



JOURNAL OF WORLD-SYSTEMS RESEARCH

ISSN: 1076-156X | Vol. 31 Issue 1 | DOI 10.5195/JWSR.2025.1228 | jwsr.pitt.edu

A Nez Perce/DuBoisian Theory of Whiteness and the Global Color-Line

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Abstract

Using a researcher-collected archive of publications by the Nimiipuu/Nez Perce, this paper argues that Nimiipuu/Nez Perce observations of white people extend W. E. B. Du Bois's world-systems analysis. The Nimiipuu/Nez Perce and Du Bois explicate a cannibalistic cycle of whiteness that emerged from competition among various imperial groups claiming whiteness for geopolitical advantage. This cycle helps explain the U.S. ascension from periphery to core in the capitalist world-system; its competition is epitomized by any rush (for gold, souls, land, etc.) that induces a state of anomie (by violence, isolation, boom/bust, etc.) and devolves into crises of social and ecological relationships (built on reciprocity, trust, symbiosis, etc.). This process creates a positive feedback loop whereby whiteness must be recalibrated as a legitimate source of advantage in the capitalist world-system, setting off new rushes to solve the problems created or compounded by whiteness. Likewise, crises sometimes present opportunities for Indigenous groups to reassert their political, economic, and cultural influence (e.g., environmental restoration)—exemplified by the 1979–1981 Nez Perce “fish-in” at Rapid River, Idaho—which simultaneously undermine white claims to superiority and progress and help people imagine and build worlds beyond the new world-order of capitalism and nation-states.

Keywords: Whiteness, Racism, Core-Periphery Relationships, Crisis, Global Social Change, Social Movements, Indigenous Peoples/Native Americans/American Indians, Archive, Long Twentieth Century, Imperialism



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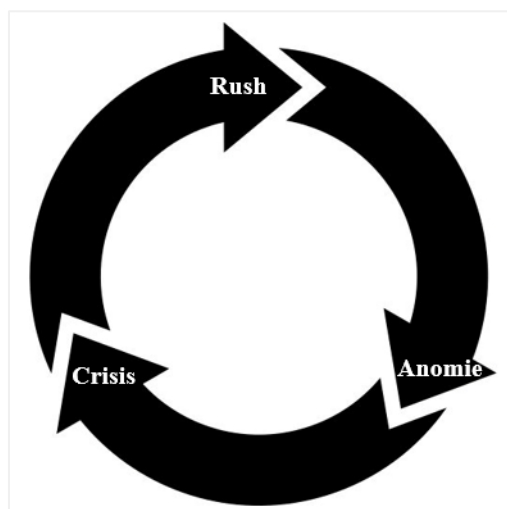
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Sociology demonstrates growing interest in the work of W. E. B. Du Bois (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020) as individuals and groups continue using and resisting whiteness (pan-Europeanism) as a source of power and privilege in the new world-order (NWO) of capitalism and nation-states. Although world-systems analysis is well positioned to address this issue, whiteness is seldom conceived as a central analytical category to help explain the various crises of the capitalist world-system and theorize its future (for exceptions, see Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Monteiro 2007; Bush 2009; Oyogoa 2016; Boatcă 2017; Grell-Brisk 2022) and there is even less engagement with Du Bois (for exceptions, see Wallerstein 1991; Monteiro 2007; Bush 2009; Itzigsohn and Brown 2020; Fenelon 2023). This hesitation to engage Du Bois likely stems from sociology's general "denial" (Morris 2015) of Du Bois as anything other than a founding figure of American sociology whose multiple theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions continue informing a variety of subfields (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020). Nevertheless, some scholars (Monteiro 2007; Bush 2009; Itzigsohn and Brown 2020) demonstrate that Du Bois' theory of the global color-line amounts to an original (albeit unformalized) world-systems analysis that understands whiteness as both a *claim* to geopolitical advantage and a necessary *consolidatory mechanism* for imperial-capitalist expansion and reproduction (Du Bois 1904, 1915, 1920, 1992, 2007). What we know less about is how Native views of whiteness may expand Du Bois's theory of the global color-line and elaborate world-systems analysis.

I argue that the more than 200 years of published Nimiipuu/Nez Perce observations (see Appendix A) of people believing themselves to be white parallels Du Bois's thesis of whiteness as developing from diverse and competing imperial-capitalist claims and methods to achieve geopolitical advantage that the state and capital consolidate to tighten control of people and resources. Furthermore, Nimiipuu/Nez Perce observations of whiteness expand Du Bois's analysis by elucidating positive feedback loops that cycle from (1.) a *rush* (for gold, souls, land, etc.) that induces a state of (2.) *anomie* (e.g., normlessness via violence, isolation, boom/bust, etc.) that creates (3.) *crises* of social and ecological relationships (built on reciprocity, trust, symbiosis, etc.). As I highlight in the theoretical framework and findings, while Du Bois touched on each of these themes in theorizing the color-line, Nimiipuu/Nez Perce observations enable the creation of a formal model (see Figure 1) to help explain the general tendencies of whiteness before and since the NWO. At the point of crisis, or what Du Bois (1904: 13) called "the problem of the color-line," individuals and groups *rearticulate* whiteness as a legitimate claim within political economy and *recalibrate* whiteness as an efficient tool for profitmaking, creating opportunities for the *consolidation* of white claims to power and capital. I show this process in the findings section by narrative reconstruction, beginning with the first collective Nimiipuu/Nez Perce encounter with white people, that is, Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery in 1805 and 1806, through a series of different groups (fur trappers, missionaries, miners, etc.) attempting to achieve foothold and whose efforts were periodically consolidated via war, legislation, eminent domain, and other means.

I argue that white consolidation helps explain how the United States ascended so quickly from a backwater periphery to replace Britain as the hegemonic core of the capitalist world-system. Du Bois (1992: 580) made a similar argument, although using different terminology and cases, marking the beginning of U.S. ascension with the “counter revolution of property” against Reconstruction in the aftermath of the Civil War. It is here when whiteness was first articulated as a truly global category of geopolitical advantage, creating enough temporary solidarity between capital, the petit bourgeoisie, and primary-sector skilled labor to grow their profits and wages through imperialism in the western frontier and overseas (Du Bois 1992), and by creating a “psychological wage” (Du Bois 1992: 700) for poor and working-class white people to suppress labor organization and revolt.

Figure 1. The Cannibalistic Cycle of Whiteness



The general American model of whiteness was then borrowed and modified, according to Du Bois, by European imperial states in their jealous pursuits to claim Africa and Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, solidifying “the color-line” as a primary consideration in interstate affairs and the pursuit of profits and higher wages, which ultimately led to World Wars I and II and the emergence of the NWO (Du Bois 1915, 1920, 1992, 2007). The aftermath of the American Civil War is also when Giovanni Arrighi (2010: 220) marks the beginning of “the long twentieth century.” Long centuries denote distinct capitalist regimes of accumulation, characterized by, among other things, the rise, fall, and replacement of hegemonic states that guide the world-economy. For Arrighi (2010), the beginning of the long twentieth century resulted primarily from British attempts to consolidate their imperial-economic power through financialization, which instead eroded British hegemony and provided opportunity for the United States to consolidate its power and capital through territorial and market expansion. The Nimiipuu/Nez Perce story helps integrate the insights of Du Bois, Arrighi, and other world-systems scholars as the Nimiipuu/Nez Perce observed the U.S. rise to world supremacy through imperial-capitalist competition (namely

against the British, but also the Spanish and Russian empires) for control over labor, resources, and sovereignty.

As I demonstrate in the findings, whiteness became an increasingly effective rallying cry for groups and individuals who otherwise had little common interests (e.g., missionaries wanted souls and trappers wanted furs) and different means for achieving their goals (e.g., missionaries forbade interracial marriage on ideological grounds while fur trappers found it advantageous to “marry” Native women), but who could band together when “the Indian problem” threatened the general legitimacy of white claims, such as with the Nez Perce War of 1877. American-style whiteness in Nez Perce country was most effective as a claim to geopolitical advantage when the United States was the economic and military hegemon of the NWO, that is, from roughly 1945 to the mid-1970s (Wallerstein 2004), but became less effective as the contradictions of capitalism set in (e.g., growing profits, poverty, and pollution), making returns on such claims less reliable and the means of realizing those claims potentially more dangerous. However, as the Nimiipuu/Nez Perce demonstrated with a “fish-in” at Rapid River, Idaho (1979–1981), Native Peoples can take advantage of white crises through collective action not only to prevent white consolidation but also to reassert influence and control over their ancestral homeland. The fish-in, or “second Nez Perce War” (Woodard 2005), resulted in the Tribe gaining (co)management status of various salmon and steelhead fisheries in the Pacific Northwest that have since helped revive fish populations that imperial-capitalist competition nearly destroyed. The revival of fish, especially salmon and steelhead, in Nez Perce country not only helps the Tribe with traditional food sources and outdoor activity, but also the rest of the (mostly white) local/regional population that enjoy fish for food, recreation, and tourism dollars.

