



A Tale of Two Obits: Reading the Cold War Through the Obituaries of W. E. B. Du Bois and Chairman Mao Tse-tung

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This article analyzes the obituaries of two influential men—W. E. B. Du Bois and Mao Tse-tung—as historically structured artifacts of the Cold War era that reflect the limits of acceptable political activism in the racialized discursive space of that period.

If news is the first draft of history, then the process of history-making begins with the obituaries of the famous. During the Cold War era, it seemed axiomatic that the news reported in media in “the West,” home of capitalist democracies, was unbiased and objective. Both the West and “the East,” home of communist socialist states where vanguard parties represented the interests of the masses, agreed that what passed as “news” in the East was really “propaganda”—lies artfully constructed under the direction of the ruling Communist Party by an efficient, largely invisible bureaucracy. In Communist China, it was frequently believed (but seldom said aloud) that the only truth to be found in the *People’s Daily* was the date.

This article argues that the distinction between news and propaganda is not as clear as the Cold War framework assumed it to be. Seeing the Cold War as a discursive space, it analyzes political lessons that the media taught about appropriate political behavior and activism. Here the Cold War acts as a meaning- and value-producing machine that accentuates difference and hides similarities. Historically, the Cold War has been analyzed as two opposing political ideologies (i.e., liberal democratic states where institutionalized representative government imposed legal limits on state authority by guaranteeing specific rights, versus communist states run by political parties that represented working-class interests) and economic systems (i.e., markets versus state planning and distribution). Although their territorial spaces were structured as conflicting, their similarities allowed both sides to marshal and privilege brute military force as the only cement capable of holding together their respective monolithic, institutionalized political cultures.

The discursive workings of the Cold War are reflected in the narration of two lives: those of the scholar, human rights activist, and Pan-African internationalist William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868–

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1963), and the most influential Chinese leader of the 20th century, 1st Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China Mao Tse-tung (1893–1976).



Figure 1. W.E.B. Du Bois meeting with Mao Tse-tung in China, 1959.
(Unknown photographer. Special Collections: University Archives,
W. E. B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA.)

Published on August 29, 1963, an obituary of one of the most important scholars and activists of the 20th century, the great African American Black internationalist William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, read:

The famous Black American scholar and anti-colonialist warrior Dr. DuBois has died. . . . For ninety years, he devoted his life to liberating oppressed peoples, opposing imperialism [and] advancing mankind. . . . After World War II, the government of the United States pursued a domestic policy of reactionary oppression of black people; outside America, [it] pursued a policy of imperialist war and aggression. Both these [policies] increased the intensity of his opposition. He was for the liberation of black people and promoted the democratic freedoms of the American people. He cheered the cause of the liberation of the Chinese people and opposed [U.S.] imperialist aggression in Korea. . . . He was a heroic warrior for peace. (Translated from "The Death of Dr. DuBois," 1963)

This obituary appeared in a surprising place: the front page of the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the *People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*, 人民日报). The item's placement on the front page above the fold attested to the CPC's high regard and respect for Du Bois and signaled the importance attached to his passing. Why did the most important newspaper in Communist China publish such a glowing obituary for a man whose obituary, captioned "W. E. B. DuBois Dies in Ghana; Negro Leader and Author, 95: Philosopher Who Helped to Found N.A.A.C.P., Later Turned to Communism," appeared on page 27 in the "newspaper of record" of his own country, *The New York Times*?

We think of the obituary as a simple report on a specific death, but it is much more than a recitation of facts about a specific individual. Appearing in every newspaper since the 18th century, obituaries are not just news but have always assessed the factual data of individual lives within a larger historical context. According to Tim Bullamore, chief obituary writer for the *Daily Telegraph* in London, the obituary is

more than a notification of death: it is the first attempt at a posthumous biography; it is an assessment of a life lived: with all the advantages and disadvantages that this person was born with, and with all the opportunities and difficulties that life threw at them, what did they make of their . . . years. . . on this Earth? (Sullivan, (2012)

The obituaries of public figures differ only in degree. They also give meaning in the present to the events of the past. It is the meaning attributed to those facts, the context given them, and the judgments delivered upon them that make obituaries compelling, highlighting not just who is important but why he or she is important (Twain, 1902). "Public" individuals, whose lives are narrated as having a special sociopolitical significance beyond that of the average person's, become true social constructs, reflecting the dominant social outlook and political and economic value structures of their day. Because obituaries are important source material for historical and genealogical research, this construction of the socially significant individual freezes certain time-specific narratives, allowing readers to view the process of value reconstruction and communal reorientation. In this sense, obituaries are historically informative, like literature, and constitute a specific site for the creation of an "imagined community." Like literature and the newspaper, the circulation of obituaries facilitates a sense of national identity by popularizing and

promoting a specific reading of history. If news is the first draft of history, then the drafting process begins with the obituary.

