



## ***Reading Colonialism and Racism Ideologies in 'The Emperor Jones': A New Historicist Analysis***

قراءة الأيديولوجيات الاستعمارية والعنصرية في "الإمبراطور جونز": تحليل تاريخي جديد

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### **Abstract**

This study unleashes a scathing critique of 'The Emperor Jones' play through the lens of new historicism, exposing the play's entanglement with the colonialist and racist ideologies of the early 20th century. By excavating the historical context of the play's creation and production, this research reveals the insidious ways in which O'Neill's work reinforced and subverted dominant power structures. This analysis will provide a critical exploration of the ways in which O'Neill critiques racism, colonialism, power and domination of his contemporary American society in the early 20th century. This analysis not only shatters the myth of O'Neill's progressive politics but also illuminates the enduring impact of colonialist discourse on American literature. By contextualizing the play within its historical framework, this study offers a nuanced and comprehensive analysis of how literary works influence and reflect societal attitudes toward colonialism and racism. Specifically, it examines how the play's characters, language, and thematic elements both reinforce and challenge the dominant colonialist and racist ideologies prevalent in early 20th-century America. This study sheds light on the dark aspects of American culture and politics, showing how colonialism and racism were used to achieve its interests. The study highlights how black slaves were exploited and ignored, and how blacks were discriminated against in American society. The study also notes that these aspects still exist in contemporary American society, affecting relationships between whites and blacks, and leading to discrimination and exploitation. By exploring the complex and multifaceted nature of colonialism and racism in "The Emperor Jones," this study enhances our comprehension of how colonialist and racist ideologies persistently influence contemporary societal structures. The study calls for awareness of the importance of overcoming these dark aspects of American culture and politics, and promoting justice and equality among all individuals.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Racism, Cultural Imperialism, Dominant Ideologies, Historical Context.

### **ملخص**

تطلق هذه الدراسة نقداً لاذعاً لمسرحية "الإمبراطور جونز" ليوجين أونيل من خلال عدسة التاريخية الجديدة، وتكشف عن تشابك المسرحية مع الإيديولوجيات الاستعمارية والعنصرية في أوائل القرن العشرين. من خلال التنقيب في السياق التاريخي لإنشاء المسرحية وإنتاجها، يكشف هذا البحث عن الطرق الخبيثة التي عزز بها عمل أونيل هياكل السلطة المهيمنة وقلبها. سيوفر هذا التحليل استكشافاً نقدياً للطرق التي ينتقد بها أونيل العنصرية والاستعمار والقوة والهيمنة على مجتمعه الأمريكي المعاصر في أوائل القرن العشرين. لا يحطم هذا التحليل أسطورة سياسات أونيل التقدمية فحسب، بل يسلط الضوء أيضاً على التأثير الدائم للخطاب الاستعماري على الأدب الأمريكي. من خلال وضع المسرحية في سياقها التاريخي، تقدم هذه



الدراسة تحليلًا دقيقًا وشاملاً لكيفية تأثير الأعمال الأدبية وانعكاسها على المواقف المجتمعية تجاه الاستعمار والعنصرية. وعلى وجه التحديد، تدرس هذه الدراسة كيف تعمل شخصيات المسرحية ولغتها وعناصرها الموضوعية على تعزيز وتحدي الإيديولوجيات الاستعمارية والعنصرية السائدة في أمريكا في أوائل القرن العشرين. وتسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على الجوانب المظلمة للثقافة والسياسة الأمريكية، وتوضح كيف تم استخدام الاستعمار والعنصرية لتحقيق مصالحها. وتسلط الدراسة الضوء على كيفية استغلال العبيد السود وتجاهلهم، وكيف تعرض السود للتمييز في المجتمع الأمريكي. وتشير الدراسة أيضًا إلى أن هذه الجوانب لا تزال موجودة في المجتمع الأمريكي المعاصر، مما يؤثر على العلاقات بين البيض والسود، ويؤدي إلى التمييز والاستغلال. من خلال استكشاف الطبيعة المعقدة ومتعددة الأوجه للاستعمار والعنصرية في "الإمبراطور جونز"، تعمل هذه الدراسة على تعزيز فهمنا لكيفية تأثير الأيديولوجيات الاستعمارية والعنصرية بشكل مستمر على الهياكل المجتمعية المعاصرة. وتدعو الدراسة إلى الوعي بأهمية التغلب على هذه الجوانب المظلمة في الثقافة والسياسة الأمريكية، وتعزيز العدالة والمساواة بين جميع الأفراد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستعمار، العنصرية، الإمبريالية الثقافية، الأيديولوجيات السائدة، السياق التاريخي

