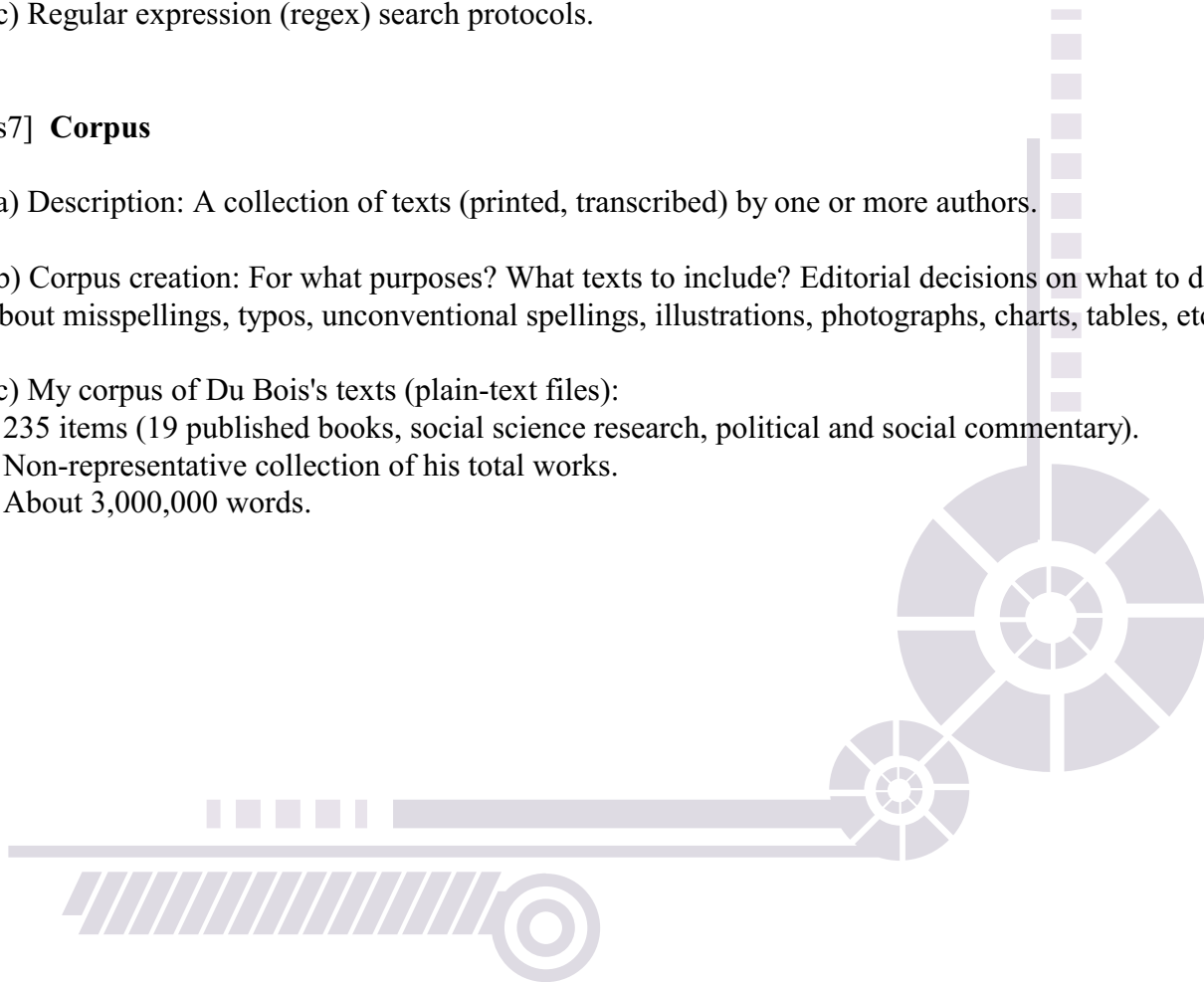


[s6] Research techniques and tool that assist me as a digital political theorist.

- (a) Corpus and corpus creation
- (b) The concordancer (software program)
- (c) Regular expression (regex) search protocols.