The Cold War as a Discursive Space

The history of William Edward Burghardt Du Bois and the chairman of the Central Committee of the CPC, Mao Tse-tung, is captured in the photo that opens this article. A ghostly reminder of a 20th century of open, explicit political contestation of the global racial order, it memorializes the first face-to-face meeting of these two towering figures in Wuhan, China, in 1959. The meeting was contentious. The CPC leader's personal ideas about Black people were not remarkably different from those held by the majority of White Americans. Mao talked extensively about gradations of skin color. Du Bois was a light-skinned colored man whose coloring reflected the mixture of races that Euro-Americans sought to deny. So when Mao reportedly said that Du Bois "was no darker than I. Who could tell which one of us is darker?" he touched upon a specifically Western lie about race that hid the significance of gradations of skin color in America (Horne, 2010, p. 323). The meeting continued in this fashion. Mao's other remarks did not favorably impress Du Bois. Eventually, the meeting in Wuhan developed into a contentious debate on African American psychology and "the primacy of economics and psychology among evolving groups" (Lewis, 2009, p. 564). Yet despite this contentious initial discussion, Du Bois remained an adamant supporter of Chinese communism, Mao Tse-tung and Premier Zhou Enlai. This was the last of three trips he made to China. He noted that China was no "utopia . . . but the Chinese worker is happy," and that China and Africa shared a bond:

China is flesh of your flesh and blood of your blood. China is colored and knows to what a colored skin in this modern world subjects its owner. But China knows more, much more than this: she knows what to do about it. (Mullen, 2005, p. 199)

Meanwhile, the CPC remained adamant supporters of Du Bois. In 1959, he became the first American to observe China's National Day parade from the central rostrum in Tiananmen Square with Mao and other Chinese leaders. In response, Du Bois wrote a poem entitled "I Sing to China" (Horne, 2010, p. 325). Premier Zhou Enlai threw an official state reception and 91st birthday party for Du Bois, which was reported in the *People's Daily*. Despite the tenor of discussion at the meeting, Figure 1 shows the two men jovially at ease with one another. Yet a detailed reading of the lives of these two men must consider the global political forces of the Cold War, a period of heightened economic and military tensions that stopped short of full-scale, "hot" nuclear war.

Officially, the spatial, institutional, and ideological organizing framework of the period was constructed by the territorial partitioning of the Yalta Agreements of 1945. One part of this division was the West: member states of the North American Treaty Alliance and other allies of the states that defeated Germany, Italy, and Japan in World War II, Finland notably among them. The economic realities of these states, all of them capitalist, were more consistent than the democratic designations of their political systems. Because of their strategic security importance, the southern portions of Vietnam and Korea, as postcolonial holdings of France and Japan, were also considered to be under the umbrella of the West. These places had media that reported the truth, called news. The other, opposing part of this

division, designated as the East, reflected the territorial partitioning defined by the Soviets' Warsaw Pact Alliance. The East had no news, only propaganda.

In both the West and the East, discourses were created in political and academic institutions and circulated in media. Government authorities controlled—through either fiat or funding—what got researched, how it was researched, and who was rewarded for that research. This similarity was crucial to another common feature of these spatial entities: They had the same sense of the state's role in using this discursive knowledge to shape or transform both the internal and external national image. As a spatial knowledge effect, the Cold War reorganized the globe into two distinctive locations, and the discourses developed in each spatial region gave the appearance of geographical and political coherence.

The Cold War discourse also led to a spatialized semblance of identity coherence. "Race" in the West and "ethnicity" in the East became the axes of difference that mapped space. Knowledge about racial identity was a complicated part of both the internal and external national image of these spatial designations (White versus non-White, except for the Japanese under U.S. military occupation and the Soviet Union's non-White communist states and parties).

The official narrative that the West was the site of racial equality was repeated in Western academic research and media, thus naturalizing spatial territories of nonracist market capitalism and egalitarian liberal democracy. Because these sources also frequently repeated that legal limits on state authority guaranteed specific rights to all citizens, this narrative of legal racial equality demonstrated the advantages conveyed by White Euro-American supremacy. But this was not the reality of the lived experience of non-Whites in the West. In the United States, the postwar Servicemen's Readjustment Act, also known as the G.I. Bill, provided as many as 7.8 million White male veterans with money to finance college or university educations that increased their annual earnings by \$10,000–\$15,000, propelling them into the white-collar professional class in the expanding corporate sector (Herbold, 1994–1995), p. 104). They entered the middle class and, with federally subsidized mortgages, bought homes in the suburbs surrounding major American cities, traveling between home and office on federally subsidized highways or commuter railways.

Black returning veterans, however, did not have the same access to education through the G.I. Bill, and social hiring practices restricted their access to white-collar professional jobs. Although the Federal Housing Administration stopped subsidizing mortgages for homes with racially restrictive covenants in 1950, banks, realtors and White suburban homeowners joined forces to keep Blacks and other non-Whites from buying homes in their suburbs. Given that local taxes supported local schools, suburban Whites were able to pass on their privileges to their children, whereas Blacks could pass on only disadvantages.

Asian immigration had been ended prior to World War II. Despite this, in 1942 American citizens of Japanese descent had their property confiscated and were then incarcerated in internment camps. They received only limited reparations under the 1948 Evacuation Claims Act, about ten cents for every dollar of property taken. Yet the contradiction between the national image of domestic equality and the reality of racism was not officially acknowledged. In 1952, the McCarran-Walter Act allowed the immigration of

"friendly" Asians from China and the Philippines but initiated the practice of national origins quotas for immigration, whereby 70% of immigration slots were reserved for people from the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the United States' wartime enemy Germany.