## 1. Introduction

O'Neill's iconic play, *"The Emperor Jones,"* has been a cornerstone of American modernist theatre that continues to fascinate audiences with its nuanced exploration of colonialism, racism, and power dynamics. The play's protagonist, Brutus Jones, a black American who rises to power as the emperor of a small island nation in the Caribbean, serves as a lens through which O'Neill critiques the dominant ideologies of his time. While *"The Emperor Jones"* has been celebrated for its innovative use of expressionist techniques and its searing critique of colonialism, it has also been criticized for perpetuating racist stereotypes and reinforcing colonialist ideologies. This study seeks to excavate the complex and often contradictory ways in which *"The Emperor Jones"* reflects and refracts the historical context of its creation and production. To understand the play's historical context, it is essential to examine the colonialist and racist discourses that pervaded American society during the early decades of the 20th century. America had newly established itself as a dominant world power, expanding its territory through the acquisition of Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. In this regard, the expansionist policy was rationalized by the ideology of the "White Man's Burden," which presumed that white Americans had a moral obligation to assimilate and modernize the allegedly "uncivilized" and "primitive" populations of the colonized regions. According to Hegel (1956), "put forward the imperialistic ideas that empire is the white man's burden" (p. 88; Al-Solel & Al-Yarimi, 2020). Particularly, the play's exploration of racism, ethnic cleansing, and colonialism has made it a rich text for analysis. Through a new historicist analysis of *"The Emperor Jones,"* this study examines the play's engagement with the racist and colonialist ideologies of the early 20th century. By interrogating the play's representation of colonialism, racism, and power dynamics, this study will challenge dominant



narratives about O'Neill's progressive politics and shed new light on the enduring impact of colonialist discourse on American literature. The New Historicist approach is ideally suited for this study, enabling a richly nuanced and contextual exploration of the play's colonialist and racist underpinnings. By examining the play within its historical context, this study will be able to explore the ways in which the play reflects and challenges the dominant ideologies of colonialism and racism in the early 20th century. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways in which colonialist discourse continues to shape American literature and society. By providing a critical analysis of the multifaceted nature of colonialism and racism in "The Emperor Jones," this study seeks to illuminate the dark underbelly of American modernism and challenge readers to rethink their assumptions about the play and its place in American literary history.

### 1.1 Study Significance

The current analysis is noteworthy because it offers a nuanced critique of O'Neill's portrayal of racism and colonialism. By examining the internalized racism of Jones's character, the economic exploitation and cultural imperialism of colonialism, and the use of dramatic irony, this analysis sheds light on the intricate dynamics of oppressive systems, revealing their multifaceted nature. Furthermore, this research aims to enrich our comprehension of how colonialism and racism are rhetorically crafted and reinforced within literary works. The study provides valuable insights into how "The Emperor Jones" reflects and challenges the dominant ideologies of the early 20th century, shedding light on the ongoing impact of colonialist discourse on American literature and society.

### 1.2 Theoretical Framework

This study employs New Historicism as its theoretical framework, emphasizing the importance of understanding the historical context in which "The Emperor Jones" play was written and received. This approach recognizes that literary texts are intricately linked to the cultural, social, and political attitudes of their time. As Greenblatt (2001) notes, this approach "deals with extrinsic methods of interpretation of literary texts. The work is understood through its historical and cultural context. It is a theory that is based on the paradigm that literature should be analyzed within the context of the writers historical and cultural background. In reaction to the text only approach advocated by the new critics, the new historicists acknowledge the relevance of the literary text and equally analyze the work with an eye of history. The New historicists have an eye to history while analyzing the work; their attention is partly on literatures' historical content as they base their thoughts on the link between the art and the historical situations. The work is less the product of the writer's imagination than the social circumstances of its creation" (p. 21).