I now move to build a theoretical framework that integrates Du Bois’s theory of the global color-line with world-systems research about the rise of the United States to global hegemon to situate Nimiipuu/Nez Perce observations of whiteness in their global political economic context. I then describe my methods and data to demonstrate how the Nimiipuu/Nez Perce observations of whiteness, from Lewis and Clark to the early twenty-first century, help us understand the history and potential futures of whiteness in political economy and global social change. Subsequently, I present my findings that describe various cycles of white people rushing into Nez Perce country, which contributed to anomie for the Nez Perce and their new neighbors and compounded into crises. Sometimes, crises are used as pretext for the state and capital to consolidate competing white claims, while at other times crises serve as flashpoints for collective action and social change. I then summarize and discuss the broader implications, limitations, and future directions for research in the discussion/conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

The Problem of Color-Line as a Problem of the Long Twentieth Century

Over his long career, Du Bois (2007) increasingly emphasized that the peoples of antiquity were incredibly diverse and while they certainly noticed and commented on physical differences, race

was not a geopolitical category used to manipulate group outcomes. Instead, the ancient world tended to rely upon notions of “civilization” and “barbarism” (Du Bois 2007: 143) to determine, among other things, the distribution of resources for imperial subjects. According to Du Bois (2007: 13), racism, that is to say, (im)material violence that reproduces racial hierarchy, appeared on the global scene once Christian holy wars, especially the Crusades, began conflating notions of superiority in faith—already used by churches and kings to justify their extortion and super-exploitation of the peasantry—with differences in the appearance of non-believers: “the Christian Church, Catholic and Protestant, at first damned the heathen blacks with the ‘curse of Canaan,’ then held out hope of freedom through ‘conversion,’ and finally acquiesced in a permanent status of human slavery.” This acquiescence was institutionalized in the transatlantic slave trade, blurring further the lines between pan-Europeanness and various Biblical justifications for theft and murder as imperial slavers, explorers, and others began to realize that the rest of the world was not Christian, nor did they look European. Hence the Doctrine of Discovery (Fenelon 2016; Horne 2020), which proclaimed lands uninhabited by Christians to be the sovereign territory of the empires that “discovered” them, consolidating power and capital via religion within different European states as they competed for dominion over “non-believing” peoples and their territories.

The Doctrine of Discovery (Fenelon 2016; Horne 2020), however, would soon reach its consolidatory asymptote in the capitalist world-system. Christian flexibility often enables relatively easy conversion through public profession and ritual, regardless of physical and cultural differences but it also contradicts the endless quest for profit accumulation in capitalism, forcing the owning classes to look “outside” increasingly larger Christian populations with certain rights ordained by God (Fynn-Paul 2009). Organized religion is also prone to infighting and fracturing, which hinder free trade and surplus production. Whiteness resolves this problem by reducing flexibility, on the one hand, with barriers against becoming white via noticeable differences of imagined significance (regardless of public professions and rituals), and, on the other hand, increasing flexibility by offering enough opportunity for some to (think they can) “become” white through fighting (white and not-white) others for that position. Thus, during “the long sixteenth century” (Arrighi 2010: 219)—approximately 1450–1640—states, churches, and their auxiliaries increasingly used whiteness as justification for imperial pursuits that were becoming progressively profitable for private enterprises (Du Bois 1920, 2007; Fenelon 2016; Horne 2020). As a result, religious racism became an increasingly effective means of mobilizing people and marshalling resources for economic expansion via imperialism in the “New World” (Du Bois 2007; Fenelon 2016; Horne 2020). Likewise, science began to compete against the church for influence in the state and increasingly used whiteness to explain observations and acquire funding (Du Bois 1915, 1992, 2007).

The “color-line,” the racial hierarchy of “white” over “not white” that broadly organizes the global division of labor (Du Bois 1904, 1915, 1920, 1992, 2007; Wallerstein 1991; Itzigsohn and Brown 2020), was becoming institutionalized on a global scale and in a variety of places with different real and imagined significance for competing imperial metropolises. And while the color-line would not become “the problem” or the “crisis” (Monteiro 2007: 36) for all humanity until

“the twentieth century” (Du Bois 1904: 13), it was certainly causing problems for individuals and groups developing and resisting claims to whiteness at the local level. In this way, European colonies were the natural laboratories to experiment with different articulations of white claims to an “other’s” land, labor, resources, souls, thoroughfares, and so on, that laid the groundwork for the emergence of the global color-line (Du Bois 1904, 1915, 1920, 1992, 2007; also see Monteiro 2007; Bush 2009; Itzigsohn and Brown 2020).

According to Du Bois (1992), it was in the United States of America after the Civil War when whiteness was fully articulated as a coherent, “stable” (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020; also see Du Bois 1920), geopolitical category for imperial claims making. It is also around this time that world-systems analysis marks the beginning of “the long twentieth century” (Arrighi 2010: 220) as the British empire increased financialization to make up for decreased industrialization, the United States consolidated its territorial and industrial claims in North America (Arrighi 2010; Chase-Dunn and Lerro 2014), and the world became subjected to a “new imperialism” that combined “interimperial rivalry...with nation building and pressures from emergent classes to produce another wave of European expansion” (Chase-Dunn and Lerro 2014: 280) that led to World Wars I and II and the NWO. What world-systems analysis tends to miss but was critical for Du Bois, is the centrality of whiteness as a mechanism for this new nation building process, which not only helps explain the consolidation of U.S. territory and industry and its subsequent ascension in the capitalist world-system but also the outbreak of world war (Du Bois 1915, 1920, 1992, 2007).

Reconstruction after the Civil War (1865–1877), at first, witnessed major challenges to white supremacy, as millions of newly freed Black people were set to integrate economic, political, cultural, and social life (Du Bois 1904, 1920, 1992). The federal government spearheaded this effort by declaring martial law in the Southern states and instituting the Freedmen’s Bureau to provide (im)material support to the emancipated and refugees (Du Bois 1904, 1920, 1992). However, federal troops were ineffective in suppressing the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) as Southern property appealed to Northern property against workers, ushering in an

...orgy of graft, dishonesty and theft, North and South, [that] was of the same pattern and involved the same sorts of people: those *scrambling* to share in the distribution of new goods and services which the new industry in the North and the restoration of the old agriculture in the South poured out, and those trying to get legal titles to the new forms of property and income which were arising. (Du Bois 1992: 586, emphasis added)

Property, the state, intellectuals, and others, instead of blaming war and poverty for postbellum corruption, scapegoated Black people as cover for the “consolidation of industrial control in a few hands” (Du Bois 1992: 595) as the panic of 1873 set in. Most importantly, this “counterrevolution of property” (Du Bois 1992: 580) was made possible not just by merging Northern and Southern property interests, but subsequently the interests of “the skilled labor guilds and capital,” who “to be sure...had bitter disputes and even open fighting, but they fought to share profit from labor and not to eliminate profit” (Du Bois 1992: 597; also see Du Bois 1915, 1920). To maintain these new profit shares, white workers received a “psychological wage” (Du Bois 1992: 700) to reassure

them that being considered white by others is better than not. Thus, while some previously not considered white, such as the Irish, found pathways to become white via racism, “the upward moving of white labor was betrayed into wars for profit based on color caste” (Du Bois 1992: 30).

Although the KKK would become the foot soldiers of this counter-revolution, “the overthrow of Reconstruction was in essence a revolution inspired by property, and not a race war” (Du Bois 1992: 622). Instead, the counter-revolution was guided by a

...new philosophy which represented understanding between the planters and poor whites. This again was not an easy thing for the planters to swallow, but it was accompanied by deference to their social status, by eagerness on the part of the poor whites to check the demands of the Negroes by any means, and by willingness to do the dirty work of the revolution that was coming, with its blood and crass cruelties, its bitter words, upheaval and turmoil. (Du Bois 1992: 623)

Instead of a multi-racial working-class creating “real democracy in the United States that might easily have transformed the modern world” (Du Bois 1992: 602), a “capitalistic dictatorship” emerged to become “the most powerful in the world, and which backed the new industrial imperialism and degraded color labor the world over” (Du Bois 1992: 630). What was new about this imperialism was not racism, but rather whiteness as a dominant, worldwide category of geopolitical advantage over and at the expense of all others categorized as not white in the world-economy that unleashed the most intense wave of imperialism and colonization the world had ever seen (Du Bois 1915, 1920, 2007; compare with Wallerstein 2004; Arrighi 2010; Chase-Dunn and Lerro 2014).

