

The concept of double consciousness assignment

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"The Souls of Black Folk". Double consciousness describes the individual sensation of feeling as though your identity is divided into several parts, making it difficult or impossible to have one unified identity. Du Bois spoke of this within the context of race relations in the United States. He asserted that since American blacks have lived in a society that has historically repressed and devalued them that it has become difficult for them to unify their black identity with their American identity (Idles and Appellants 351-352).

Double consciousness forces blacks to not only view themselves from their own unique perspective, but to also view themselves as they might be perceived by the outside (read: white) world. This is what Du Bois spoke of in the above passage when he talked about "the sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (351). As a result, blacks can suffer from a damaged self-image shaped by the perceptions and treatment of white people. Black life in turn can easily become shaped by stereotypes perpetuated by mainstream culture.

According to Du Bois the prejudices of white people elicit "self-questioning, self-separating, and lowering of ideals" among black people (Idles and Appellants 354). The initialization of anti-black sentiment from the outside world thus begins to shape the black American experience. Through the concept double consciousness Du Bois becomes better able to explore the social problems he studied in his earlier work "The Philadelphia Negro". Double consciousness also creates an element of conflict within the black American, as they struggle (often unsuccessfully) to reconcile their identity as a black person and as an American citizen.