Through a close reading of the play, this study will examine how "The Emperor Jones" reflects and shapes cultural attitudes towards colonialism and racism in the early 20th century. A New Historicist analysis will reveal the complex power dynamics at play in the text, exposing the ways in which the play constructs and perpetuates colonialist and racist ideologies. While Brannigan (1989) argues, "New Historicism emphasizes the use of the past as an impetus for political struggle in the present, highlighting the inherent connection between literary studies and politics" (p. 36). Moreover, this analysis will investigate how the play challenges dominant ideologies, offering insights into the ways in which literary texts can both reflect and subvert the cultural norms of their time. As Muller (2013) posits, "literary texts are bound up with other discourses and rhetorical structures, and are part of a history that is still being written" (p. 2). By situating "The Emperor Jones" within its historical context, this study will provide a nuanced understanding of the play's engagement with the complex social and political issues of its era. Murry (1999) also asserts that "New Historicists are influenced by the work of the French theorist Michel Foucault who focused upon the intricately structured power relations in a given culture at a given time to demonstrate, how that society controls its member through constructing and defining what appears to be universal" (p. 809).

## 2. Literature review

Despite its significance, "The Emperor Jones" has been overlooked in A New Historicist critiques, leaving a notable gap in the existing literature. This study addresses this lacuna by providing a critical discourse analysis of the play *The Emperor Jones*, examining the existing critical literature on "The Emperor Jones" and explore how a New Historicist reading can provide new insights into the play's colonialism, racism, power and domination ideologies. Building on theoretical frameworks from New Historicism, this research undertakes a critical analysis of this canonical American play. By doing so, it aims to provide a nuanced and detailed understanding of how literary texts reflect and shape cultural, political, and historical attitudes towards colonialism and racism. Through this analysis, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of colonialism and racism in American literature. By exploring the ways in which "The Emperor Jones" engages with these issues, this research aims to shed new light on the play's significance within the broader context of American literary history. Eugene O'Neill's depiction of Brutus Jones in "The Emperor Jones" has sparked intense debate among critics, who question whether the character perpetuates harmful racial caricatures. As Bogard (1972) notes, "the Negro who is essentially uncivilized wearing the contemporary sophistication as a loosely fitting mask over an incorrigibly savage countenance" (p. 139). This perspective is supported by Bogard's further argument that "O'Neill perpetuated the stereotype of the incurably savage black. This perspective presented a decidedly racist



perspective of African American portraiture" (p. 139). However, Gagnon (2011) offers a different interpretation, suggesting that "O'Neill employed the epithet as a linguistic device that allowed the tyrant Brutus Jones to demonstrate his superiority over other blacks referenced in the play" (p. 125). Furthermore, Gagnon notes that "Jones regresses, he begins identifying with his own race as a victim, dropping the term in the latter scenes as he assumes the victim's role" (p. 125). This regression highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of Jones's character, which challenges simplistic interpretations of his portrayal. Manheim (1998) provides further insight into the play's themes, arguing that "the main themes of *The Emperor Jones* are racism in the American society and the concept of Empire in O'Neill's ideology" (p. 183). Manheim also notes that "O'Neill challenges the white authority and brings the concept of the Empire under question: The play calls attention to the racial oppression that actually existed in America in 1920" (p. 183). This challenge to white authority is reflected in Falk's (1985) argument that "Jones is dominant and the West Indies Islanders as dissidents who aim to put an end to Jones' dictatorship. The idea of rebellion against the tyrannical status quo is intensified by the use of the theatrical devices" (p. 240). The play's portrayal of colonialism and racism has been the subject of much critical debate. Some critics, such as Agrawal (2018), have argued that "the play reinforces racist stereotypes through its portrayal of Brutus Jones" (p. 3). However, others, such as Singh (2015), have contended that "the play perpetuates colonialist ideologies by depicting the Caribbean island of Haiti as a primitive and uncivilized society" (p. 237). Fanon (1968) provides a nuanced understanding of the colonialist context, noting that "for colonialism, this vast continent was the haunt of savages, a country riddled with superstitions and fanaticism, destined for contempt, weighed down by the curse of God, a country of cannibals" (p. 211). New Historicist critics have approached "The Emperor Jones" from a different perspective, examining the play's historical context and cultural politics. Hogan (2009) argues that "the play reflects the anxieties of the American bourgeoisie during the 1920s, particularly with regards to issues of race and colonialism" (p. 37). Also Khan (2012), contends that "the play critiques the colonialist ideologies of the time, but ultimately reinforces racist stereotypes through its portrayal of Brutus Jones" (p. 5). While Painter (2010) provide further insight into the cultural politics and historical context of the play, highlighting the ways in which it reflects and critiques the colonialist and racist ideologies of the time" (p. 43). The existing critical literature on "The Emperor Jones" highlights the complexity and nuance of the play's colonialism and racism ideologies. Through a New Historicist lens, this play yields fresh perspectives on its historical backdrop and cultural underpinnings, revealing how it both mirrors and challenges the dominant colonialist and racist ideologies of its era. By examining the play's portrayal of colonialism and racism, the study seeks to enrich our understanding of the intricate and layered dynamics of colonialist and racist ideologies within the American literary canon.