Externally, this same dynamic was applied to U.S. relations with the Central and South American states that were discursively and problematically constructed as the West during the Cold War era. Although the language of "solidarity" between the West and Central and South American states was the official narrative used to describe relations, it pertained only to the Euro-American-looking (White) ruling elites, not the darker or Mestizo masses. The victories—electoral or otherwise—for illiberal nondemocratic White candidates who practiced predatory authoritarianism over darker-skinned masses with the support of death squads trained by the U.S. Army's School of the Americas were hidden from public view. Concern about the economic injustice of colonialism was replaced by the discourse of economic development. In 1954, when U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles introduced a draft of the Declaration of Solidarity for the Preservation of the Political Integrity of the American States against International Communist Intervention in Caracas at the 10th Organization of American States (OAS) meeting, the Central Intelligence Agency's covert operations to overthrow the legitimately elected government of President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman of Guatemala were well under way. Western media reports on U.S. financial and military support for various predatory authoritarian regimes, like the Somozas in Nicaragua or Augusto Pinochet Ugarte in Chile, used the language of a protective anticommunism.

The opposing discursive location, the East, was led by the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR). This spatial conception was undergirded by initial bilateral and later by multilateral trade agreements and commercial treaties with, and/or ideological allegiance to, several areas defined as multiethnic, non-White areas, such as the People's Republic of China (PRC), Mongolia, North Korea, and North Vietnam, as well as the states of the Warsaw Treaty Organization of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance (Warsaw Pact). The Warsaw Pact was narrated as a zone of solidarity composed of the eight Eastern European states initially under Soviet military occupation. Despite being both negatively (in the West) and positively (in the East) portrayed as a monolithic and unified politically discursive space, the Warsaw Pact states were clearly divided by conflict. In 1956, the noncommunist Hungarian government headed by the communist Imre Nagy attempted to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact. Soviet occupation ended this Hungarian Revolution, dismantling the government and executing Nagy in 1958.

Even the states that were ideologically linked to the USSR challenged Soviet notions of transracial, trans-ethnic solidarity. This multiethnic/multiracial space held many non-White communist political parties that had been created, funded, and steered by the Soviet Union, and the CPC was one of them. Not only did the CPC begin its rule with Soviet support, protection, and guidance, but its internal structure was modeled on the Leninist structure of the USSR. As Kirby (2006) has pointed out, the early leaders of the CPC absorbed the internationalist values of the worldwide communist/socialist revolution and agreed to a period of Soviet tutelage. Unlike the Warsaw Pact, their alliance therefore was not "bought at gunpoint." The establishment of the PRC in 1949 was viewed as a victory of a "fraternal partnership" stretching from Berlin to Canton. According to Kirby, this partnership was cemented through bilateral commerce treaties formalizing "most favored nation" trade relationships.

Yet, even the USSR's most ardent student, the CPC, chafed under Soviet intervention. New evidence from the archives of the Chinese Foreign Ministry demonstrates that well into early 1961, Beijing still hoped to save the relationship with Moscow. According to Dong Wang (2011), the CPC's internally widespread pessimism about the relationship was not acknowledged until the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) meeting in October, 1961. In 1962, Chairman Mao openly criticized Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev for his failure during the Cuban Missile Crisis. In June 1963, the PRC published *The Chinese Communist Party's Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement*, and the USSR responded with an "Open Letter of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union." These public critical exchanges were the final formal communication between the two communist parties. By 1964, the CPC had officially labeled the Soviet Union "revisionist" (*suxiu*, 苏修) because it sought to reestablish capitalism. And by the end of the 1960s, the CPC was aligning itself with the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America—that is, people of color (*youse renzhong*, 有色人种)—and against the similarly racialized urge to dominate others illustrated by U.S. imperialism and Soviet or Khrushchovian revisionism. The Sino-Soviet split (*zhongsu jiaoe*, 中苏交恶) reflected official policy and a racialized break.

National Image

Despite their nonmonolithic spatial realities, the East and the West shared a sense of the state's role in shaping and transforming both the internal and external national image, and media were central to this effort. In both the East and West, print media published racialized accounts of social, political, and economic struggles. In the East, these media narrated these struggles as justifiable or "righteous" (*zhengyi*, 正义) struggle ("Support the Righteous Struggle," 1963). Over the course of the last half of the 20th century, national allegories of identity and national character were increasingly reinscribed through the media, both textual (textbooks, books, journals, magazines) and visual (television, ads, billboards, postcards, stamps, and especially, the ubiquitous propaganda posters [*xuanchuanhua*, 宣传画]).

