Double-Consciousness

W. E. B. DuBois uses the concepts of ‘the veil’ and ‘double-consciousness’ to explain the peculiar conditions within which African Americans find themselves in the United States and the specific tools at their disposal to understand (and hopefully dismantle) those conditions. The existence of African Americans ‘behind the veil’ of segregation is hidden from the view of most white folk, but those who live behind it also move in the ‘white’ world. As such, they have knowledge about their own lives, about the functioning of the veil, and about the activities of those who live on the other side of the veil as well. The double-consciousness that ensues from being both an African-American and an American provides the basis for deeper insights into the social realm and the possibility for more effective actions against the systems of domination in place.

Essential Reading:

W.E.B. DuBois ‘Of Our Spiritual Strivings’ in The Souls of Black Folk

W.E.B. DuBois ‘Of the Faith of the Fathers’ in The Souls of Black Folk

Further Reading:

Gilroy, Paul ‘Cheer the Weary Traveller, W.E.B. Du Bois, Germany and the Politics of (Dis)placement’ The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness
Questions:

How does ‘double-consciousness’ work as an analytical category to make sense of the world?

What role does ‘experience’ have to play in understanding ‘double-consciousness’?

How can ‘double-consciousness’ help us to understand social inequality (and to do something about it)?

Can those in front of the veil understand ‘double-consciousness’? Does this matter?

Submitted by Gurminder K Bhambra