Armed with a new philosophy of whiteness, the United States immediately began consolidating its territorial claims in “Indian country” (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014; Fenelon 2016) and then projected itself onto the world, starting with the *coup d'état* against the Hawaiian Queen Lili‘uokalani in 1893 and the invasions of Puerto Rico and the Philippines in 1898 and 1899, respectively. Wallerstein (2004: 56–57) explains this behavior as typical of semiperipheral states, which “spend their energy *running very fast*...to [at minimum] stay in their intermediate place but hoping...[to] rise on the ladder,” using their power “quite consciously to raise the status of their state as a producer, as an accumulator of capital, and as a military force” (emphasis added). Semi-peripheral states are also primary locus of innovation and social change in a world-system (Chase-Dunn and Lerro 2014). In the case of the United States, a major innovation was the synthesis of various Euro-American imperial claims to advantage into a coherent geopolitical category of white that can expand or contract depending on the needs or desires of capital. This new synthesis was so effective that other core and aspiring-core states—including Japan in World War II (Du Bois 2007)—“in a sudden, emotional conversion” (Du Bois 1920: 30) beheld their own “discovery of personal whiteness” (Du Bois 1920: 29) that spurred a “new imperialism” (Du Bois 1920: 48) by borrowing and modifying the general U.S. model to fight for their place within the worldwide axial division of labor and expand it into Africa and Asia (Du Bois 1920, 1992, 2007; also see Monteiro 2007; Bush 2009; Itzigsohn and Brown 2020).

In this way, and foreshadowing Samir Amin's (1980) thesis that workers in core states benefit (if only indirectly) from the super-exploitation of workers and peasants in peripheral areas, whiteness becomes a mechanism that helps the state create a national identity, manifesting most potently in the "armed national associations of labor and capital whose aim is the exploitation of the wealth of the world mainly outside the European circle of nations" (Du Bois 1915: 711). This is the heart of the problem, that is, the perpetual social crises, of the color-line: as whiteness becomes a more coherent geopolitical claim for advantage, the more whiteness engenders "jealousies...[suspicion,]...and bitter hatreds" (Du Bois 1915: 711) among those competing for white supremacy in the world-system. As Du Bois (1915: 711) explained:

The difficulties of this imperial movement are internal as well as external. Successful aggression in economic expansion calls for a close union between capital and labor at home. Now the rising demands of the white laborer, not simply for wages but for conditions of work and a voice in the conduct of industry, make industrial peace difficult. The workingmen have been appeased by all sorts of essays in state socialism, on the one hand, and on the other hand by public threats of competition by colored labor. By threatening to send English capital to China and Mexico, by threatening to hire Negro laborers in America, as well as by old-age pensions and accident insurance, we gain industrial peace at home at the mightier cost of war abroad.

For Du Bois (1915, 1920, 2007), then, World War I and World War II resulted in part from institutionalizing whiteness on the global level to create and enforce the axial division of labor between the "whiter" and "darker nations" (Du Bois 1920: 4). In this way, we can see that whiteness *cycles* as different global articulations of ideal whiteness—for example, the English gentlemen, the Aryan youth, the American WASP—rise and fall with the power, privilege, and protection they garnish in political economy. This is because whiteness relies on violence for group formation, and as such is inherently "unstable and forever contested" at all social levels as individuals and groups claim or "borrow" (Böröcz 2021: 1126, 1125) whiteness by competing with (white and not white) others for their place on the advantageous side of the color-line (Du Bois 1904, 1915, 1920, 1992, 2007; also see Monteiro 2007; Bush 2009; Itzigsohn and Brown 2020). What Du Bois provides world-systems analysis, then, is a demonstration of the centrality of whiteness for explaining not just the rise of the United States as hegemon, but the development and future of the NWO. Whiteness helped consolidate power and capital in the United States, western Europe, and other places around the world, as capitalism transformed empires and their colonies into nation-states in the aftermath of World War II.

I argue that published Nimiipuu/Nez Perce observations (see *Appendix A*) of white people corroborates Du Bois's thesis of whiteness as developing from the state and capital consolidating diverse and competing imperial-capitalist claims and methods to achieve geopolitical advantage. Furthermore, the Nimiipuu/Nez Perce story expands Du Bois's analysis by revealing positive feedback loops that cycle from (1.) a *rush* (for gold, souls, land, etc.) that induces a state of (2.) *anomie* (i.e., normlessness via violence, isolation, boom/bust, etc.) that creates (3.) *crises* of social and ecological relationships (built on reciprocity, trust, symbiosis, etc.). At the point of crisis,

whiteness is recalibrated as a legitimate source of advantage in the capitalist world-system, setting off new rushes to solve problems created or compounded by whiteness. In the crisis stage, groups looking to secure more benefits than the mere psychological wage of whiteness find more such opportunities. Likewise, crises sometimes present opportunities for oppressed not-white groups, including Indigenous or Native people, to reassert their political, economic, and cultural influence (e.g., land reclamation), undermining white claims to superiority and progress while helping people imagine and build worlds beyond the NWO. In other words, oppressed not-white groups can and do take advantage of openings presented to them by the cracks and fissures in power structures—often in vain (Fuentes 2016) but sometimes in ways that have levied significant challenges to national and global abuses of white capitalist power (Hall and Fenelon 2009; Estes 2019; Norgaard 2019).

I next outline a Nimiipuu/Nez Perce–Du Bois method of world-systems analysis. Subsequently, I describe the rushed development and institutionalization of whiteness in Nez Perce country, creating anomie for the Nez Perce and their new neighbors and culminating in various crises. I briefly summarize the most famous crises, such as the Nez Perce War of 1877; then, I focus on one crisis that allowed the Nez Perce to reassert some control over their homeland: a social movement “fish-in” was staged at Rapid River, Idaho between 1979 and 1981, which led to the Tribe taking charge of different fish management responsibilities at various salmon and steelhead fisheries in their ancestral homeland. I then summarize the findings and comment on the utility of world-systems analysis for scholars studying whiteness in other intellectual traditions, concluding with a brief exploration of these findings’ implications for understanding, fighting, and building social worlds beyond the latest crises of the NWO, such as climate change, the resurgence of fascism, naked imperialism, and the threat of nuclear holocaust.

Data and Methods

This analysis relies on an archive of publications ($n = 120$) from 1805 to 2020 written by, for, or with the Nimiipuu/Nez Perce about their social worlds before and since the institutionalization of whiteness in their homeland. I collected these publications and compiled the archive (see *Appendix A*). This archive enables abductive coding and narrative reconstruction to extend social theories by comparing how different groups understand social worlds of the past, present, and future (Altheide 1987; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Charmaz 2004; Timmermans and Tavory 2012; Hunter 2013). This required triangulating distinct data, such as oral and written history, archaeology, ethnography, geology, biography, and journalism. Within-group or “group-centric” (Chase-Dunn and Mann 1998: 47) comparisons helped clarify what life was like for the Nimiipuu/Nez Perce before and since whiteness. Between-group comparisons helped sketch differences and similarities in how whiteness is understood. I made such comparisons explicit in the text below, distinguishing between data sources by placing *Appendix A* citations within {curly brackets}. Some citations in

Appendix A credit non-Nez Perce author(s) only, but they were written in close collaboration¹ with the Tribe or tribal members and contain original information directly from tribal members that is otherwise unavailable or difficult to access.

Three significant biases appear in *Appendix A*'s data. First, some of the most popular Nez Perce authors were elected members of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee (NPTEC), that is, the Tribal government, such as Allen Slickpoo, Sr. and Allen Pinkham, Sr. Indeed, Archie Phinney (1904–1949), the most famous twentieth century Nez Perce intellectual, spearheaded the writing of the NPTEC constitution (published in 1948). Moreover, while the Tribe is a major employer on and around their reservation (Idaho Department of Labor 2020), most Nez Perces are not employees or elected officials of NPTEC. Second, roughly one-third of *Appendix A* publications are solo-authored by women or co-authored with a woman as first author, and James's {1996} ethnography is the only major work to focus exclusively on Nimiipuu/Nez Perce women. Third, *Appendix A* is incomplete because whiteness continues to "fracture" (Fuentes 2016) Nimiipuu/Nez Perce history. Nevertheless, the data are robust because they range in worldview and were penned by authors as young as schoolchildren and as old as elders, who lived at different times and places, practiced (or not) different religions, and had diverse educational backgrounds spanning from no formal Western schooling to doctoral training.