[s7] Corpus

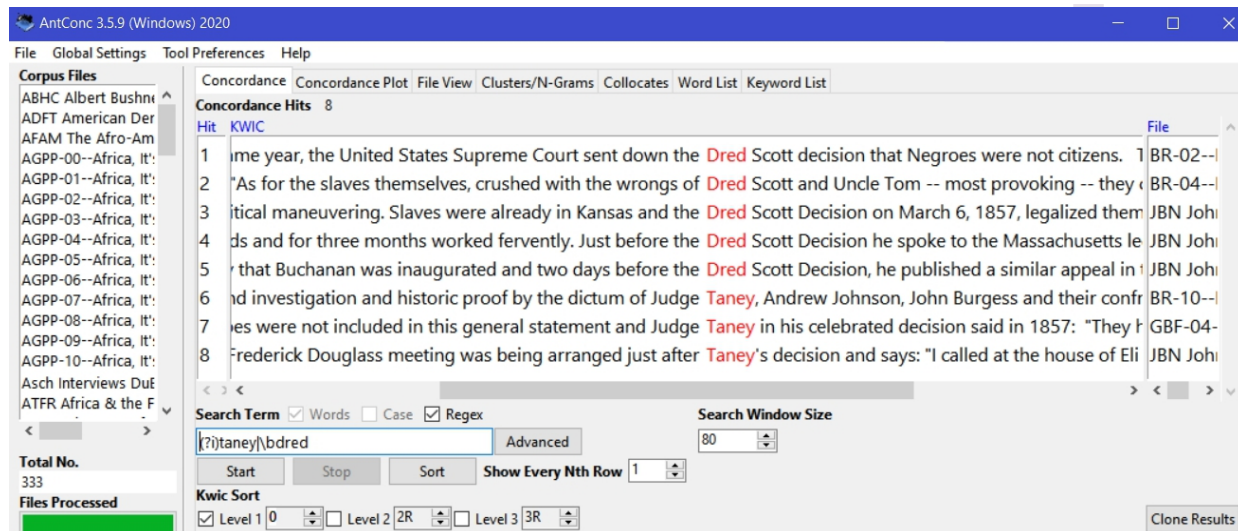
- (a) Description: A collection of texts (printed, transcribed) by one or more authors.
- (b) Corpus creation: For what purposes? What texts to include? Editorial decisions on what to do about misspellings, typos, unconventional spellings, illustrations, photographs, charts, tables, etc.
- (c) My corpus of Du Bois's texts (plain-text files):
 - 235 items (19 published books, social science research, political and social commentary).
 - Non-representative collection of his total works.
 - About 3,000,000 words.



[s8] **Concordancer software**

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

(b) Screen capture of AntConc

Figure 1: The Interface of AntConc 3.5.9 (2020) [Regex {re-0}: (?i) taney|\bdred]

[s9] Regular expressions (regexes)

(a) Description: A search protocol to match text patterns, whether in variables, lines, or documents.

