

Editor's Introduction

The papers in this issue all address some aspect of the incorporation and disincorporation of unequal places and regions into world-systems. They address the accumulation processes that drive capitalist expansion as well as the ideological work that helps sustain hegemony and reproduce inequality. They also point to counter-hegemonic dynamics that help drive world-systemic change. As the daily headlines continue to bring forth new signals of U.S. hegemonic decline and of a world-system that is in deep crisis, these accounts can aid our effort to understand our current predicament and perhaps shed light on the various paths that might lead to more desirable alternatives.

Papers by [Adam Driscoll and Edward Kick](#) and by [Thomas Hall](#) lead this issue by exploring how world-system peripheries are incorporated and reproduced over long periods of time. They refocus our lens on regions rather than states as sites of important world-system dynamics, reminding us of the centrality of underlying logics and processes of world-systems. Driscoll and Kick show how Britain's reliance on and development of extractive industries in eastern North Carolina during its period of hegemony generated "degenerative sectors" oriented towards production for export, which undermined domestic development and ensured the region's continued peripheralization even after British hegemonic decline. This fascinating study helps explain why poor regions stay poor, and it may enhance readers' understandings of how such world-system dynamics ensure that countries of the global South remain on the bottom of the economic hierarchy.

Taking an even longer time frame, Hall's study comparing China's and the U.S. southwests similarly looks at the effects of world-systemic hierarchies on regions, illustrating how the dynamics of frontier areas perpetuate long-term inequalities over time. Interestingly, Hall finds that patterns seen in frontiers are common across different historical world-systems, despite some important differences in the methods of incorporation of borderlands. What seems key to Hall's account is variation in how native populations are incorporated into the world-system. In China, native groups were mobilized into administration, unlike in the United States. Despite the relative neglect of frontiers in the study of world-systems, Hall argues that these regions and people play important, and often the most visible, roles in system change.

The paper by [Erym Masi de Casanova and Barbara Sutton](#) explores the globalized consumption practices of cosmetic surgery tourism. They put forward the concept of "transnational body projects" to draw our attention to how capitalist expansion is extending into ever more personal, physical spaces. Examining media discourses in different countries, they show how the commodification of bodies and beauty reinforce and replicate world-system inequities between core and periphery countries as well as gender and class. The article also contributes to analyses of tourism as a form of transnational consumption that has been important to capitalist accumulation processes in more recent times.

World-systems analysts have argued that hegemons in decline tend to rely more heavily on coercion, thereby deepening the contradictions between practices and the ideals that legitimate hegemony. The article by [Eric Bonds](#) illustrates this dynamic as seen in contemporary U.S. policy. He demonstrates how U.S. government discourses have been used, often clumsily and unconvincingly, to justify illegitimate violence, providing evidence of the decline of U.S. hegemony. Such decline is apparent in the more frequent and blatant reliance on military force instead of nonviolent, persuasive forms of influence characteristic in times of less contested

hegemony. The recent scrutiny by the United Nations of the U.S. use of drone strikes to counter global counterterrorism reinforces the conclusions of Bond's analysis.

The question this study raises for those concerned with human rights and the advance of humanitarian norms is how much a hegemon can stretch the distance between normative claims and actual practice before its hold on power crumbles. How much more violent and blatant might hegemonic violence become? What impact do such contradictions have on the viability of international law and institutions? On the one hand, Bond's work reinforces the idea advanced in the work of scholars like Kathryn Sikkink, whose recent book *The Justice Cascade* demonstrates a gradual strengthening of international human rights norms, often evidenced in behavior such as that documented in Bond's article. By appealing to humanitarian norms even to justify bad behavior, states signal the legitimacy and significance of international norms. Will such norms eventually render the contradictions of hegemonic behavior untenable? Or will hegemonic violence undermine the very idea of a world-system based on human rights?

Reinforcing the idea that systemic contradictions help sow the seeds for the rise of counter-hegemonic and anti-systemic challenges, [Brent Kaup](#)'s analysis illustrates how capitalist development and the processes of displacement and exclusion it generates forced population movements in Bolivia that encouraged the emergence of new forces of resistance. Countering the traditional structural impediments to the creation of alliances between peasants and industrialized workers, more recent trends have thrust dislocated peasants and workers into common spaces in the margins of society. It is here where their ability to develop more systemic analyses that account for their shared grievances and the common sources of those grievances contributes to the formation, or what Kaup calls "reintegration" of new and potentially potent alliances. Indeed, these dynamics contributed to the election of Evo Morales, South America's first indigenous president, who has helped fuel Latin American counter-hegemonic resistance to U.S. hegemony. Thus, the contradictions of advanced capitalism are expanding the fissures in the foundation of the existing hegemonic regime.

[Asafa Jalata](#)'s contribution complements Hall's analysis of how the United States incorporates frontier regions by manipulating and pitting different indigenous populations against one another. He details the extreme violence that has been essential to the expansion of the modern world-system, arguing that such violence is more accurately labeled "terrorism." This paper demonstrates the ways ideology is used to negate the experiences and history of indigenous peoples. Jalata calls for a retelling of history as a necessary step towards challenging "hegemonic knowledge" and its reproduction in public discourse and the academy. By framing colonial genocide against indigenous populations as terrorism, his work helps counter the erasure of history and, complementing Bond's article, further challenges the legitimacy of a system whose authority is based on claims of human rights that are contradicted in this retelling of history from the perspective of the periphery.

I've offered just a few thoughts to entice readers to dig into this issue of the *Journal of World-Systems Research* and to consider how the ideas put forward by these authors can advance new thinking and guide practices in a time of great uncertainty and change. In addition to these great articles we've got [reviews](#) of some important recent books on themes related to the study of world-systems. I am grateful to our contributors, our editorial team, and to the many reviewers who have contributed to making this issue possible, and I hope readers are pleased with the results of our collective efforts.

Jackie Smith, *University of Pittsburgh*