I began creating this archive² in the summer of 2017 after receiving NPTEC's permission³ to research their reservation. Although the reservation has an archive at the Nez Perce National Historical Park that is managed through a partnership between the U.S. Forest Service and the Tribe, only a handful of Nimiipuu/Nez Perce documents are stored among hundreds by white people about the Nimiipuu/Nez Perce. Relying on my friends and family in the area,⁴ I began to collect publications by Nimiipuu/Nez Perce authors. Compiling this archive while writing research memos (Charmaz 2004) enabled the ease of access necessary for "reflexive" (Altheide 1987) and "abductive" (Timmermans and Tavory 2012) coding schemes of multiple iterations between diverse contexts, data, and theories. I categorized data by theme, *rush*, *anomie*, and *crisis*, using Microsoft Excel and wrote additional memos reflecting on my observations and theoretical

¹ The Walla Walla Treaty Council of 1855, which was a military negotiation and not a collaboration, is the one exception because its meeting minutes provide original dialogue between Nez Perce leaders and their neighbors.

² The 120 Nimiipuu/Nez Perce sources compiled through this research constitutes one of the only known lists of known Nez Perce publications, and it is my hope that publishing the list in full will give the Nez Perce more access to their own literature. The archives on and near the Reservation do not house very many (if any) Nez Perce publications, so *Appendix A* can be treated as an archive itself. In-text citations from these 120 Nimiipuu/Nez Perce sources can be found in *Appendix A* while works cited by non-Nimiipuu/Nez Perce sources can be found in the traditional References section. Any errors or omissions in *Appendix A* are the full responsibility of the author.

³ Permission from NPTEC is *not* an endorsement of my research

⁴ My mom moved the family from Boise, Idaho, to the Nez Perce Reservation for work. Like most other residents of the Reservation (Idaho Department of Labor 2020), my blood family and I are phenotypically white and not Nez Perce. However, my brother, dad, and I became quite close with several Nez Perce families. I was therefore able to draw on my community connections to begin identifying Nez Perce authors and their works. I lived on the Reservation from 1997–2006, attending grades 4–12 in Kamiah, Idaho.

framework. These themes emerged from *Appendix A* and the works of Du Bois. However, because many printed Nimiipuu/Nez Perce observations and insights about whiteness emerge from their oral historical and mythological traditions, a note on validity is required.

The Nimiipuu/Nez Perce have a long history of observing and adapting to change in their homeland, claiming it stretches back to “time immemorial,” or a time beyond memory. While the exact dates of most observations may be lost, oral histories retain much of how people anticipated, interpreted, and adapted (or not) to changes in their homeland. Strict rules help ensure the accuracy of oral history, whereby a minimum of three people—one to tell, one to confirm, and one to witness—must collaborate for a story to become history. As Lucullus Virgil McWhorter (1860–1944) once described:

In tribal gatherings where deeds of personal prowess are recited, it is the custom of anyone who may be acquainted with the facts to correct innocent mistakes or false statements on the part of the narrator ... and oral histories are kept nearer the facts. ... [T]he writer has known aged warriors of creditable reputations for veracity to be deterred from recounting their early exploits simply because of a dearth of corroborative testimony {McWhorter 1940: 193n13}.

This enables people to describe “quite accurately” places or events they have not directly experienced {Space 1970: 2}. In other words, the Nimiipuu/Nez Perce have a living culture of information triangulation and preservation that facilitates corroboration with other data points. Therefore, I treat Nimiipuu/Nez Perce oral histories about white people as veracious ethnographic observations that can be triangulated with Western ethnography, history, archaeology, and other sources {Walker 1966}.

Likewise, scholars consider Nimiipuu/Nez Perce oral traditions (e.g., myths, folklore) “quite conservative” (Walker & Matthews 1998: 3), as these ancient stories persist “practically intact” {Phinney 1969: VII} and usually without reference to Euro-American materials or culture. Nimiipuu/Nez Perce oral history and traditions set the foundation for Nimiipuu/Nez Perce written history, accumulating since at least 1878, when Duncan McDonald (1849–1937) wrote a series of newspaper editorials in *The New North-West* (Deer Lodge, MT) about the Nez Perce view of the 1877 War and its immediate aftermath {McDonald 2016}. These oral traditions, however conservative, stress “adaptation” to dramatic and subtle changes in specific and abstract places as a primary “theme” {Pinkham & Evans 2013: 11}. This focus is one reason Nimiipuu/Nez Perce publications tend to draw inspiration from their oral traditions, especially when developing metaphors as heuristic devices that support historical interpretation, contemporary problem solving, and contemplations of better futures beyond the NWO {e.g., Landeen and Pinkham 1999}. This process enables an expansion of world-systems analysis by elaborating whiteness as a cyclical cycle of violence in the capitalist world-system that, while incredibly dangerous, may also present opportunities for humans to create social worlds beyond whiteness and capitalism.

Findings

Musings from an Ancient Cannibal

An ancient Nimiipuu story tells of a brother, the eldest of five, who was a hunter and a husband, transformed into a cannibal monster after accidentally eating his own blood⁵ {Slickpoo 1972; Aoki and Walker 1989} (Walker and Matthews 1998). The cannibal, *pá·pspałó·*, was not evil. However, he was ravenous and, thus, *dangerous*, devouring his flesh to the bone—leaving only an “ugly” skeleton and beating heart—and then murdering and eating three of his four younger brothers.⁶ His youngest brother, however, managed to escape the cannibal’s clutches by incorporating ancestral knowledge⁷ and working together with *all* the surviving people to set a trap and kill the cannibal, tripping him off a cliff somewhere between Kooskia and Kamiah, Idaho.⁸

This and other monster stories from the Nimiipuu/Nez Perce oral tradition emphasize the importance of maintaining deliberation, composure, and responsibility to the community. They warn of people rushing or becoming agitated when things do not go to plan, placing themselves over the community. The cannibal’s appetite is a metaphor for undesirable behaviors (e.g., murder, theft, waste) and emotions (e.g., greed, jealousy, suspicion) that cause people to disregard social norms, spurring broader systemic problems (e.g., war, slavery, resource depletion) that destroy or obstruct what groups need to thrive. These themes help contextualize the milieu structuring what the Nimiipuu did and did not notice during their early encounters with white people.

Notably, the Nimiipuu/Nez Perce do not call white people “cannibals” or explicitly refer to monster stories when discussing their interactions with white people. However, this monster story directly warns of undesirable social behaviors that parallel Nimiipuu observations of whiteness. While some monsters in the Nimiipuu tradition are evil, this one is merely dangerous. This distinction is crucial: Evil signals something innate and unchangeable, while danger highlights the importance of a coherent and flexible social structure to overcome crises and adapt to social change. Thus, the monsters’ behaviors are not metaphors for people but social structures that create and restrict human thoughts and behaviors.

⁵ The series of events suggests this accident resulted at least partially from *haste*. The eldest brother had fatally shot a deer. However, it was not a clean shot, and he chased the deer deep into the woods. Upon finding the deer dead, the man began field dressing. Then, he cut his hand, smeared his blood onto the venison, cut some of the bloodied meat from the animal, and consumed his blood accidentally.

⁶ The brothers *rushed* to find the eldest one by one. However, *pá·pspałó·* had created a lasso from his intestines, and when the brothers found his cave, *pá·pspałó·* lassoed them around the ankles and ate them alive, piling their bones in a dank corner and waiting for the next individual to find his lair.

⁷ The youngest brother also rushed to find the eldest, but he stepped on and broke Meadowlark’s leg. The youngest brother felt terrible and offered to fix Meadowlark’s leg in exchange for information about his brother. Meadowlark agreed, but she told him his brother was a transformed cannibal and must be killed, explaining how to do so. The youngest brother then planned his next moves, including strapping sharp flint to his legs to cut the lasso and drive *pá·pspałó·* from the cave.

⁸ The brothers belonged to a semi-permanent camp, and when the youngest escaped, *pá·pspałó·* chased him back to the settlement. However, the youngest had enough time to warn the others, including Coyote, who forced *pá·pspałó·* down a path over a steep ledge.