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

[s10] Useful regexes to address Research Question One

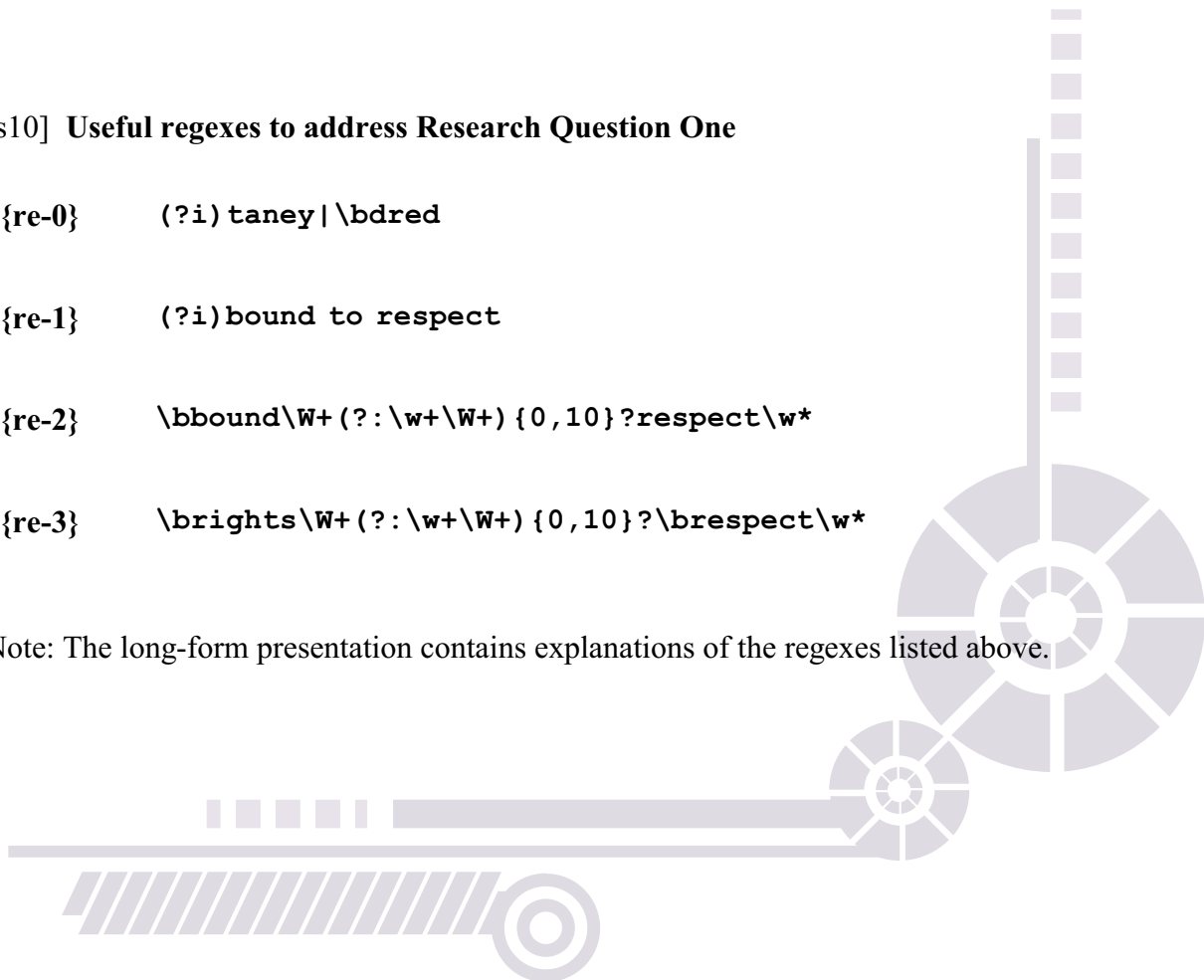
{re-0} `(?i) taney| \bdred`

{re-1} `(?i)bound to respect`

{re-2} `\bbound\W+(?:\w+\W+){0,10}?respect\w*`

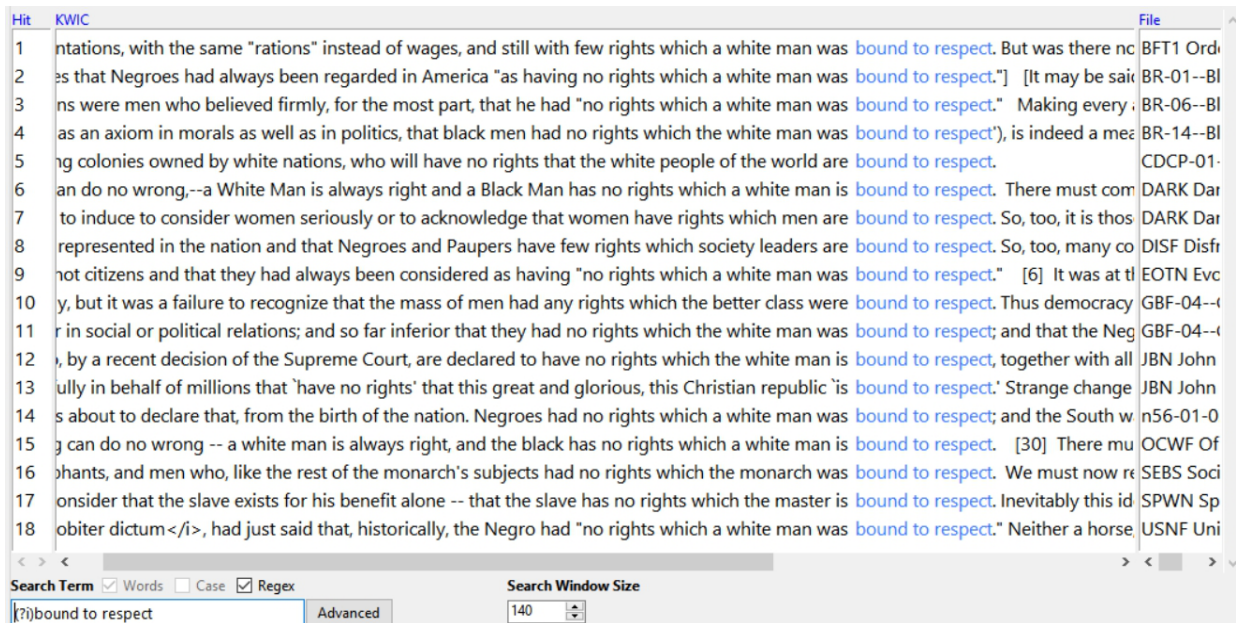
{re-3} `\brights\W+(?:\w+\W+){0,10}?\brespect\w*`

Note: The long-form presentation contains explanations of the regexes listed above.



[s11] Results of running regex {re-1}

Figure 2: All 18 Matches for Regex {re-1}: (?i)bound to respect



[s12] Du Bois's writings with the Taney statement and Taney variants

Table 1: Du Bois's Texts containing »bound to respect «

	Books		Periodicals	Pamphlets & Organizational Monographs	Newspapers
	Non-fiction	Fiction			
U.S. slavery [Taney statement –WDB directly quoting Taney]	GBF BREC		SPWN EOTN USNF		n56-01-02
Reconstruction Era	BREC	BFT-1			
White supremacy	DARK		OCWF		
Democracy (general)	GBF				
Men / women	DARK			DISF	
Monarch / subjects				SEBS	
Colonizers / colonized	CDCP				
Taney refs by others as cited by WDB	JBN (2) BREC				

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

[s13] **Chronological listing by publication year:** writings presented in Table 1 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]