This does not mean that the creation of a specific image of the West—racially unmarked and offering equal opportunities to all to prosper—began with the Cold War. This effort, assigned to the Committee on Public Information at the end of World War I, was established by President Wilson's Executive Order 2594 of 1917. It aimed to use media, especially the new technology of the telegraph, to "spread the American gospel and [to] win 'world opinion' to the side of U.S. ideals" (Manela, 2007, p. 47). Wilson directed this message to both international and domestic audiences. It presented the United States as a racially White, unified, benevolent, disinterested country participating in this global war to establish goodwill toward all. This national image of the West generally, and the United States specifically, as benevolent, racially egalitarian, disinterested, and therefore objective intensified during the Cold War era. Real "news" reported it, erasing the impact of race on history. This became the definition of "objective" reporting.

This brings us back to the obituaries. Both Mao and Du Bois were participants in the international movement that articulated the state as a racialized construction. And both men attempted to challenge the narrow national discourse of racial identity, expanding the discourse beyond the nation-state to

achieve transracial recognition of equivalent international dominations. While Du Bois fought for equality for Black people in the United States, he also held an internationalist vision. As a member of the multiracial coalition that founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), he wrote the NAACP report entitled "An Appeal to the World: A Statement on the Denial of Human Rights to Minorities in the Case of Citizens of Negro Descent in the United States of America and an Appeal to the United Nations for Redress" which appealed to the United Nations to extend human rights protections to U.S. Blacks and others (Du Bois, 1947). In 1919 he organized the first of a series of Pan-African Congresses whose main task was to petition the Versailles Peace Conference that was negotiating the end of World War I to grant sovereign state status to African states, thereby ending colonialism on the African continent. Du Bois also supported Asian state sovereignty and admired Japan's post-Meiji economic and military growth, but once it was clear that Japan's "Asia for Asians" East Asian Co-Prosperity Zone was just a shield for exploitation and domination, Du Bois turned his attention to China.

As the "junior" partner in Sino-Soviet relations, the PRC began to articulate an image of itself as a "unified, multiethnic state" (*tongyi de duo minzu guojia*, 统一的多民族国家) and a racialized member of the global community of Third World states (*disan shijie*, 第三世界), which included other Asian states, Africa, and Latin America (*yafeila*, 亚非拉). The Ethnic Identification Project of 1954 created the ethnic groups that surrounded the Han majority of the newly independent Communist Party state as much as it revealed them. Simultaneously, Mao and the rest of the CPC leadership wanted to assert themselves on the world stage as a unique voice distinct from the Soviet Union. To that end, the CPC sent a major delegation to participate in the Asian-African Conference (万隆举行的亚非会议) held in April 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia. Delegations from 29 newly or nearly independent African and Asian states met to "to promote goodwill and unity . . . in order to explore and promote common benefits and to enhance friendship" ("Welcome to the Opening of the Asian-Afro Conference," 1955, p. 1). Participation at Bandung was so important to the CPC that it assigned two veteran revolutionaries of high standing—Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs Zhou Enlai (1898–1976), seconded by Vice Premier Chen Yi (1901–1972)—to head its delegation. Premier Zhou acknowledged the significance of Bandung in his opening speech, reported in the *People's Daily* on April 19:

This is the first time in world history that the peoples of the many states of Afro-Asia have met together. More than half the world's peoples live in the nations of the Afro-Asian region. These peoples have already created magnificent ancient cultures, a great contribution to humankind. ("The Asian-African Conference: Zhou Enlai's Speech on the 19th," 1955, p. 1)

The Soviet Union was not invited to participate in the Bandung Conference, which censured its occupation of Eastern Europe and Central Asia as colonialist.

Although only six African states—Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gold Coast (Ghana), Liberia, Libya, and Sudan—attended the Bandung Conference (and not all of them were officially independent states), the principles of anti-imperialism and anticolonialism became important media aspects of Chinese foreign policy. Mao's foreign policy began to enact the kind of transracial recognition of domination that Du Bois sought to cultivate. Both China and the newly or barely independent states of Africa had to struggle for

sovereignty that was recognized on the world stage. China saw Africans, Asians, and people from Latin America as united in political struggle (*yafeila*, 亚非拉), encircling the West as the Party had encircled its enemies during China's civil war. This narration depicted Africa, Asia, and Latin America as joined in struggle under the leadership of the CPC, the global defender of sovereignty, in opposition to the growing global discourse of development (*fazhan*, 发展) that was replacing the discourse of colonialism (*zhiminzhuyi*, 殖民主义):

In China, since the people have made themselves the masters of the country, we have been attempting to eliminate the long-term backwardness handed down to us as a semi-colonial society. . . . We believe . . . that sovereign and territorial rights of nations should be respected and should not be violated. Moreover, all national subsidiary ethnic peoples should enjoy the right of self-determination. They should not have to suffer persecution or be abused. Each ethnic group should enjoy fundamental human rights without distinction based on race or skin color, nor should they suffer any ill-treatment or discrimination. . . . Now we say that we oppose racial discrimination and demand basic human rights; we oppose colonialism and demand ethnic autonomy; we resolutely protect the right to complete national sovereignty and territorial sovereignty . . . these are the common demands of the newly awakened Asian-African nations and peoples. ("The Asian-African Conference: Zhou Enlai's Speech on the 19th," 1955, p. 1)

This narrative ultimately became the concept of the "Third World" (*disan shijie*, 第三世界) (Taylor, 2006, p. 168; Yee, 1983, pp. 239–241).