I now merge those metaphors with the analytical themes of *rush*, *anomie*, and *crisis* to reconstruct a comparative historical narrative, referring periodically to the ancient cannibal story to demonstrate how pursuing advantage over and from others compels violence that can cycle out of control. I describe the same series of historical processes in Nez Perce country three times, per each theme, demonstrating the development of a series of cycles operating at different social levels and with generalized patterns (Figure 1). In the section on crises, to conserve space, I briefly summarize the most well-known crises consolidated white advantage in Nez Perce country, and then elaborating on a single crisis at Rapid River, Idaho, to demonstrate how whiteness, like capitalism, can help create conditions that may lead to its eventual downfall.

The Rush of Whiteness

The first Nimiipuu collective encounter with white people involved an ill-equipped, half-starved U.S. Army reconnaissance team, the so-called Corps of Discovery, under the direction of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, in the summer of 1805 and the spring of 1806.⁹ Nimiipuu prophets had long foreseen the arrival of new people from across the eastern ocean bringing change, both good and bad, so they were unsurprised to meet the newcomers {Slickpoo 1973; Pinkham and Evans 2013; Baird, Mallickan, and Swagerty 2015} (Walker 1969; Miller 1985; Ruby and Brown 1989). However, their smell, appearance, behavior, and attitude were surprising, especially the party's hurried disposition in an unfamiliar land. Pinkham and Evans {2013: 213, my emphasis} explain the first impression:

The old people declared the white men q'uyi'iy (*full of odor*), and said hipeqyíymne (*they were in a hurry*).

When the Americans came back to Clearwater country in the spring of 1806, they were still in a *hurry*...

[T]hey became *anxious* to leave and could not wait for the salmon's arrival [, signaling safer travel conditions in the Bitterroot Mountains]. Their *impatience* revealed an unwillingness to embrace the power or validity of salmon's mystery, and their disregard of knowledgeable tribal leaders ... They *might have listened* and made it easier on themselves and their horses.

The impatience of the convoy was palpable and seemed to influence their every decision; they even scarfed down the first meal the Nimiipuu fed them so quickly that many in the party fell ill. Nevertheless, the Nimiipuu, interested in acquiring good changes from new neighbors, such as

⁹ In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson commissioned Lewis and Clark to explore and chart a passage from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean in and beyond the northwest section of the newly acquired Louisiana Territory, placing a wedge between U.S., British, and Spanish imperial territory claims in western North America and enabling the development of trails for frontier settlement. The Haitian Revolution expelled the French from Haiti and sent the empire into a tailspin, forcing the French to pay off their debts and losses, in part, by selling their colonial claims in North America to the United States (Horne 2015). At this time, the United States was a small, vulnerable periphery of the capitalist world-system, protected from European metropolises by geography and business partnerships. However, the Louisiana Purchase presented an opportunity for upward mobility in the capitalist world-system of which the United States took full advantage.

guns and the Bible, assisted¹⁰ Lewis and Clark in preparing for the final leg of their journey to the Pacific Ocean via the Columbia River and back over the Bitterroot Mountains. The Nimiipuu, despite their reservations (discussed below), made an official alliance with Lewis and Clark, who promised a reliable trade partnership.

The trade alliance never materialized, but the Nimiipuu generally considered themselves allies of the United States, engaging in consensual sexual relations, marriage, fighting battles against common enemies, and providing logistical support {Space 1970; Slickpoo 1973; Pinkham 2006; Pinkham and Evans 2013; Baird et al. 2015} (Garth 1964; Miller 1985; Ruby and Brown 1989; Cannell 2010). Furthermore, a steady trickle¹¹ of white men (white women and children would not arrive at the Plateau until the 1830s and 1840s), mainly from the British empire and the prepubescent U.S. imperial state, as well as the Spanish and Russian empires, were now rushing into Nimiipuu country to explore, trade, and settle, especially with or for the North West Company {Slickpoo 1973; Pinkham and Evans 2013; Baird et al. 2015} (Wyeth 1899; Miller 1985; Cannell 2010). The Nimiipuu, whom the Francophone newcomers began calling Nez Perce,¹² had little interest in fur trapping but did frequent the newly established trading posts. The speed of imperial competition (1809–1846) was increasing between groups using whiteness as an excuse to lay claim to commercial property rights (e.g., fur territory). The pace of life was quickening, and each new group seemed more impatient than the last to achieve their goals.

After the fur trappers and mountain men, Presbyterian missionaries came, most notably Reverend Henry and Eliza Spalding to Lapwai in 1837 and Reverend Asa and Sarah Smith to Kamiah in 1839 (Drury 1958; Carlson 1998). Carlson (1998: 124) describes these and other missionary women as “rushed” into unwanted marriages with ill-tempered, ill-equipped men—themselves prone to rash decision-making—based on the unlikely chance of achieving economic and social upward mobility in a misogynistic society through whiteness by saving “heathen” souls. The Smiths found frontier life disagreeable and returned east within three years; the Spalding’s achieved a small following—still, the Nez Perce generally describe them as impatient, unwilling

¹⁰ For example, the Nimiipuu showed Lewis and Clark how to build canoes, provided guides, convinced their down-river allies not to attack the party, and watched over their horses for several months until their return {Space 1970; Slickpoo 1973; Swayne 2003; Pinkham 2006; Pinkham and Evans 2013; Baird et al. 2015} (Ambrose 1996; Gass 1997).

¹¹ There was also the ambiance of a rush, typically described in Western historiography with words such as adventurous, thrilling, fun, exciting, lively, dramatic, and dangerous. While the number of white people arriving at this time was relatively low compared to the coming decades, these individuals and groups *felt* the colonial rush, laying the groundwork for more intense waves.

¹² Nez Perce is from the French, meaning “pierced nose.” This, however, does not accurately describe the Nimiipuu—most of whom did not pierce their noses—a multi-ethnic, multi-dialect Sahaptin-language group of connected polities and semi-permanent settlements that systematically pooled and distributed resources from a common territorial claim of over 13 million acres. The Nimiipuu had recently incorporated horses into their society, generating a new form of equine wealth and enabling more effective uses of other, older forms of wealth (dogs, salmon) and trade items (e.g., processed camas roots). Horses also expanded opportunities for extending kinship, diplomacy, travel, warfare, and trading war captives {Slickpoo 1973; Landeen and Pinkham 1999; Nez Perce Tribe 2003; Pinkham and Evans 2013} (Joseph 1955; Ray 1981; Miller 1985; Ruby and Brown 1993; Stern 1998; Walker 1998).

to listen to the People, and primarily concerned with securing their social and economic advantage over the “Godless” fur trappers, mountain men, speculators, farmers, and Catholic missionaries {Slickpoo 1973, 1987; Nez Perce Tribe 2003; Conner and Lang 2006; Weaskus 2011; Pinkham and Evans 2013; Baird et al. 2015} (Cannell 2010; Carlson 1998; Drury 1958). Many Nez Percés believed that Christianity was an expanded version of their religion {Thomas 1970; Slickpoo 1973, 1987; James 1996; Nez Perce Tribe 2003; Pinkham and Evans 2013; Baird, et al. 2015} and thus were perhaps more patient with newcomers, given the chance to expand their powers through a religion with a book, than they otherwise would have been. In 1847, however, the fragile peace broke after the Cayuse, close allies of the Nez Perce, murdered the missionaries Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and 11 others in what became known as the “Whitman massacre” {McWhorter 1952; Slickpoo 1973; Pinkham and Evans 2013} (Drury 1958; Carlson 1998; Cannell 2010). The reasons for Cayuse aggression mattered little to the United States, which used the sensational story to accelerate the exploration and development of the Oregon Territory south of the 49th parallel, its new imperial territorial claim acquired from the British empire because of the Mexican–American War (1846–1848). The missions were abandoned, settlements were fortified, and the few remaining settlers, such as William Craig, a mountain man turned farmer and speculator who married a Nez Perce woman, used the opportunity to make property claims where the missions and fur trappers had failed to do so (Cannell 2010); by 1855, the U.S. federal government felt confident enough to engage in treaty negotiations with the Native groups of the Plateau at Walla Walla.