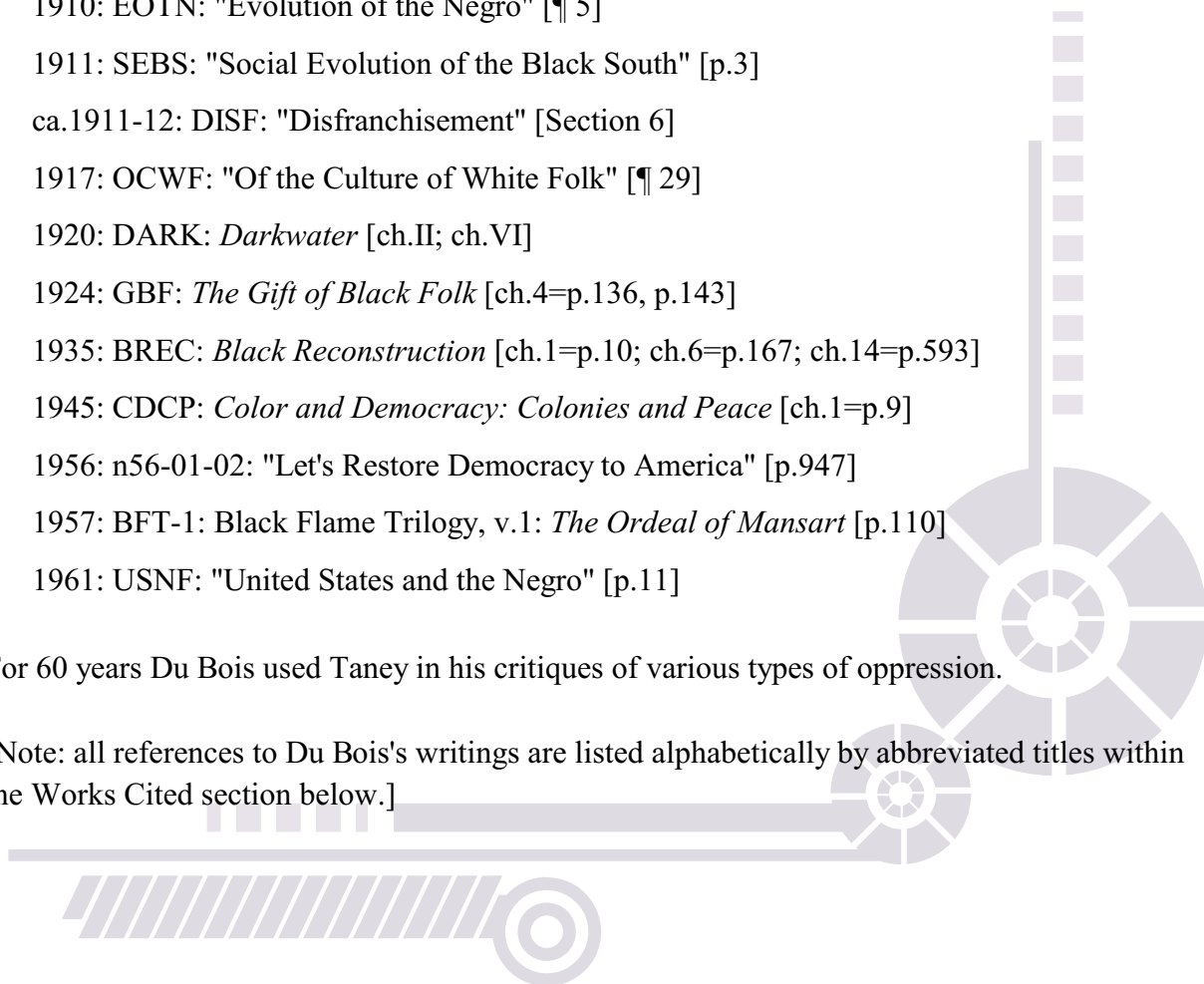
1956: n56-01-02: "Let's Restore Democracy to America" [p.947]

1957: BFT-1: Black Flame Trilogy, v.1: *The Ordeal of Mansart* [p.110]

1961: USNF: "United States and the Negro" [p.11]