### 3. Power and Domination Contexts in *The Emperor Jones*: A Critical Exploration of Power Dynamics

This study will present a critical analysis and exploration of the power dynamics and domination contexts in O'Neill's seminal tragedy, *"The Emperor Jones,"* this analysis applies the tenets of New Historicism, situating the work within its rich historical and cultural milieu to uncover nuanced meanings and resonances. Eugene O'Neill's masterpiece, *"The Emperor Jones,"* presents a thought-provoking examination of the complex power structures that shape human interactions. Through the complex and multifaceted character of Brutus Jones, O'Neill delivers a scathing critique of the mechanisms of power and domination, laying bare the contradictions and paradoxes that define these systems. This analysis will provide a nuanced and critical examination of the power dynamics at play in *"The Emperor Jones,"* highlighting the ways in which Jones's character embodies the tensions and contradictions of power and domination. Through a searing examination of O'Neill's play, this study exposes the darkest recesses of human depravity, illuminating the timeless and devastating relevance of *"The Emperor Jones"* as a withering critique of the systemic injustices and societal atrocities that plagued its time. According to Alshokhada (2025), notes that "there are many important issues underlying O'Neill's critique in *The Emperor Jones'* play, including the racial discrimination, slavery, and also American occupation of Haiti, which occurred in the twentieth century" (p. 682). While Cohn (1971) also argues that "O'Neill gained inspiration for the material that ended up as *The Emperor Jones* from the armory of textual imagery comprising both the United States encounter with the Caribbean island and the legacy of slavery in the Americas, including a biography of the Haitian leader, Christophe" (p. 47). In discussion of *The Emperor Jones's* play, Jones's rise to power is a testament to his cunning, intelligence, and ruthlessness. He manipulates and exploits the native population, using his charisma and physical presence to establish himself as the emperor of the island. As Smethurst (2011) notes, "in both the North and in the formerly rebellious Southern states, blacks suffered under the stain of slavery and were marginalized culturally and economically by custom and law" (p. 17). This marginalization is reflected in the play's portrayal of Jones's rise to power, which is rooted in his ability to internalize and perpetuate the dominant ideologies of colonialism and racism. However, Jones uses his position of power to exploit and oppress the native population, perpetuating the cycle of violence and domination that is inherent in colonialism. The play also highlights the ways in which power is maintained and challenged. Jones uses a range of tactics to maintain his power, including violence, intimidation, and manipulation. However, the native population, led by the character of Lem, begins to organize and resist Jones's rule, using their knowledge of the island and its customs to challenge his power. This resistance serves as a powerful counter-narrative to Jones's dominant discourse, highlighting the ways in which power can be challenged and subverted. As Randal



(1998), indicates that "the play O'Neill develops mood, also sees Moon of The Caribees as his first experiment with the impact of black culture upon whites, and this, his first truly multicultural play, and foreshadows also his interest in total theatre" (p. 52). This multiculturalism is reflected in the play's portrayal of the complex power dynamics between Jones and the native population. The play's portrayal of power dynamics is also supported by Falk (1985), who considers "Jones as dominant and the West Indies Islanders as dissidents who aim to put an end to Jones' dictatorship. The idea of rebellion against the tyrannical status quo is intensified by the use of the theatrical devices" (p. 240).

