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by D Denys

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Double Consciousness

W.E.B. Dubois in his writings about racism and oppression identified the concept of "double consciousness" as a useful theoretical model, which helps in understanding the psychosocial differences in American society. Dubois introduces the concept of double consciousness, which according to him describes the conflict between dual identities that he found among African Americans in the early 1900s. For Du Bois, this double consciousness is not simply an internal struggle; but instead, a conception of self-identity mediated through several modes of power. Double consciousness divides the identity of African Americans in that people see themselves as individuals with rich lives internally, but at the same time can see that racism clouds others from seeing them in the same way. This leads to integrating racism into the consciousness of every African American: while it helps the oppressed defend against racism, it also profoundly affects the way African Americans view themselves. In the text "Scholar Denied: W.E.B. du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology" Aidon Morris introduces perspectives of different authors who critique the concept of double consciousness. Like many others mentioned in the text, Reeds argued that Du Bois absorbed ideas about intellectual debates on racial superiority and assigned it to whites. Meanwhile, the author states that Du Bois's sociology of race is the hallmark of his scholarship. (ETS)

Scholars have noted and provided their criticism in regards to the concept of double consciousness. In the text, "Revisiting Du Bois: The Relationship Between African American Double Consciousness and Beliefs About Racial and National Group Experiences" Lyubansky and Eidelson, talk about the concept of double consciousness by focusing on the relationship between racial and mainstream acculturation and the beliefs of African Americans in regards to racial groups. According to the author, Du Bois placed the origin of double consciousness in a repressive culture, which forced black people to see themselves only in the eye of a dominant White society. The primary objective of the article is to explore the essential manifestations of the concept of double consciousness. (ETS)

The primary interest in this article according to the author is the extent to which African Americans have held onto the beliefs about racial groups. The authors address different beliefs including distrust, helplessness, superiority, injustice, and vulnerability to explain how perception relates to oppression. Lyubansky and Eidelson in their observation found that such beliefs directly bear on race relations in the United States. Meanwhile, contrary to their expectations the authors found a "global mindset in which Black Americans consistently hold stronger beliefs about their racial group than about their national group across all domains (Lyubansky and Eidelson 18)." Here the authors mainly focus on showing how beliefs about racial and national groups are shaped through cultural involvement. The authors believe that various 'Black' racial categories no longer represent today's pluralistic society. (ETS)

In "Ever Feeling One 's Twoness" Ernest Allen, Jr. points out that the notion of double consciousness is an appropriate description of the literally divided spiritual, psychological and even cultural conditions of individual black artist and intellectuals at the turn of the century is dubious at best in an empirical sense but a powerful metaphor for later generations. In this writing, Allen argues that debates of separatism and integrationist mainly shaped the double consciousness in the early 1960s. While Ernest Allen appreciates the reading for its values of (ETS)

comprehension into African American cultural dualities, his works are mainly critical of Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*.

The author presents a similar concept of double consciousness in his writing "The Unstable Argument" stating that the conception of double consciousness was a political attempt to gain support among sympathetic white philanthropists (Ernest Allen 25). "In fact he believes that suggestions constructed about speaking to an international struggle among the members of the educated black elite 'who are torn between the values of, on the one hand, upper-or middle class whites and on the other hand those black sharecroppers, domestic and other working individuals is, as one might say today, between Afrocentric cultural orientation'. The concept of 'twoness' according to Ernest Allen raises issues instead of creating possibilities. Therefore, Ernest Allen believes that cultivation is required in regards to knowledge of white Americans.

The article presented by Lyubansky and Eidelson differs in many ways to Ernest Allen. Both authors have different perspectives in regards to the concept of double consciousness. On the one hand, Lyubansky and his colleague argue that Du Bois placed the origin of double consciousness in a repressive culture, which forced black people to see themselves only in the eye of a dominant White society. As such, the concept of double consciousness plays a role in the beliefs of African Americans in regards to racial marginalization. On the other hand, Ernest Allen believes that the concept of 'twoness,' double consciousness, and double ideals are merely a political attempt to gain support among sympathetic white philanthropists. In fact, the author argues that Du Bois should have instead cultivated the knowledge of white American. Meanwhile, the author also appreciates the reading for its values in cultural dualities.