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

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



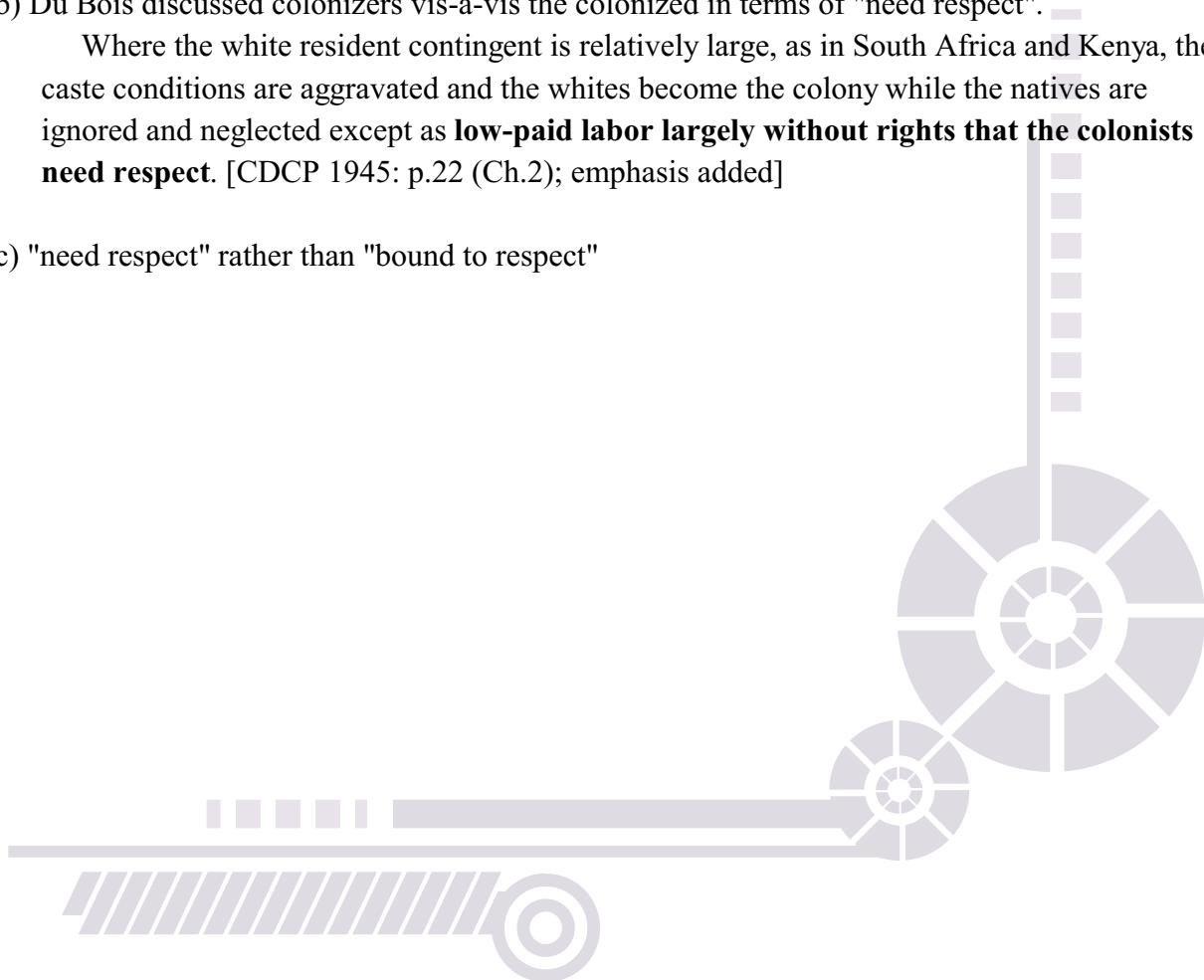
[s14] **Regexes {re-1}, {re-2}, {re-3} matched similar results with one exception.**

(a) Proximity regex {re-3}, seeking "rights: within 10 words of "respect", also located an unusual Taney variant.

(b) Du Bois discussed colonizers vis-à-vis the colonized in terms of "need respect".

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: p.22 (Ch.2); emphasis added]

(c) "need respect" rather than "bound to respect"



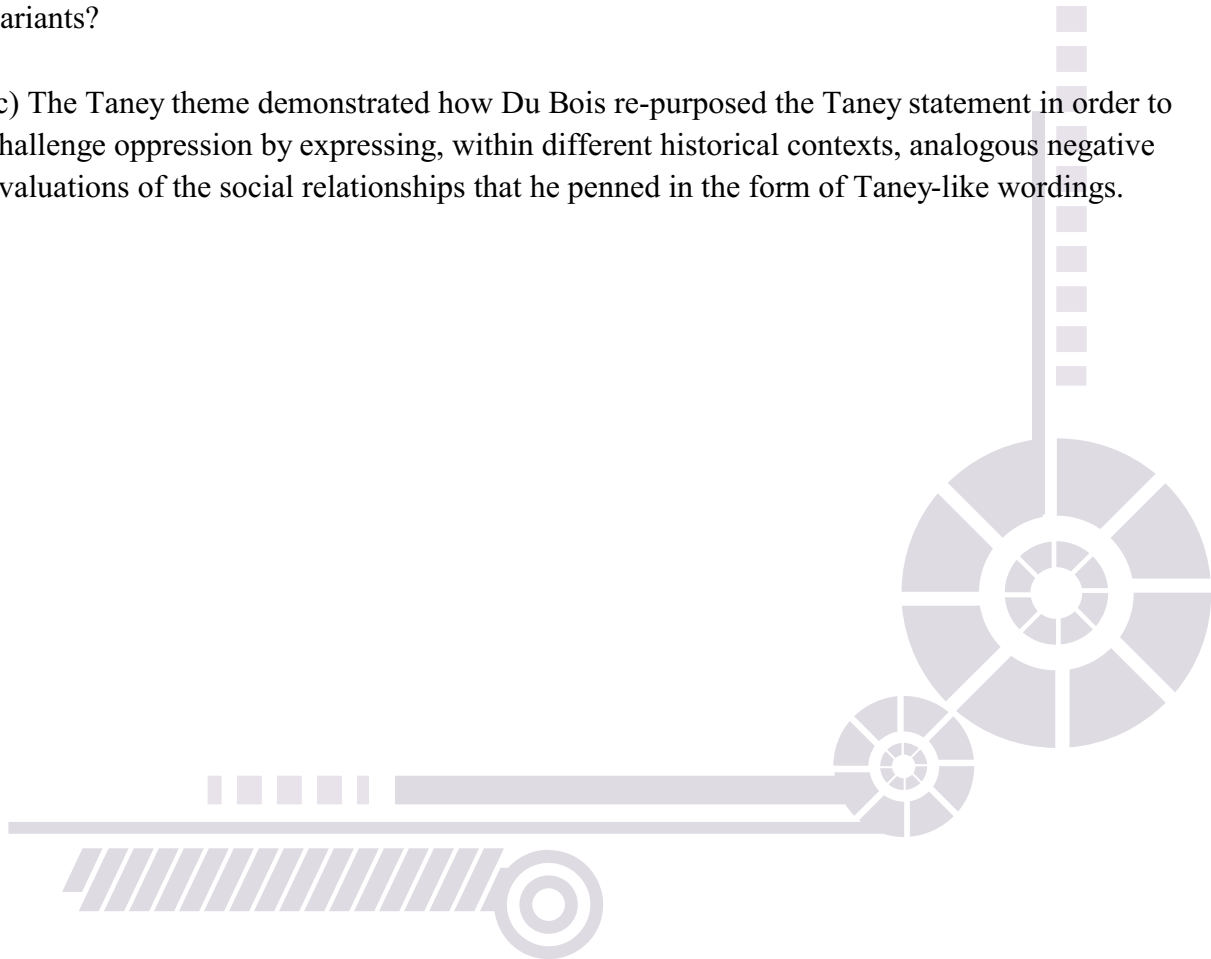
[s15] **Interpretations of the search results: Addressing Research Question Two**