In the Cold War, a spatial, institutional, and ideological organizing discourse, media presented categories that structured the understanding of these two men's lived experience. Obituaries of both men (Du Bois in 1963; Mao in 1976) ran in *The New York Times* (*NYT*) and the *People's Daily*. *The New York Times* obituaries narrated liberal individualism and political activism as suspect; the *People's Daily* obituaries narrated political activism as an all-encompassing educational experience.

Du Bois, West and East: Champion or Curmudgeon?

The *NYT* Du Bois obituary, published on page 27 on August 28, 1963, was titled "W. E. B. DuBois Dies in Ghana; Negro Leader and Author, 95. Philosopher, Who Helped to Found N.A.A.C.P., Later Turned to Communism." Like most obituaries, it began with a contemporary overview of the subject's life work. In writing Du Bois' obituary, this meant a 1960s retroactive reevaluation of his theoretical contributions to the struggle for African-American equality, which the *NYT* truncated and called "[n]egro thought."

This obituary gave a sense of Du Bois as an outsider, unable to understand and get along with his own people, much less others. In a review of Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* 60 years earlier, on April 25, 1903—8 years after Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Compromise" speech and 7 years after the U.S. Supreme Court raised Jim Crowism ("separate but equal") from a regional to the national/federal standard in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (163 U.S. 537)—the *NYT* reviewer had written:

It is generally conceded that Booker T. Washington represents the best hope of the negro in America, and it is certain that of all the leaders of his people he has done the most for his fellows with the least friction with the whites who are most nearly concerned, those of the South. Here is another negro "educator," to use a current term, not brought up like Washington among the negros of the South and to the manner of the Southern negro born, but one who never saw a negro camp-meeting till he was grown to manhood and went among the people of his color as a teacher. . . . Naturally, [he] probably does not understand his own people in their natural state as does the other [Washington]. ("The Negro Question," 1903, p. 7)

Du Bois had written a critical review of Washington's accommodationist strategy as enunciated in Washington's *Up from Slavery*. The 1903 review in *The New York Times* mentioning Du Bois' "frequent [sic]" disagreements with "not only whites but with members of his own race," specifically cited this disagreement with Booker T. Washington. The *NYT* did not need to mention its own position on Booker T. Washington's ideas; nor did it or any other White mainstream newspapers even consider whether it was the strategy preferred by Black people. At the time, Washington's strategy was the one that Whites preferred Blacks to pursue. The *NYT* review reported Du Bois' disagreement as if it were a mere personal disagreement, as opposed to a radically different vision of racial uplift for African Americans. His personal disagreeableness continued in his work with the NAACP. The third sentence in his obituary stated that he had founded the NAACP "but . . . later broke with the organization under conditions of bitterness."

Overall, the review of *Souls* was a positive one, but by the time of his death, Du Bois had long ago moved beyond many of the ideas in this book. At the time the review was written, Du Bois was still attempting to promote racial equality through sociological exploration of the reality of Black lived experience, but he was also entering a process of radicalization that pushed him toward an internationalist, Pan-Africanist strategy for American Blacks. The obituary noted that he joined the Communist Party in 1961, at the age of 93—an act that was frowned on in the West at the height of the Cold War—and mentioned that his membership was an act of political protest against the Supreme Court's decision upholding the McCarran-Walter Act.

The next section was biographical. Describing Great Barrington, Massachusetts, where Du Bois grew up, the *NYT* noted that he was raised in a "relatively humble situation," emphasizing his distance from his own people. It does not contextualize racism's housing segregation. According to the *NYT*, this meant that Du Bois never experienced real racial discrimination until he attended Fisk University.

The biographical section chronicled Du Bois' education and his early career as an educator. In reporting on his position as editor of the NAACP journal *The Crisis*, it mentioned that he left the editorship positions several times over "disagreements." It cited his work during the formation of the United Nations, as well as his chairmanship of the Stockholm Peace Petition, "a movement characterized by the Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, as Communist-inspired." This charge was presented as unconnected to Du Bois' indictment by a U.S. federal grand jury for failure to register as a foreign agent.

Du Bois' "major" writings were listed, but his 1946 NAACP report "An Appeal to the World: A Statement on the Denial of Human Rights to Minorities in the Case of Citizens of Negro Descent in the United States of America and an Appeal to the United Nations for Redress" was not. This report exposed the hypocrisy of relegating human rights abuses to the East when the West was engaged in Jim Crow racial discrimination, segregation, and apartheid.

The *NYT* obituary noted his "extensive" travels in Communist China and the Soviet Union, as well as the birthday celebration Premier Zhou Enlai had arranged for him in Beijing. It also noted his acceptance of the Lenin Peace Prize in 1959.

The end of an obituary generally gives a sense of the individual's character and family life. Here, Du Bois was described as "reserved and somewhat formal." The *NYT* also mentioned his "immaculate" attire and pince-nez glasses.