The meeting minutes of the Walla Walla Treaty Council {1855}—led by then Washington Territory Governor Issac Stevens, whose biography is subtitled *Young Man in a Hurry* (Richards 2016)—reveal that the Nez Perce and their old neighbors felt rushed to give up enormous chunks of their homelands and believed that such behavior reflected values unsuitable for Plateau ways of life that rely on diverse, reciprocal relationships. For example, the negotiations began without Chief Looking Glass, forcing him to hurry back from a hunting/war expedition on the Plains in dramatic fashion, declaring,

It was my children that spoke yesterday and now I come and hear them speak. I asked my children what was their *hurry*? They knew I was coming. Why did they *run and speak* till I came: that is the reason I marked it [the reservation lines] bigger.
{Walla Walla Treaty Council 1855: 65, my emphasis}

Looking Glass delayed the signing of the treaty and helped secure hunting, fishing, and gathering rights to “all usual and accustomed places” for Nez Percés {Landeem and Pinkham 1999; Nez Perce Tribe 2003} (Josephy 1997, 2007; Cannell 2010). The United States also promised that white people would not “trespass” in Nez Perce country. However, even if treaty negotiators were earnest in their claims, such promises could not be kept, especially after the discovery of gold on the reservation in 1860, sparking a gold rush and the development of boom-and-bust towns, and the breakout of the Civil War in 1861, which diverted federal resources away from enforcing rules on the frontier.

The situation was unraveling for the Nez Perce as more and more white people flooded their territory, which the federal government used as an excuse to force Chief Lawyer into signing away land that belonged to other Nez Perces (e.g., Chief Joseph) with a new “steal treaty” in 1863 {Slickpoo 1973; Landeen and Pinkham 1999; Nez Perce Tribe 2003} (Flanagan 2000; Josephy 2007; Cannell 2010), further reducing the federally recognized reservation to around 770,000 acres. This “opened” even more land for white miners, farmers, commercial fishermen, loggers, schoolteachers, doctors, and missionaries, all competing for their claim to propertied white advantage.

By 1877, the United States was done waiting. It launched a genocidal war that commanding officer General Oliver Otis Howard¹³ (1881: 15) compared to the wars of “civilization” against the “barbarous Celts...and Highlanders.” The Nez Perce War of 1877 is the most famous period of Nez Perce history {Reubens 1934; McWhorter 1940, 1952; Chief Joseph 1995; James 1996; Thompson 2000; McDonald 2016} (e.g., Haines 1955; Brown 1966; Josephy 1997, 2007; Greene 2000; West 2011; Sharfstein 2017), and the U.S. military still uses the conflict as a critical historical lesson on how *not* to fight counterinsurgency (Pfau 2006). The first battle at White Bird killed about one-third of U.S. forces and only one Nez Perce, and the second battle at Cottonwood saw 17 American soldiers and volunteers die compared with one dead and one injured Nez Perce, after which the United States began murdering women, children, and elders. At the war’s outset, the “non-treaty” Nez Perces numbered roughly 800, about 300 of whom were warriors; by the war’s end, 77 Nez Perces were dead, including 30 women and babies and Chief Looking Glass, while Chief White Bird escaped with over 200 people to Canada, and Chief Joseph was arrested and sent with 481 others to Oklahoma Indian Territory {McWhorter 1940; Bull 1987; Chief Joseph 1995; McDonald 2016} (Pearson 2008) under the direction of Gen. Sherman. There, 213 Nez Perces would die in exile, mostly from neglect, disease, and heartbreak. The 1877 War’s conclusion was accompanied by the full institutionalization of whiteness as the legitimate claim to the land. For example, the Dawes Act and allotment policies made it impossible for Nez Perces to own property unless they took a “Christian name” and used the land for farming or grazing and not heritage husbandry {Axtell and Aragon 1997} (Gay 1981; Tonkovich 2012). The United States forced Nez Perces to deny their culture and white settlers scrambled to acquire their “surplus” land plots.

After the war and allotment, larger and more devastating rushes gobbled up nearly all available resources, polluting the environment and creating a series of resource-dependent towns that would become increasingly vulnerable to national and global capitalistic forces {Phinney 2002} (Oliphant 1950; *The New York Times* 1996; Colombi 2005, 2012a, 2012b) (see also Force, Machlis, and Zhang 2000; Brown and Swanson 2003). For example, the Hanford Nuclear Site on the Columbia River was built in a rush during WWII as part of the Manhattan Project, followed

¹³ Du Bois admired Gen. O. O. Howard, who had marched with Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman to the sea, for supporting the Freedmen’s Bureau and Southern Reconstruction. Du Bois (1992: 223) called him a “good man...sympathetic and humane.” Shortly after Reconstruction, Howard and Sherman were sent west to expand the U.S. imperial state into “Indian country.”

by a series of Cold War dams to supply hydroelectric power, flood control, and recreation {Landeem and Pinkham 1999; Nez Perce Tribe 2003} (Colombi 2005). These helped propel the United States to the hegemonic core of the capitalist world-system.

These rushes created a state of anomie and, eventually, crisis for the Nez Perce and their neighbors. At the crisis stage, power must recalibrate, presenting formidable dangers while sometimes allowing one to take advantage of mistakes caused by rushing for white advantage.

Pan-Europeanism and the Norm of Anomie

The Nimiipuu were baffled by Lewis and Clark and the rest of the Corps. For example, the Nimiipuu commented “that some of the white men’s faces appeared upside down” {Pinkham and Evans 2013: 34} because they were bald and wore beards.¹⁴ Furthermore, it was unclear if the group was a war party, given the presence of weapons and a Black man, York, who was enslaved to Clark but appeared to the Nimiipuu as possibly “painted for war” {Pinkham and Evans 2013: 35}. However, the company of a Lemi Shoshone woman, Sacagawea and her child made this seem unlikely because the Nimiipuu did not know women and children travel with war parties {Pinkham and Evans 2013: 102}. This strange and unlikely companionship led the Nimiipuu to contemplate murdering the Corps of Discovery at least twice {Clark 1953d; Swayne 2003; Pinkham and Evans 2013}. However, they took time to explore their curiosity and, in the end, decided to help the party because of the testimony of an older woman, Watkuweis, who was once rescued by and married to a white man. But being patient with the Corps was not easy, for they came across as “single minded and a little irritable” {Pinkham and Evans 2013: 49} and perhaps a bit “anxious” {Pinkham and Evans 2013: 51} to accomplish their goals—whether reaching a destination or eating a meal—as fast as possible (Ambrose 1996). The Americans were also building a reputation for being “dog-eaters, like the Nimiipuu’s enemies...[whose] hand-shaking business showed a lack of good manners and a trifling with adults as if they were children...[and who would] sometimes rudely [enter] one’s lodge with no announcement” {Pinkham and Evans 2013: 102}. But while the Corps could be off-putting, they also demonstrated gratitude and friendship; thus, the Nimiipuu decided to build an alliance with the United States.

Conversely, the next wave of white explorers, fur trappers, and others comprised people from various competing imperial states and social strata, each with distinct expectations, goals, methods, tools, and languages—all used to lay white claim to the resources of the Pacific Northwest {Slickpoo 1973; Pinkham and Evans 2013; Baird, et al. 2015} (Wyeth 1899; Pearsall 1949; Patroll 1951; Carlson 1998; Cannell 2010). For example, early explorers and trappers were known for marrying Native women and fathering children to establish themselves favorably, only to leave for some adventure and often never return (Cannell 2010). Other practices considered inconsistent

¹⁴ Epidemics of foreign disease had upended the Southern Plateau’s social worlds just a century prior, killing approximately half of the Native population (Boyd and Gregory 2007). Thus, although the Nimiipuu had recently expanded their wealth via horses, it was with a much smaller population—one coping with significant losses and readjusting to a faster-paced political economy {Slickpoo 1973; Pinkham and Evans 2013; Baird, et al. 2015} (Walker 1969, 1998; Miller 1985).

with the Nimiipuu cosmic order included resource exploitation beyond natural limits, drinking too quickly and too much, lying, cheating, theft, and murder.

When the missionaries later arrived in Nez Perce country, they too found the behavior of frontiersmen offensive, competing with them for Native groups' attention and accommodation {McWhorter 1952; Slickpoo 1973, 1987; Baird, et al. 2015} (Drury 1958; Carlson 1998; Josephy 2007; Cannell 2010). The Nez Perce, given some members' interest in Christianity and the cultural practice of freedom of religion, gave the missionaries a chance. However, the missionaries' strict rules, including corporal punishment against adults for petty offenses, and their demand for hard manual labor with little in return, save God's grace, often opposed Nez Perce lifeways and caused much confusion. As Weaskus {2011: 12–13} explains, for example, "Hell, as a concept, was at first untranslatable, especially for the root-digging women," who found only "cold and moist soil" as they dug for roots. Rev. Spalding further discredited himself by insisting that Hell was below the roots, for

...only a heretic would disrespect the earth by digging further than was necessary. The women [thus] argued against the underground world of fire, and Reverend Spaulding was stripped of his ethos until a further understanding of the English language was established. {Weaskus 2011: 13}

Nevertheless, a greater understanding of English also signaled that power had concentrated further around a national state that traced its roots back to Europe for a united cause: control over Native land, particularly if it contained valuable resources.