(a) The results of the regexing via concordancer justify arguing for a Taney theme in the writing of the Du Bois corpus.

(b) How did Du Bois convey his social critiques via using Taney's original statement and variants?

(c) The Taney theme demonstrated how Du Bois re-purposed the Taney statement in order to challenge oppression by expressing, within different historical contexts, analogous negative evaluations of the social relationships that he penned in the form of Taney-like wordings.

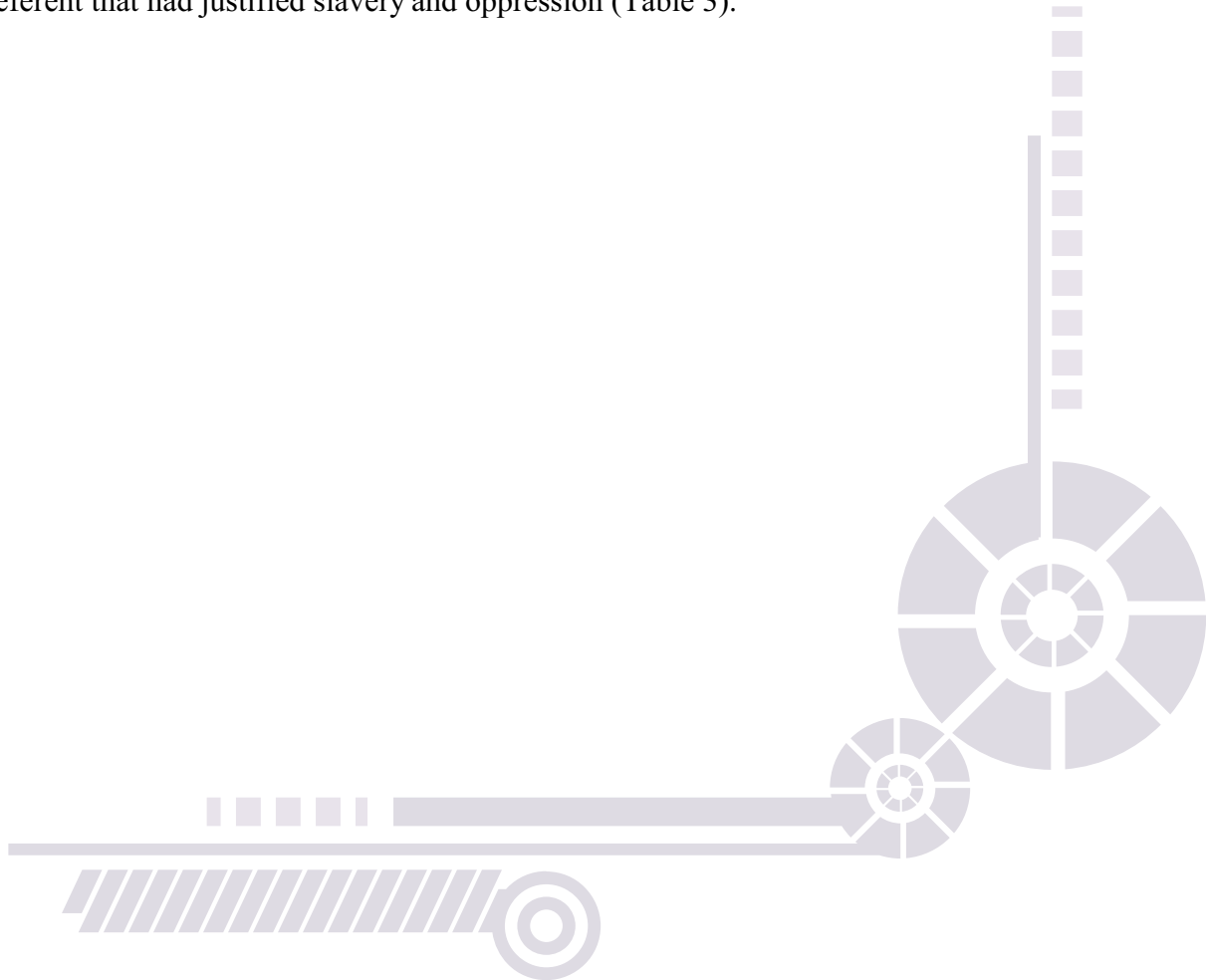
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[s16] **Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1988) provides an interpretive framework**