The construct of double consciousness has had an impact on influencing scholarly writing and issues of race and racism as well. However, much has changed since the time of Du Bois. In politics and culture, race continues to signify and structure social life. A history of black activism to advance eliminate racial equality, however, has helped to ensure that blacks and minority groups are increasingly incorporated into different professions, academia, politics, and business, and even in previously biased social institutions like colleges, schools, and mass media. Moreover, because of the impact of the civil rights movement from the 1960s, blacks have increasingly affirmed and celebrated their identity as a group.

Identity politics have increasingly incorporated the collective remembrance, recovery, and the shared history of oppression, among other pursuits involving the implementation of policies for black equality. This converts into political matters compelling white society to institutionalize laws and public policies affirming the social, political, and economic equality with whites, while slowly conceding the history of black people. Therefore, for the most part, blacks today are no longer socially invisible 'nobodies.' The tension, which initially existed between a collectively shared racial history and race, as well as the shared political objectives involving racial equality, was emphasized with the election of a black president. The mix racial background of Obama—a white mother and a black father and being raised in Indonesia—with Harvard credentials, impelled others to ask questions even as they received his candidacy, illustrates the attained equality.

Different tensions are accompanying institutionalization of racial equality point to the complex nature of racism and race. Even though the color line persists even today and continues to be of great importance in everyday life, some ambiguities and nuances based on the appropriate time and place of drawing the line, and in the way which its meanings vary across different contexts. The black civil rights activist Lani Guinier elaborates on how multidimensional race is. She states, "In many ways, Race can be stigmatizing, but at the same

time, it can be liberating (Guinier and Torress 4)." Because of the changes of black people representation since the Second World War, a habit of thinking that the task of attaining racial equality is not pressing any longer has persisted.

Scholars, however, have argued that race and racism have not disbarred, and instead have been given different meanings. Sociologists who talk of race tend to emphasize on entangled dimensions of the systematic patterning of social stratification, inequality, and conflicts. Racial inequality is not merely something that is acquired subjectively through a given person, but rather one which gets objectively structure into everyday culture. Racial categorization and race, therefore, are an engine of social status, economic inequality, and cultural worldviews. Given the multiple forms of racism that African Americans have had to content, it should not be surprising that most African Americans experience the double consciousness, the awareness of being part of a different culture.

For some black authors, double consciousness has meant having to choose the primary audience or both. For even such choices cannot be separated from political views on the role of writers as members of an oppressed society. In fact, one of the oldest issues in the black literary community revolves around the social role of black writers. The role of writers remained a matter of social importance during the movements in the 1960s, the literary and artistic offshoot of the Black Power Movement. Meanwhile, talking about double consciousness is perhaps incomplete without considering racism from the perspective of white people. From a sociological point of view, the race is not merely about blacks or other minorities but often requires attention to whites and how they relate to other groups.

According to Du Bois, double consciousness was not merely a liability, but it gave blacks a profound understanding of human experience because of confrontation with oppression and slavery, and this situated knowledge need not be repressed. Du Bois proposes that marginalized groups have a specific view of society which allows them to have insight in regards to the social system that can escape members of the dominant groups. The concept of double consciousness centered race as an essential construct in the social world, explicitly foregrounding the effect of race on blacks. The study of race should not be reduced to discrimination but should instead illuminate the way in which race fundamentally structures social relations. The concepts of double consciousness suggest that Du Bois understood racial and ethnic identity as a complex and multifaceted issue. Double consciousness is not merely an internal struggle but instead a conception of self-identity.

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