The situation worsened after the Whitman massacre—itsself a result of anomie set off by an outbreak of smallpox and the failure of self-proclaimed healer Marcus Whitman to cure any of the Cayuse, who believed the Whitmans were out to kill them and steal their land {McWhorter 1952} (Miller 1985; Carlson 1998; Josephy 2007; Cannell 2010). The 1855 treaty negotiations at Walla Walla and elsewhere increased anomie for Native and white groups alike, as did the gold rushes and re-drawing of reservation boundaries during the 1860s, because now the United States was confident enough to engage in treaty-making, arrogant enough to tell Indigenous groups where and how to live, and sacrificial enough to send its citizens into a situation with little to no protection or support.

In 1877, the United States disregarded all norms of human conduct as the Army and various volunteer groups—who had become frustrated by superior Nez Perce horsemanship and knowledge of the terrain that, at first, foiled attacks, enabled escapes, and caused severe casualties—began engaging total war {McWhorter 1940, 1952; Slickpoo 1973; McDonald 2016} (Howard 1881; Josephy 2007; West 2011). Yellow Wolf (1855–1935). A warrior of the 1877 War who survived exile in Oklahoma explains in a graphic recollection:

[W]e came back from driving the soldiers to the hill to find part of our village in ruins. This tepee here was standing and silent. Inside we found the two women lying in their blankets dead. Both had been shot. The mother had her newborn baby in her arms. Its head was smashed, as by a gun breech or boot heel. The mother had

two other children, both killed, in another tepee. Some soldiers *acted with crazy minds*. {McWhorter 1940: 132, quoting Yellow Wolf, emphasis added}

Yellow Wolf's description of "crazy minds" can be read as a critique of a social structure that enables upward mobility via violence toward "others," much like Du Bois described the solidification of whiteness during Southern Reconstruction that was projected into the Western frontier.

The U.S. citizenry was likewise shocked and disgusted by reports of brutal violence by the military and volunteers (e.g., *The New York Times* 1877), and soon, missionaries were sent to ease the minds of eastern elites {Slickpoo 1973, 1987; Sappington and Carley 1995; James 1996} (Gay 1981; Coleman 1987; Tonkovich 2012). Nevertheless, the post-war reconstruction efforts of missionization and industrialization produced their own cacophony. Chief Joseph {1995: 41} foreshadowed this in 1879 when, as a political prisoner, he negotiated a visit to Washington, DC, to plead that Congress grant his people's return home from exile, commenting that he could not "understand why so many chiefs are allowed to talk so many different things.... Good words do not last long until they amount to something. Words do not pay for my dead people."

The 1877 War had liquidated formal Nez Perce political leadership (at least until 1948) and most of what Nez Percés needed to live. The United States began consuming everything it could, unleashing even more settlers to lay claim to "surplus" Nez Perce lands and resources through allotment {Slickpoo 1973, 1987; Sappington and Carley 1995; James 1996} (Gay 1981; Tonkovich 2012). This left the Nez Perce with ownership of approximately 12 percent of the land within their reservation boundaries {Nez Perce Tribe 2020}, leaving barely enough for some to continue practicing heritage lifeways {Slickpoo 1973; James 1996; Landeen and Pinkham 1999} and others to become "quasi-landlords" {Phinney 2002: 5–6} by leasing out their allotment plots to white farmers, preventing full "proletarianization" {Phinney 2002: 10–11}. Even so, where allotment and business failed, eminent domain would seize more land and water, such as for the construction of dams that inundated homelands and destroyed ecosystems, further hindering the Nez Perce from practicing traditional lifeways {Landeen and Pinkham 1999; Scheuerman and Trafzer 2015} (Colombi 2005). Nevertheless, dam construction, combined with pollution and overuse from capitalistic extractive industries, would soon prevent white residents, and the tourists they increasingly relied on, from enjoying fully what Nez Perce country has to offer, including salmon fishing {Landeen and Pinkham 1999; Nez Perce Tribe 2003} (Colombi 2005, 2012a, 2012b). This contradiction escalated into a fight about fishing rights at Rapid River, Idaho, spiraling into a crisis of whiteness as a legitimate claim to land and resources. The following section examines this crisis, sometimes called the Second Nez Perce War (1979–1981), showing how the Nez Perce utilized the situation to reassert themselves as leading actors in the political economy of their ancestral landbase.

Dangers and Opportunities in White Crises

Each historical event and process described above created social crises, some larger than others, prompting the recalibration of whiteness as a legitimate source of advantage in Nez Perce country. In most cases, the state recalibrated and foreclosed opportunities to openly resist power, as was the case for the 1855 Walla Walla Treaty negotiations. Although explorers, missionaries, and other settlers failed to consolidate power over Native groups—and among themselves—the U.S. government clarified generalized property ownership rights by granting prominence to racial categorization (i.e., white/not-white) over occupation (e.g., missionary, trapper, farmer). Still, a complete redefinition of whiteness, as occurred in the Civil War and its immediate aftermath (Du Bois 1992), and redirection of military resources would be necessary to fully institutionalize racial capitalism on the Plateau, as occurred after the 1877 War. However, even with their population devastated,¹⁵ and despite every forced assimilation effort {Thomas 1970; Slickpoo 1973, 1987; James 1996} (Ackerman 1971; Gay 1981; Coleman 1987), many Nez Percés were still finding ways to live as Nez Percés through heritage practices of hunting and fishing, storytelling, and family formation {Phinney 1969, 2002; Slickpoo 1972, 1973; James 1996; Landeen and Pinkham 1999; Cash Cash 2018} (Colombi 2005, 2012a, 2012b; Harper and Walker 2015).

Not only were the Nez Perce not going away, as Manifest Destiny prophesized, but by 1934, they rejected a canned constitution from the Indian Reorganization Act, instead drafting the NPTEC constitution by 1948 {Slickpoo 1973; Nez Perce Tribe 2003}. Moreover, they started taking advantage of the “self-determination” policies of the 1970s, regaining some political control within their reservation boundaries (e.g., citing the 1855 Treaty to encourage heritage fishing) {Nez Perce Tribe 2003: 65–69}. The Nez Perce population was slowly rebounding {Feathers 1970}, and more opportunities to practice culture openly increased their self-confidence {Sapatqayn 1991; James 1996; Axtell and Aragon 1997; Landeen and Pinkham 1999; Nez Perce Tribe 2003}. Simply because “Indians” were choosing to live like “Indians,” whiteness was clearly in crisis. Compounding matters, capitalism encouraged unhinged industrialization and extraction of natural resources and “outstripped nature’s capacity to deliver” {Pinkham 2019: 298}. The state, ever-hungry for more power, rushed into action—like pá·psaló from his cave—to maintain the legitimacy of whiteness, setting off the so-called Second Nez Perce War.

In 1979, the State of Idaho, under Governor John Evans’s (D) leadership, sought to restrict Tribes from harvesting “more fish” than white recreational anglers. The official reasoning was that salmon runs were declining due to drought and Idaho Tribes’ fishing practices, including the Nez Perce’s “unlimited hunting and fishing rights” (*The New York Times* 1979: 8A, ¶6). In exchange for limiting the harvest, the State of Idaho offered to “give elderly and poor members of the tribe 2,500 fish. These will be ‘jacks,’ or salmon not old enough to spawn, or ‘hatchery carcasses,’ fish that are killed to remove eggs” (*The New York Times* 1979: 8A, ¶11, quoting Mr. Scott). In this way, Idaho projected blame onto the wrong groups. Plateau dams were the primary culprit, as most

¹⁵ The Nez Perce population fell from 1,600 in 1877 to 1,400 in 1900 to 1,200 by 1937 {Phinney, 2002: 26; Slickpoo, 1973: 227}. The Nimiipuu population at the time of Lewis and Clark was between 7,000 and 10,000 {Pinkham and Evans 2013: 250}.

were built with no or inadequate fish ladders and raised average water temperatures; when combined with pollution, overfishing, habitat degradation, and wide variability in human resource use regimes across the world, this exacerbated the salmon's vulnerability {Landeem and Pinkham 1999; Nez Perce Tribe 2003} (Colombi 2005, 2012b; Harper and Walker 2015).