Furthermore, the play also explores the psychological complexities of power and domination. Jones's character is a prime example of the ways in which power can be both empowering and suffocating. His internal struggle to maintain his power and control over the island is a testament to the psychological toll of domination. As Gagnon (2011) argues that "because of O'Neill's personal experiences in New London, he understood the marginalization and degradation caused by prejudice and ostracized cultures" (p. 73). This understanding is reflected in the play's portrayal of Jones's internal struggle to maintain his power and control over the island. At the same time, the play also highlights the ways in which the native population is able to resist and challenge Jones's power, serving as a powerful reminder of the agency and autonomy of marginalized communities. The play 'The Emperor Jones' is a tragedy that critiques American domination and power, reflecting themes such as imperialism and colonialism, racism and oppression, economic exploitation and cultural imperialism, and the performance of power and masculinity. As Locke (1983) argues that "African American artists should depict blacks in the best light, discrediting the Jim Crow and minstrel representations that flourished in the early twentieth century" (p. 207). The play's portrayal of Brutus Jones, a black American who becomes the emperor of a Caribbean island, functions as a scathing critique of the intricate and troubled landscape of American hegemony, laying bare the darker underpinnings of its dominance. While Baraka (1991) notes that "the more genuine American theater that O'Neill helped create during the same period that saw black characters on the stage in something approaching realism for the first time, as well as an American working class" (p. 152). Through its exploration of American domination and power, The Emperor Jones raises important questions about the impact of American imperialism on marginalized communities, the ways in which power is exercised and maintained, the performance of masculinity and power, and the ongoing struggles for justice, equality, and human rights. The play highlights the ways in which American power and domination are perpetuated and maintained, and serves as a powerful critique of exposing the profound and lasting impact of American imperialism on the global landscape, revealing the pervasive and insidious ways in which it has molded and continues to influence the world.



#### **4. A Critical Analysis of Colonialism and Racism Ideologies in The Emperor Jones: A Legacy of Oppression and Discrimination**

This study will examine the ways in which The 'Emperor Jones' tragedy, critiques colonialism and racism ideologies, according to the principles of New Historicism, as outlined by Colebrook (1997), who suggests that "fewer employs the term in the new historicism way of analyzing a particular social event which has meaning for the people involved and discovering the patterns of conversations, codes and modes of thinking that attribute those meanings to the cultural event" (p. 75). This perspective is supported by Brannigan (1989), who argues that "New Historicism understands the stories of the past as society's way of constructing a narrative which unconsciously fits its own interests"(p. 36). Eugene O'Neill's magnum opus, "The Emperor Jones," unleashes a blistering rebuke of racism and colonialism, laying bare the grotesque brutalities and moral rot of imperialist exploitation. As Baldick (2005) notes, "New Historicism is a way of analyzing literary texts that takes into account the historical and cultural context in which they were written" (p.187). Pietruszynski (2006) also argues that "New Historicism is a way to explore how literature can bring some understanding to current social problems" (p. 20). Through the complex and nuanced character of Brutus Jones, O'Neill delivers a scathing critique of the insidious ways in which racism and colonialism entrench themselves in society. This analysis will provide an in-depth examination of O'Neill's critique, focusing on the internalized racism that haunts Jones's character, the exploitative economic structures and cultural imperialism that underpin colonialism, and the use of dramatic irony to underscore the absurdity and injustice of these systems. In many cases, through a critical examination of how O'Neill's masterpiece, "The Emperor Jones," unmasks the depths of human depravity, this study seeks to illuminate the play's profound resonance as a searing commentary on the socio-political complexities of its era. The play portrays the internalized racism of Jones's character, who embodies the contradictions of a black man who has internalized the racist ideologies of the imperial powers. O'Neill demonstrates how racism can be both externally imposed and internally perpetuated, highlighting the ways in which individuals and communities can internalize and perpetuate racist ideologies. This internalized racism is evident in Jones's character, who uses his position of power to exploit and oppress the native population, perpetuating the cycle of violence and domination that is inherent in colonialism.

