

# [Web du bois and double consciousness assignment](https://assignbuster.com/web-du-bois-and-double-consciousness-assignment/)

[](https://assignbuster.com/)[Psychology](https://assignbuster.com/essay-subjects/psychology/)

W. E. B. Du Bois: Double-Consciousness Ashanti Johnson SOC101 Lestine Shedrick October 18, 2011 W. E. B. Du Bois (1968-1963) was a huge contributor to sociology through the eyes and experience of an African-American scholar (Vissing, 2011). Du Bois was an author, activist and student of Black sociology. In his 1897 article, Strivings of the Negro People”, Du Bois introduced the term “ double-consciousness”, a concept I believe to be just as relevant in today’s African-American communities. Double consciousness refers to what Du Bois considered an absence of “ true self consciousness” (Du Bois, 1897) amongst Africans in America.

In place of that absence, lies a dual awareness- awareness of one’s self combined with an awareness of how others perceive you. Is being an American a contradiction to Black identity, even in contemporary society? In his 1903 book, ‘ The Souls of Black Folk’, Du /bois gives an analysis of African-Americans and double-consciousness, that Black people are caught between separate self conceptions, as an American and as an African. “ The negro ever feels his two-ness, an American, a negro, two souls, two warring ideals and one dark body whose dogged strength keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois, 1903).

Du Bois broke his concept of double-consciousness down into three manifestations: First, the power of White stereotypes on Black life and thought. Second, racism and the exclusion of Black Americans from mainstream American society. Lastly, Du Bois points out the internal conflict between being of African descent and being an American. What is the power and influence of White stereotypes on the everyday lives of African-Americans today, in the 21st century? We live in a society that, many could argue, is saturated with Black culture. Commercial television, film and radio are largely influenced by African-American language, imagery and music.

Examples of what used to be considered African-American youth vernacular, have seeped into mainstream culture. Words and phrases such as “ bling” and “ you go boy” are not Black slang, but American slang. The continued commercial inclusion of African-American images, language and music, does not eliminate double-consciousness- it may, in fact, magnify it. The stereotypes and images of Black people in America have evolved since Du Bois coined his term in 1897, but even the ever-changing understanding of Black culture leaves most African-Americans trapped in a conflict of who they are versus who they are believed to be in the eyes of America.

On one hand, Africans are credited with inventing many genres of sound, dance, art and athletic styles. Although there are many groundbreaking contributions in math, medicine and science, Africans are not “ popular” for these attributes. Because of this, many African-American parents keep their children from concentrating on such areas of strength as dance, music or sports in order to keep them away from a stereotypical field of study. Double-consciousness will have a talented athlete fore-go a sports career so that they are not considered “ just another ball player”.

When we think of Black Americans being excluded from mainstream American society, we consider the generations leading to the civil rights movement. Today, our President is an African-American, so surely this issue is no longer relevant. Racism cannot flourish in contemporary America, right? According to Merriam Webster’s Dictionary, racism is “ a belief that some races are by nature superior to others” and the “ discrimination based on such beliefs” (Webster, 2011).

We now live in an anti-racism society. It is frowned upon to act or react in any way that could be construed as racist. Our society has laws in place which make racist actions in the workplace, school or even in public- illegal. The conflict of double-consciousness still exists in this modern, anti-racist America. Perhaps even more frustrating for today’s African-American, is living with the reality of racial tension in a society refusing to admit that such tension still exists.

Du Bois spoke of internal conflict as being the most significant manifestation of double-consciousness. There is an inner conflict between being of both American and African lineage. African-Americans are a special group of immigrants who did not choose America as their new home. It was slavery that brought the African to America for generations of forced labor. The knowledge that most of the African culture, language, history and experience, was lost to American Africans after the slave trade, helps fuel the inner conflict.

Where should the African-American feel his strongest connection? Africa? America? In conclusion, double-consciousness impacts the African-American today just as it did in the early 1900’s. W. E. B. Du Bois described his concept as “ a world which yields no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world” (Du Bois, 1903). Today’s politically correct society tends to use the word “ color blind”, intended to show an acceptance for all people, regardless of race or color.

Today, the double-conscious African-American must continue the search for his conscious identity in a society which has gone from color-racist to color-blind in a matter of a few decades. References Du Bois, W. E. B. (1897, August). Strivings of the negro people. The Atlantic, Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). The souls of black folk. Chicago: McClurg and Company. racism. 2011. In Merriam-Webster. com. Retrieved October 18, 2011, from http://www. merriam-webster. com/dictionary/racism Vissing, Y. (2011). An introduction to sociology. San Diego, CA: Bridgepoint Education