This mattered little for white folks with growing resentment. For example, a resident of Grangeville, Idaho, a border town of the Nez Perce Reservation, wrote in a letter to the editor titled "The Indian fishing":

If the Indians were not benefactors of the technology of the white man my sympathy would be with them. However, they drive automobiles, use gasoline, and [use] electric power generated by the hydro power plants. Consequently, being as how we live in the same country we should be given equal treatment. This means to be governed and abide by the same laws. (Lewiston *Morning Tribune* 1980c)

Such support emboldened the State of Idaho to impose its fishing laws on the Nez Perce, and while NPTEC initially agreed to suspend tribal fishing, some Nez Perces at Rapid River, just outside Riggins, ID, refused to listen to their Tribe, much less to Idaho—thus, the "Fishermen's Committee" {Landeem and Pinkham 1999: 118; Nez Perce Tribe 2003: 80} was born.¹⁶ One man attended the initial Rapid River fishing ban donning a gas mask in anticipation of police violence (*Lewiston Morning Tribune* 1979). The Nez Perce fish-in and a crisis of whiteness had commenced.

Idaho did not anticipate Nez Perce resistance, and the situation intensified as SWAT teams arrested protesters for exercising their fishing rights {Landeem and Pinkham 1999; Nez Perce Tribe 2003} (*Lewiston Morning Tribune* 1979–1980). Both sides allegedly positioned snipers on the other (Woodard 2005). The state, however, became frustrated and began acting in self-defeating ways, such as arresting a seven-year-old boy {Landeem and Pinkham 1999: 116–7} (*Lewiston Morning Tribune* 1980b). After three years, Idaho had had enough and lumped all 33 court cases into one, but the Nez Perce argued that the 1855 Treaty and the Boldt Decision of 1974 granted them precedence.¹⁷ District Court Judge Reinhardt of Grangeville found that Idaho had violated the 1855 Treaty, dismissed the case, and ordered Idaho to work with the Tribe "to determine how that fishery [at Rapid River] should be managed" {Nez Perce Tribe 2003: 120}. After Reinhardt's

¹⁶ This recalls the 1877 War, in which the "non-treaty" Nez Perces—those who refused to sign the 1863 treaty—had to fight for their lives, while most Nez Perces were already on the reservation {McWhorter 1940, 1952; Slickpoo 1973} (Joseph 2007). Those staging the fish-in were the few willing to risk everything. Both events reflect a history of semi-autonomous groups independently deciding how best to manage and maintain their territorial claims and uphold their individual and collective responsibilities {Baird, et al. 2015; Landeem and Pinkham 1999}. In 1980, four central figures of the "Fishermen's Committee," A. K. Scott, Brad Picard, Gordon Higheagle, and Rev. Walter L. Moffett, were elected to NPTEC, replacing those who had bent to Idaho's demands (*Lewiston Morning Tribune* 1980a).

¹⁷ In the 1950s, Washington state attempted to prevent Tribes from exercising ancestral fishing rights in what became known as the "fish wars" (Reyes 2016). Members of the Nisqually, Puyallup, and other Tribes staged a series of fish-ins that forced *United States v. Washington* (1974) to uphold the treaties' supremacy, saying that "the Indians were entitled to half of the harvestable salmon running through their traditional waters" (Reyes 2016: 120–1).

decision and a successful lawsuit against the Bonneville Power Administration in 1982 for damages to fish habitat by dam building {Gudgell, Moore, and Whiting 2006} (Colombi 2012a), the Nez Perce began acquiring co-management and management status of fisheries and acclimation sites in ancestral territory across Idaho, Oregon, and Washington, building a thriving tribal fishery and wildlife restoration program with approximately 200 employees and a \$20 million annual budget {Landeem and Pinkham 1999; Nez Perce Tribe 2003, 2020} (Colombi 2012a; Harper and Walker 2015).

The salmon have slowly begun returning to Nez Perce country. Still, the problems of dams, extractive industries, and climate change impede recovery efforts, and the Tribe halts salmon fishing altogether in some years {*Nimiipuu Tribal Tribune* 2019, 1(20): 3}. Nevertheless, Idaho now recognizes that tourism and recreation dollars for salmon and steelhead help sustain communities shifting away from dependence on extractive industries (Rodríguez 2011; Idaho Department of Labor 2020). Even Mike Simpson (R-ID 2nd District) recently advocated for dam removal on the Snake River to recover salmon and steelhead runs {*Nimiipuu Tribal Tribune* 2019, 1(4): 4}.

Conclusion

In this paper, I argue that Nimiipuu/Nez Perce observations of white people in Nez Perce country have identified some weak spots in the power structure of whiteness. For instance, whiteness induces an insatiable appetite for power and privilege in some, making whiteness inherently unstable and dangerous, exposing patterns from a time of rawness and vulnerability for U.S. colonial whiteness not typically explicit in standard Western historiography. The first collective Nimiipuu experiences with white people (i.e., Lewis and Clark and company) occurred as whiteness began to overcome the Christian Doctrine of Discovery as the primary justification for colonialism and slavery (Fenelon 2016; Horne 2020) and when the United States remained a backwater periphery in the global capitalist world-system—particularly until 1848 (Chase-Dunn and Lerro 2014). The Nez Perce story also demonstrates how the United States used whiteness as an accelerant for global upward mobility in the capitalist world-system, consolidating various economic and social interests into “white” property rights, as demonstrated by the 1855 Treaty negotiations, the “steal treaty” of 1863, and the War of 1877—experiences quickly internalized by the U.S. military (Pfau 2006). The United States then projected this template for white power consolidation in competition with other imperial states “scrambling” over the others’ world (Du Bois 1920, 1992, 2007).

Nimiipuu/Nez Perce publications enable a distinct reading of Du Bois, helping to elaborate how competition for racial advantage in the capitalist world-system builds temporary solidarity for dominant white groups against all “others.” Dominant white racial solidarity is temporary, being strictly conditional to the advantage it provides as different states and their owning classes rise and fall, prompting hasty attempts to grab, maintain, or retake power and constantly redefining what it means to be white. The perpetual redefinition of central sociopolitical categories in political

economy is culturally jarring and inherently dangerous as the state cannot recognize the “other” as fully human. Moreover, because there is no “self” without the “other” (Du Bois 1904, 1920), and since “others” consistently resist claims to white dominance, (aspiring) dominant racial groups often destroy or damage what they need to fulfill their claims to superiority (e.g., the ecosystem) out of resentment, jealousy, and suspicion, causing crises of white legitimacy. Such crises force a recalibration of whiteness, creating more dangers and, at times, opportunities for not-white groups to reassert their humanity. The case at Rapid River represented a local crisis where the state could not manage valuable salmon resources for tourism, recreation, and food, bound to global structures and processes that were beginning to chip away at the economic hegemony of the United States (Wallerstein 2004; Chase-Dunn and Lerro 2014). The Nez Perce became the primary scapegoat for the salmon’s decline. Nevertheless, through a series of fish-ins and media campaigns, they took advantage of this crisis, forcing the state to enable tribal management and co-management of fisheries and reasserting themselves as primary caretakers of the salmon and other flora and fauna in their ancestral homeland.

Nimiipuu/Nez Perce publications also present an opportunity for future research to make comparisons with the countless scattered archives from other not-white groups about social worlds before and since whiteness on the Plateau and elsewhere. Such comparisons could scrutinize the patterns of whiteness observed in this paper and illuminate additional strategies for building a world beyond the NWO by preventing white consolidation when local, regional, and global crises arise. The world-systems analysis of Du Bois would aid such comparisons that attempt to understand the dynamics of whiteness via qualitative data analysis of diverse groups producing and reproducing their history and legends under different conditions, at various times and places, and for myriad ends. Perhaps there is still time to slow and prevent the twenty-first century rush backward toward the global autosarcophagy of fascism and open imperial aggression as groups recalibrate whiteness in the context of climate change and the United States’ decline as a hegemonic power of the capitalist world-system. If so, humans may collectively create and discover more opportunities to imagine and develop social structures that do not rely on violence against the self and others—including the other lifeforms with whom we share this Earth.

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Disclosure Statement: Any conflicts of interest are reported in the acknowledgments section of the article’s text. Otherwise, authors have indicated that they have no conflict of interests upon submission of the article to the journal.

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Appendix A: Nimiipuu/Nez Perce Data Sources

** Signifies that the byline exclusively credits non-Nimiipuu/Nez Perce author(s). These publications are included because they were written in close collaboration with the Tribe or tribal members, and they include original quotes, stories, art, or other information directly from Nez Percés about their history, experience, knowledge, etc. {Curly brackets} in the text signify data sources from Appendix A. Any omission or incorrect inclusion is entirely the responsibility of the author.

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