O'Neill's critique of colonialism and racism is equally nuanced, as he highlights the ways in which it is used as a tool of economic exploitation and cultural imperialism. As Bogard (1972) notes, the play presents a racist perspective of African American portraiture, perpetuating the stereotype of "the Negro who is essentially uncivilized wearing the contemporary sophistication as a loosely fitting mask over an incorrigibly savage countenance" (p. 139). The Emperor Jones' play



portrays the colonial powers as ruthless and cunning, using every means at their disposal to extract wealth and resources from the native population. Simultaneously, O'Neill spotlights the potential for resistance and subversion, revealing that even the most oppressive systems of imperialism can be challenged and undermined. A particularly noteworthy dimension of O'Neill's critique is his scathing examination of the exploitative nature of imperialism, racism and colonialism is his use of dramatic irony. Throughout *The Emperor Jones's* play, Eugene O'Neill leverages irony to underscore the hypocrisy and contradictions of the colonial powers, as well as the internalized racism of Jones's character. This irony serves to underscore the absurdity and injustice of these oppressive systems, and to highlight the need for resistance and subversion. *The Emperor Jones's* tragedy, the play offers a profound exploration of racial and historical themes through the troubled character of Brutus Jones, offering a searing commentary on the enduring impact of systemic racism, slavery, colonization and making it a crucial aspect of the play that should not be overlooked. In anyway, it should not be neglected the history, colonialism, race and racism which is offered through visions of Brutus Jones. *The Emperor Jones* is set on a fictional Caribbean island, where the protagonist, Brutus Jones, an African American, has risen to power as the island's emperor. The play's portrayal of Jones's rise and fall from power serves as a commentary on the racist ideologies of the time. Jones's character embodies the contradictions of racism, as he seeks to assert his own power and autonomy while also reinforcing the racist structures that have enabled his rise to power.

Continually, Eugene O'Neill's tragedy "*The Emperor Jones*" remains alarmingly relevant today, as its themes of internalized racism, systemic oppression, ethnic cleansing and colonialism continue to echo the persistent struggles with racism and racial cleansing that plague contemporary society. In O'Neill's masterpiece, "*The Emperor Jones*," the insidious legacies of racism and imperialism are starkly exposed. The play masterfully excavates the intricacies of Black identity, deftly exposing the corrosive effects of internalized racism and the performative nature of identity. Through its unflinching portrayal, O'Neill's masterpiece offers a powerful indictment of systemic oppression. Actually, Eugene O'Neill's "*The Emperor Jones*" has experienced a striking resurgence in relevance, offering a hauntingly prescient lens through which to view contemporary global events, including the Arab Spring of 2011, the widespread protests in the United States on May 28, 2020, and the American unrest of 2024. The play's themes of oppression, rebellion, and social upheaval resonate deeply with these contemporary movements, highlighting the enduring power of O'Neill's play. The play *Emperor Jones*, was written by Eugene O'Neill, continues to resonate with contemporary issues, particularly with regards to colonialism and racism ideologies. The play's scathing depiction of colonialism and racism remains eerily relevant, laying bare the lasting scars of these oppressive systems, the ongoing impact of these ideologies on our world today. As Manheim



(1998) notes, "the main themes of *The Emperor Jones* are racism in the American society and the concept of Empire in O'Neill's ideology" (p.183). Memmi (1965) also explains that "the colonizer who accepts his role has to construct and rely on such myths: With all his power he must disown the colonized while their existence is indispensable to his own" (p. 54). *The Emperor Jones*' play resonates with modern-day America, echoing the unrest and calls for change sparked by George Floyd's killing in 2020, which challenged President Trump's authority and highlighted systemic injustices. As George Floyd's tragic murder ignited international outrage, nationwide protests, and widespread criticism on social media, exposing systemic racism and discrimination against African-Americans and challenging the dominant power structure and sparking calls for reform. *The Emperor Jones*' play eerily parallels contemporary geopolitical tensions, linking historical events like America's occupation of Haiti and invasion of Iraq to ongoing conflicts, such as Israel's 2024 attempts to occupy Gaza and Palestinian territories, backed by the United States. Particularly, the tragedy "The Emperor Jones" remains a poignant reminder of the dark legacy of ethnic cleansing and racial discrimination in American history, particularly during the early 20th century. Particularly, the play's representation of ethnic cleansing is also noteworthy. The character of Smithers, a white trader, serves as a foil to Jones, highlighting the colonialist attitudes that underpinned ethnic cleansing. Smithers's treatment of Jones and the other islanders is marked by condescension and contempt, reflecting the colonialist ideologies that viewed people of color as inferior and subordinate. Unfortunately, the play's themes continue to resonate with contemporary issues, serving as a powerful commentary on the ongoing struggles with racism and social injustice in America. As Falk (1985) notes, the play portrays the colonial powers as "ruthless and cunning, using every means at their disposal to extract wealth and resources from the native population" (p. 240). A new historicist analysis of *The Emperor Jones* reveals the complex power dynamics in the play. As Alshokhada (2024) states, "literature also helps us develop our creative and cultural capabilities to understand and translate the complex phenomena that have a negative effect on the human environment and seek to represent them as a complex issue in literary genres" (p. 215). Alshokhada (2025) also notes that "when we read and analyze any literary text, the literary text should be inherently tied to its social, cultural, and historical context, requiring interpretation within the era and environment in which it was written" (p. 678).