This obituary gave a severely truncated account of Du Bois' lifelong work as a political activist for African American equality and depicted his internationalism as frequent trips abroad. Reflecting the liberal democratic discourse of the West, the narrative in the *NYT* portrayed Du Bois, "a Negro leader," as simply another individual in the liberal political meaning of the individual. His choices, and therefore his identity, were an individual's project, uninfluenced by local determinants. There was no history through which to make sense of his choices—after all, he had not experienced racial discrimination until he went south as an adult! The limitations Black men faced in the United States went unmentioned. Although Du Bois' choices were considered ideological and assessed negatively, the *NYT's* interpretation of them was not considered ideological, for these choices were not considered a reasonable reaction to local or American racism.

As mentioned above, Du Bois' obituary in the *People's Daily* appeared on the front page above the fold on August 29, 1963. It was titled "The Death of Dr. DuBois: Noted Black American Scholar and Anti-Imperialist Champion (*Duboyisi Boshi Shishi: Zhuming Meiguo Heiren Xuezhe he Fandi Zhanshi*, 杜波依斯博士逝世: 著名美国黑人学者和反帝战士)." Following the standard organization of the obituary, the article opened with a contemporary assessment of Du Bois' important accomplishments. In the East, where Mao and the CPC had begun to articulate a racialized foreign policy differentiating China from the Soviet bloc, Du Bois' important accomplishments were in line with such a policy. According to the *People's Daily*, he was a "warrior" (*zhanshi*, 战士) against imperialism. Du Bois' choices, like those of the CPC, were shaped by international conditions and transracial solidarities.

This obituary reported that Du Bois' activism in support of the Black people's liberation in the United States and Africa had begun in the 1910s, and that he was devoted (*xianshen*, 献身) to the liberation of peoples of oppressed nationalities (*minzu*, 民族), promoted the progress of humankind, and advanced world peace. Its biographical summary noted his birth in 1868 in Massachusetts and his education, especially his doctorate at Harvard University. Although it did not identify Du Bois as one of the founders of the NAACP (*Meiguo Quanguo Youserenzhong Xiejinhui*, 美国全国有色人种协进会), it noted his position as editor of *The Crisis* (*Weiji*, 危机).

The *People's Daily* obituary also noted Du Bois' Pan-African internationalism and the connection he saw between the oppression suffered by Black people in the United States and Africa alike. It discussed his participation in the Pan-African Conference (*Fanfei Huiyi*, 泛非会议) in London in 1900 and the first meeting of the Pan-African Congress, which Du Bois organized in Paris at the end of World War I. After World War II, the *People's Daily* reported, Du Bois suffered unreasonable persecution (*wuli pohai*, 无理迫害) at the hands of the U.S. government because of his domestic and international activism to promote global peace.

This obituary also discussed Du Bois' theoretical analysis of transracial identification and solidarity, which by 1963 had also become a part of the CPC foreign policy approach. It quoted Du Bois' call for a Pan-African awakening, in which he called on Africans and those of the African diaspora to "rise up" (*zhanqilai*, 站起来), using the same phrase Mao Tse-tung used, in his first speech to the newly liberated Chinese masses from the Tiananmen Gate, to declare the birth of a people's republic in China. The *People's Daily* obituary concluded by stating the CPC's position on transracial solidarity: that the people of "the dark continent (*heise dalu*, 黑色大陆) can depend on the friendship and sympathy of China" ("The Death of Dr. DuBois," 1963). Here, the discursive construction of the suffering and "liberation of the Chinese people" was equated with the Korean peoples' suffering and liberation from U.S. imperialism and the suffering of American Blacks, linking different races and different nationalities together through their similar oppressions and similar struggles. Yet the *People's Daily* did not explain how this discursive narrative of mutual recognition of similar experiences of oppression could lead to political solidarity and mutual support. It seemed that transnational, transracial solidarity was easier said than done.

The obituary ended by noting that Du Bois had lived in Ghana (Jiana, 加纳) since 1960, working on an encyclopedia of Africa.

Mao, East and West: Great Teacher or Deluded Romantic?

By the late 1970s, the Cold War dynamic had changed in important ways. For the West, the recognition that the communist East was not a monolithic political space assumed greater importance than communism's discursive continuities. Despite the intense anti-West rhetoric of China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the West saw the political rupture between the Soviet Union and Communist China as an opportunity to alter the Cold War dynamic. For China, the Cultural Revolution seemed to have exhausted the unifying utility of Mao Tse-tung Thought, with its continued utopian embrace of the purity of the ethics of command economies and state-centered distribution of goods and services. After a series of secret meetings that occurred during the Cultural Revolution, U.S. President Richard Nixon acknowledged CPC sovereignty and made a diplomatic trip to China in February, 1972, thereby ending 25 years of isolation from the West. At the end of the weeklong trip, the United States and China issued the Shanghai Communique, a foreign policy statement governing their bilateral relations. In January 1976, Premier Zhou Enlai died. Chairman Mao Tse-tung died in September, some eight months later.