(a) Gates asks: how do oppositional expressions function linguistically.

(b) Du Bois changed certain signifiers of dominance and subordination within a historical referent that had justified slavery and oppression (Table 3).



[s17] **Table 3: Taney: "they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect"**
 — **With four examples from Du Bois**

S Y N T A G M A T I C A X I S							
	Subordinate Group(s)				Dominant Group(s)		
P A R A D I G M A T I C A X I S	[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
	[DARK] It is the husbands, brothers, & sons... [who do NOT]... acknowledge that women have	➡	rights	which	men	are	bound to respect

[s18] Implications of the Taney theme

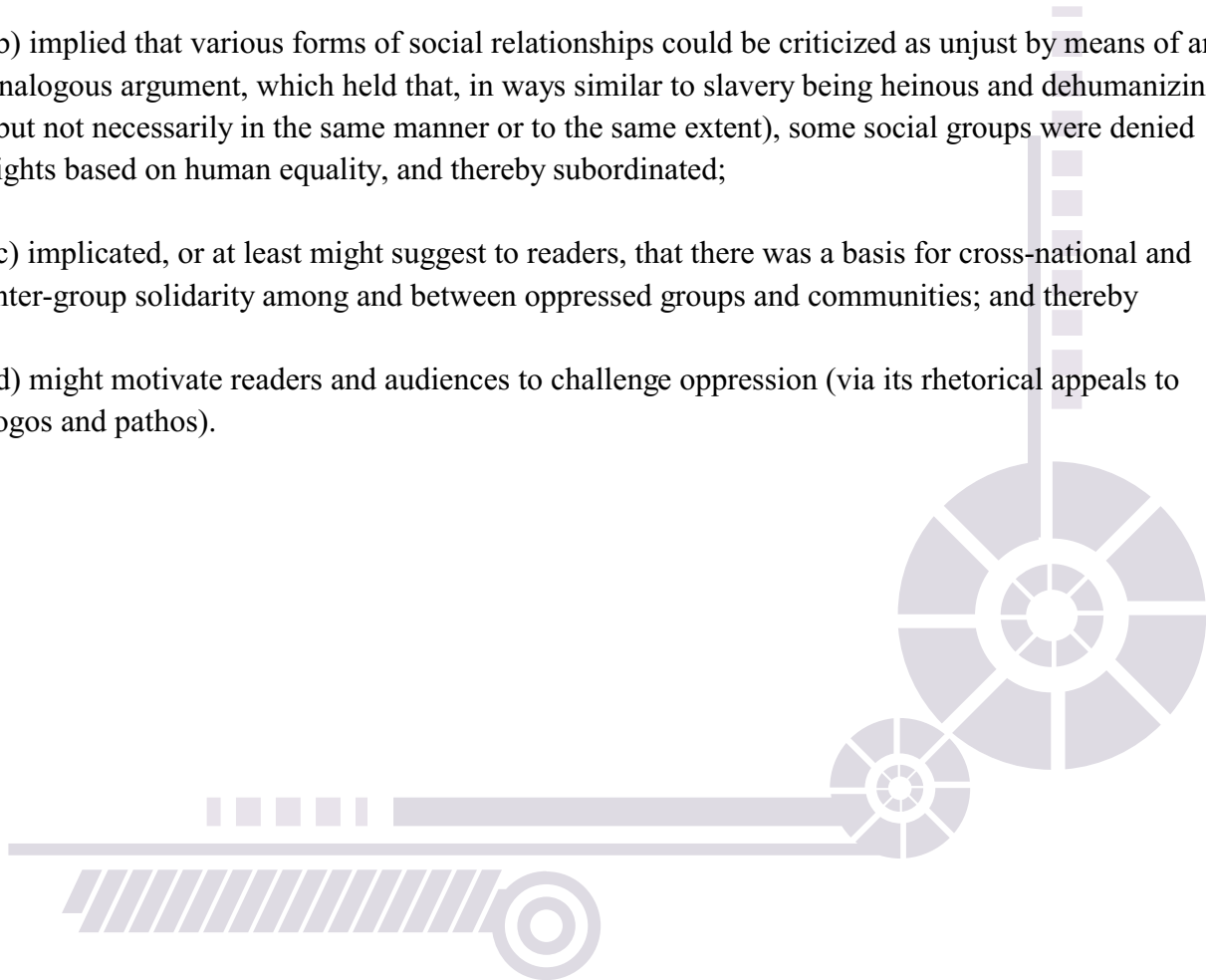
Such a shifting of dominant and subordinate groups. . .