The play's portrayal of racism and ethnic cleansing serves as a commentary on the dominant ideologies of the time. The United States continues to grapple with complex and ongoing issues of racial discrimination and systemic racism, as the statements of US President Trump about the displacement and deportation of the residents of Gaza strip to other countries during his assumption of American power on 16/1/2025. In general, the play "The Emperor Jones" serves as a disturbing mirror to modern society, reflecting the ongoing scourge of racism and racial



cleansing through its exploration of colonialism, oppression, and the corrosive legacy of systemic inequality. The legacy of colonialism and racism can be seen in various forms of oppression and discrimination, including American occupation and the systemic racism that perpetuates disparities between white and black people. The play's nuanced examination of colonialism and racism delivers a searing indictment of how these toxic ideologies have indelibly marked our past, present, and future. Moreover, the play sheds light on the insidious ways in which colonialism and racism are deeply entrenched and perpetuated, with colonial powers using racism as a tool to justify and maintain their dominance over marginalized communities. This intersectionality is particularly evident in the play's portrayal of Brutus Jones, a black American who becomes the emperor of a Caribbean island, only to perpetuate the same colonialist and racist ideologies that have oppressed him. A fundamental principle of historicism holds that any literary work or text is a product of, and reflects, the social, cultural, political, and material contexts in which it was written. This means that literary texts are inherently shaped by the historical circumstances of their creation, and therefore offer valuable insights into the complexities of their time. The Emperor Jones serves as a powerful reminder of the ongoing impact of colonialism and racism ideologies on our world today. The play's exploration of these themes highlights the need for ongoing critical examination and resistance to these ideologies, and serves as a call to action for a more just and equitable society.

## 5. Conclusion

1. In conclusion, this analysis has conducted a thorough and critical examination of the colonialist and racist ideologies that underlie Eugene O'Neill's seminal work, *The Emperor Jones*. Through a rigorous New Historicist reading, this analysis has laid bare the complex web of power dynamics, cultural imperialism, and racial domination that shape the play's narrative, revealing the intricate mechanisms by which colonialism and racism perpetuate systems of oppression, exploitation, and dehumanization. The Emperor Jones emerges as a scathing indictment of the brutalizing effects of colonialism and racism, which have left an indelible mark on the lives of marginalized communities and continue to haunt contemporary society. By examining the play's portrayal of colonialism and racism, this study has highlighted the ways in which these ideologies are intertwined, with colonial powers using racism as a tool to justify and maintain their dominance over marginalized communities. Furthermore, this analysis has demonstrated how *The Emperor Jones* serves as a powerful testament to the enduring legacy of colonialism and racism, which continues to shape the social, cultural, and economic realities of our world today. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that *The Emperor Jones* remains a vital and urgent work, one that demands a nuanced understanding



of the historical and cultural contexts that shape our understanding of power, identity, and social justice. As such, this play remains strikingly relevant today, offering a potent reminder of the imperative for sustained critical reflection and social reckoning. This study has provided a new historicist analysis of *The Emperor Jones* tragedy. O'Neill's play's engagement with racist and colonialist ideologies has been examined, revealing the complex power dynamics at play. This analysis has highlighted the need for a nuanced understanding of the play's historical context and its representation of racism and ethnic cleansing.

## 6. References

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