The response to Mao Tse-tung's death was presented as unprecedented, deeply felt, and universal. Most people in (and outside of) China had experienced the late 19th and early 20th centuries as chaotic, politically, economically, and therefore socially. The utopianism of the CPC's brand of Marxism-Leninism had sometimes led to economic disasters and famine, as in the Great Leap Forward (*Dayuejin*,

大跃进, 1958–1961). Yet for most people living during the Cold War Maoist era, life had improved. As one blogger recently wrote,

the truth is that when Mao came to power the country was in tatters, and by the time he left there was a good basic infrastructure including things like railways and roads, and at least some industry had developed as well. (ChinaSmack.com, 2011, para. 1)

Mao died after midnight on Thursday, September 9, 1976. The *People's Daily* first informed its domestic readership of his death the next day, running a picture of Mao that took up the entire front page, headlined "The Great Leader and Teacher Chairman Mao Tse-tung Will Live Forever! (*Weida de Lingxiu he Daoshi Mao Zedong Zhixi Youngchui Buxiu!* 伟大的领袖和导师毛泽东主席永垂不朽!)." This first newspaper report of his death also demonstrated the extent of national or domestic mourning and grief. Page 2 of this edition of September 10, 1976, listed the nearly 420 people on the funeral committee (*zhisang weiyuanhui*, 治丧委员会). They included several CPC Central Committee members, headed by Mao's chosen successor, Hua Guofeng, as well as members of the State Council, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, and the Central Military Commission. This issue also began the biographical presentation of Mao's life, starting with his youth activism in Changsha from 1919 to 1936. Each photo of Mao was captioned by a narrative describing his political development; however, none of them depicted his personal life. An article on page 6 introduced two slogans that reappeared throughout the mourning period: "The Brilliance of Mao Tse-tung Thought Will Forever Illuminate the Road Ahead" (*Mao Zedong Sixiang de Guangyao Yongyun Zhaoyaozhe Women Qianjin de Daolu*, 毛泽东思想的光耀永远照耀我们前进的道路), and the black-bordered "Wholeheartedly Grieve and Mourn the Passing of the Great Leader and Teacher, Chairman Mao Tse-tung" (*Jiqi Beitongdi Aidao Weida de Lngdoa he Daoshi Mao Zedong Zhuxi Shishi*, 极其悲痛地哀悼伟大的领导和导师毛泽东主席逝世).

Recognition of Mao's greatness extended beyond China, a fact the newspaper illustrated, beginning on September 11, 1976, by publishing pages of condolences from foreign dignitaries, reminiscent of the telegram Mao and Zhou Enlai had sent expressing their condolences to Shirley Graham Du Bois upon the death of W. E. B. Du Bois 13 years earlier. Asian, African, and Latin American leaders expressed their admiration for Chairman Mao and sorrow at his passing. Many of them stated that Mao and his understanding of Marxism had been their political inspiration and guide. Even former U.S. President Richard Nixon sent a telegram of condolence.

Throughout the remaining months of 1976, every daily edition of the *People's Daily* contained at least one article on Mao and his impact on China and the Chinese people. To accommodate the outpouring of commemorations during this period, each edition of the paper was an additional 6–12 pages longer. And throughout September, each edition repeated the black-bordered banner headline of September 10, 1976, exalting Mao as a great leader and a great teacher.

Mao Tse-tung's obituary in the *People's Daily* reflected aspects of the gender bias noted by researchers (Kastenbaum, Peyton, and Kastenbaum, 1977). His important status was underlined by the extensive use of photos, which accompanied the biographical presentation of his political development that featured prominently in the initial mourning period. Through September, each issue of the paper ran one to two full pages of these photos: Mao "giving cadres a report in Yanan in 1942," "greeting the

People's Liberation Army in 1956," surrounded by "Asian, African, and Latin American friends in 1959," or waving to crowds of Red Guard youths as he rode in a car in front of Tiananmen Square in 1966. Along with photos illustrating his political biography appeared pictures of the nation united in mourning—photos from across China of the masses at the capitol, members of every ethnic group, peasants and workers from across China, schoolchildren wearing black armbands, all crying over Mao's passing. As it had done earlier in the year when Premier Zhou Enlai died, the *People's Daily* published photos of Mao lying in state at the Great Hall of the People, his coffin open to offer a last look at the great leader, and of the crowds of mourners, average Chinese, waiting to pay their last respects (*zhanyang*, 瞻仰) to the remains of the deceased (*yirong*, 遗容).

The reports explicitly and repeatedly stated the importance of Mao's ideology and theoretical understanding and adaptation of Marxism-Leninism. They also acknowledged that Mao Tse-tung Thought would continue to be a central influence on China's domestic and foreign policies. A front-page article of September 16, jointly written by the staffs of the *People's Daily*, *Red Flag* (*Hongqi*, 红旗) and the *Liberation Army Daily* (*Jiefangjun Bao*, 解放军报), was headlined "Chairman Mao Will Forever Live in Our Hearts" (*MaoZhuxi Yongyun Huozai Women Xinzhong*, 毛主席永远活在我们心中). It elaborated how everyone should continue to use the great leader's ideas to

strengthen the leadership of the Party, as a guiding principle of class struggle as the dynamic behind the 'criticize Deng' movement, to stress revolution, to promote production, to promote labor, to promote strategy and to advance every aspect of socialism. ("Chairman Mao Will Forever Live in Our Hearts," 1976)

A different view of Mao's leadership came across in his *NYT* obituary, written as a special assignment by Fox Butterfield, the paper's former Beijing Bureau Chief. Mao's death appeared as a front-page, above-the-fold news story on Friday, September 10, 1976, under a title emphasizing U.S. fears of political instability. The bold headline "Mao Tse-tung Dies in Peking at 82; Leader of Red China Revolution; Choice of Successor Is Uncertain" encompassed three shorter articles: "Kissinger Is Cautious; No Setback for U.S. Relations With Peking but Sees Hazards in a Change"; "Political Uncertainty in China"; and "Party in Unity Plea: Appeal to People is Coupled With Delayed Disclosure of Chairman's Death." Butterfield's extensive, three-page obituary appeared on page 13.