(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 its rhetorical appeals to logos and pathos).



[s19] **In closing**

(a) The Taney theme is a normative critique made by Du Bois about different forms of socially repressive relationships

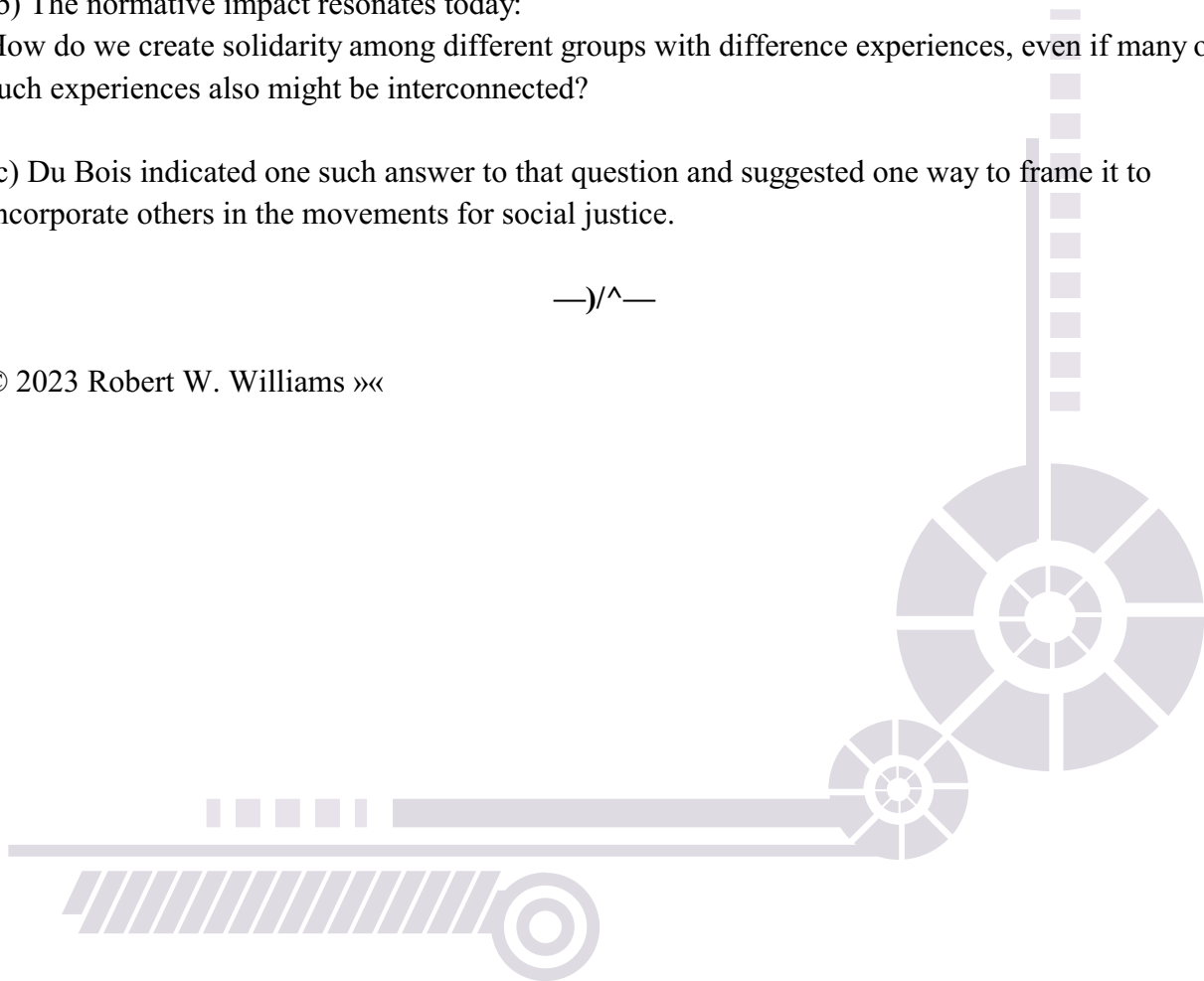
(b) The normative impact resonates today:

How do we create solidarity among different groups with difference experiences, even if many of such experiences also might be interconnected?

(c) Du Bois indicated one such answer to that question and suggested one way to frame it to incorporate others in the movements for social justice.

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Works Cited in the Summary of the Project

A. Works Written by W.E.B. DuBois

- BFT1. 1957. *The Ordeal of Mansart*. [Black Flame, Vol. 1]. NY: Mainstream Publishers.
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B. Work Written by Another

- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. 1988. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. NY: Oxford U.P.

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