The *NYT* obituary began by stating that Mao, "who began as an obscure peasant, died as one of history's great revolutionary figures" (Butterfield, 1976). Yet the assessment of Mao's leadership and character was decidedly negative throughout the obituary. As in the Du Bois obituary, the problematic nature of the individual personality arose repeatedly. Butterfield stated that Mao was "by turns shrewd and realistic, then impatient and a romantic dreamer." This motif of Mao's unrealistic vision of China reappeared throughout the obituary.

According to Butterfield, Mao's "awesome power and privilege" allowed him to call for a tightly disciplined party while putting himself above party discipline (Butterfield, 1976). The cult of personality was the only personal expression of power that mattered: "He built a strong unified Party and then undermined its authority" (Butterfield, 1976). Butterfield went on to list the party members Mao raised to

high status, only to purge at a later period. Deng Xiaoping, Lin Biao, and Liu Shaoqi, Deng's mentor, were mentioned in this regard.

Mao's rift with Moscow, the Sino-Soviet Split, was depicted as a result of his individual quixotic personality and upbringing. In the biographical section of the obituary, the *NYT* quoted an American reporter, Edgar Snow, the first Western journalist to interview Mao in 1936, who had reported that the Chinese masses revered Mao despite his personality: "He (Mao) ha[d] the habits of a peasant." (Butterfield, 1976) Agnes Smedley, another Western journalist who became acquainted with Mao and the CPC during the Yanan era, described Mao as aloof and reserved: "The sinister quality I had first felt so strongly in him proved to be a spiritual isolation" (Butterfield, 1976). This biographical midsection of the obituary focused on Mao's personal life and the cost to him of the revolution. Replete with personal losses—the death of his brothers, his sister, and his second wife—this section also chronicled the psychological illness of his son, along with Mao's own brushes with death.

The obituary called Mao a teacher, citing as evidence of this his preference for sending his losing opponents in intraparty power struggles to reeducation camps for thought reform, rather than indulge in Stalin's penchant for terror, torture, purge, and murder. After comparing these intrigues to those of classical Chinese imperial courts, the *NYT* discussed Mao's fourth wife, the former Shanghai actress Chiang Ching, and her role in the worst excesses of the Cultural Revolution. Here his affairs with other women were described as examples of his "willingness to bend the rules for himself."

Yet the obituary addressed Mao's most influential contribution—his theoretical exegesis of Marxism-Leninism to include peasants as forces for revolution—by truncating it to a single paragraph on the "signification of Marxism," thereby overlooking the international reach of this approach.

Mao's *NYT* obituary ended with an assessment of China's economic deviation from the Soviet path of economic development. Mao "shifted," it claimed, between "his warlike, utopian outlook and his more prudent realism in the face of economic difficulties."

Conclusion

This article has examined the obituaries of the two men in the photo at its opening and shown how the lives of these two influential men were narrated in obituaries in *The New York Times*, the American newspaper of historical record, and China's *People's Daily*. Each newspaper reflected the Cold War-era construction of national images of the United States and the PRC. These media taught lessons about the racial/ethnic spatialization of geopolitical territories and its ramifications for how people were presented. In these national narratives, the West emphasized political activism as idiosyncratic individualism, even in the discussion of the leader of the world's largest communist state, Mao Tse-tung. In obituaries, the *NYT* presented Mao's revolutionary political activism as excessively "romantic" and somewhat outside the boundaries of rational behavior, and similarly depicted Du Bois' political activism and beliefs as the expression of a difficult personality who may not have truly understood America's racial climate.

In the West, the presentation of racial identity evolved from the static boundaries of “race” to a more fluid category of “culture.” This permitted the political promise of globalizing liberal notions of individualization, equality, and democratization. In the presentation of the lives of Mao and Du Bois, the political activism these men participated in—an activism that had the potential to profoundly reshape the lived experience of race—was erased as a possibility. The West had captured the national image of racial equality while simultaneously denying its importance.

In the East, the notion of a domestic racial/ethnic unity also prevailed, but the media there also acknowledged conflict over inequality and oppression in the global context. It was hoped that this articulation of shared experience of oppression by the West would create a culture of the masses that embraced racial difference, especially Blackness. But the obituaries in *the People’s Daily* did not explain how this shared experience would develop into solidarity. The photo above, of two world leaders presenting an image of that very transracial solidarity, captures a missed opportunity—a chance lost in the discursive space of the Cold War.

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