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White Blues: Can Eric Clapton Embody Du Bois' Double Consciousness?

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WHITE BLUES: CAN ERIC CLAPTON EMBODY DU BOIS’ DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS?

by

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ABSTRACT

In this article I explore if Black consciousness, as described by W.E.B. Du Bois’ theory of double consciousness, can be taken on by those who are White. I analyze songs both written and covered by Eric Clapton, to examine if elements of double consciousness are in his music. Furthermore, I analyze album covers that have Clapton’s image on them, looking for characteristics of physical Blackness. My findings reveal that Eric Clapton does take on aspects of double consciousness, through his music, and facets of physical Blackness. Thus, I discover it is possible for Whites to experience elements of double consciousness.
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The music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways.

- W.E.B. Du Bois

When all the original blues guys are gone, you start to realize that someone has to tend to the tradition. I recognize that I have some responsibility to keep the music alive, and it’s a pretty honorable position to be in.

- Eric Clapton

Introduction

In his book, The Souls of Black Folk, W.E.B. Du Bois eloquently shared the condition of Blacks in America around the turn of the 20th century. He illustrated the national spirit of Blacks by saying, “Lo! we are diseased and dying, cried the dark hosts; we cannot write, our voting is vain; what need of education, since we must cook and serve?” (Du Bois 1903:13). Blacks were struggling with reconstruction, lack of legitimate work, racism, segregation, and all manner of social ills. They fought and toiled against the invisible, but tangible color line that separated Blacks and Whites.

Du Bois argued that out of this pain, was born a gift, a second sight that let them see themselves through another world, a White world. Blacks were given a double vision, and a double mind, where they felt their “two-ness,-an American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, to unreconciled strivings” (Du Bois 1903:9). This “double consciousness” was the fertile soil in which a musical art form grew—the blues.

The blues’ roots were found in the Deep South: Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia, and South Carolina. In the late 19th century the blues sprouted out of African spirituals,
chants, and other musical traditions. It took Black peoples’ native music and combined it with the pain, heartache, and torture of everyday living. The blues tradition was illuminated by the social fact of racial injustice, and resistance to that inequality (Smith 1992:51). These two aspects were a part of the social life that permeated in 19th and 20th century America, and separated Black and White culture with a distinct color line.

Notable artists emerged as the music grew, such as Leadbelly and the legendary Robert Johnson. These musical forefathers inspired the next generation of Black bluesmen to follow the clarion call of their musicianship, some of the more popular artists being Buddy Guy, Muddy Waters, and B.B. King. As the 1960s came, so did a worldwide recognition of blues, especially in England. During this era, White audiences embraced Black blues musicians. Muddy Waters was noted as saying, “The blacks are more interested in the jumpy stuff. The whites want to hear me for what I am” (No Author: 1971). Some of those Whites who listened to B.B. King and others were inspired to become blues artists themselves, including Jeff Beck, Mick Jagger, Jimmy Page, and Eric Clapton.

With this influx of dedicated White musicians to this Black art form, many of them took on elements of physical Blackness, like afros or popular Black clothing, such as dashikis. Some artists went further, and fully immersed themselves in blues culture through constant mimicry of Black blues artists. One of these White musicians separated himself from his cohorts in talent and desire—Eric Clapton. Clapton’s guitar skill became so renowned in England that in subway tunnels the statement, “Clapton is God” could be found spray painted on the walls (Clapton 2007:64). Through his sustained and committed practice of blues music there was a possibility that Clapton developed a sense of double consciousness. Therefore, my research focuses on
whether Black consciousness, as defined by Du Boisian double consciousness, can be taken on by those who are White.

I begin by reviewing the literature on double consciousness, blues music, and race. I then provide detail on my methods, followed by an analysis of the music and images of Clapton. Focusing on the main elements of double consciousness that emerged in the analysis, I provide various explanations for my findings. I conclude with implications of this study for double consciousness and for future research.

Literature Review

In this literature review I first discuss double consciousness and how a variety of scholars have defined the term. I then examine the relationship of double consciousness to blues music.

The term double consciousness was originally used in medicine and psychology, where it was applied to cases of split personality. From there it spread to other disciplines. In 1843 the expression was used in an essay titled, "The Transcendentalist," by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson applied the term "double consciousness," to discuss the problem of the individual who was pulled back from the divine by the demands of daily life. The transcendentalist had moments of clarity that made their existence more difficult, because they then compared those moments of beauty to the everyday insignificance and hostility of life (Dickson 1992:300).

As seen below, Du Bois originally formulated the idea of double consciousness in an essay for the Atlantic Monthly in 1897 (he re-released it in 1903 in the book The Souls of Black Folk). Du Bois drew heavily on popular historical understandings of double consciousness to make his argument to his majority White readership. Du Bois’ description of double
consciousness below has shades of Emerson, as does the title of the essay, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings"—evoking transcendental images. Du Bois defined double consciousness by saying;

the Negro is a sort of seventh son...gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world...this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others...One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two warring souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self (1903:9).

In these poetic lines Du Bois attempted to give insight into life within the Black community. He detailed the pain, tension, and struggle between living in two worlds—Black and White. Du Bois characterized Blacks as a tenaciously strong people, whose will kept their “warring ideals” from destroying them. They longed to know themselves, and yearned to combine both Black and White ideals into something truer and finer.

Hence, double consciousness, in its entirety, seems to be a four fold concept. First, that within the Black person there was a tension between being African and American. They struggled to keep these two conflicted parts together. Secondly, they faced an internal conflict of White culture deeply influencing their self-perception. Thirdly, they externally encountered racism that kept them from being fully American. Lastly, there was a yearning to merge their double consciousness into a cohesive, better whole.

Du Bois thought that as Blacks grew in education and knowledge, the more they became aware of their double consciousness. Du Bois labeled Blacks who achieved high levels of
education the *talented tenth*. Through educational attainment, Black intellectuals had “discovered the mountain path to Canaan: longer than the highway of Emancipation and law, steep and rugged, but straight, leading to heights high enough to overlook life” (1903:12). For Du Bois, a classical education\(^1\) led Black intellectuals to see both sides of White and Black life, where they had a “dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, self-respect” (1903:12). A classical education gave Blacks new found personal understanding and depth, that led them to have “broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of relation of men to it” (1903).

Hence, Du Bois asserted that the talented tenth were worthy to lead the Black community because of the rigorous training they obtained.

The Du Boisian scholar, Dr. Ernest Allen, has posited that the Black upper class wanted to be an exact copy of White middle and upper-class America. He stated that one reason for this was due to Black intellectuals being “reared in homes that placed a premium on middle class values and a Victorian code of behavior.” In addition, Allen said that the “black upper-class, then, conspired to mold it into a replica of middle- and upper-class white America” (2003:26).

Thereby, Allen argued that upper-class Blacks were raised in an environment that socialized them to have the same code of conduct as middle and upper-class Whites. As a result, for Allen, the talented tenth were White in attitude and values, and not linked to the toil of the Black lower class; therefore, they did not experience double consciousness.

However, Allen missed an immensely clear point—that when Black intellectuals (talented tenth) went out to shop, eat, socialize—they did so in a segregated community. They were Black, despite their *values*, and encountered racism in a multitude of ways that affected their psyche.

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\(^1\) Classical education is defined as math, science, literary studies, philosophy, languages and art.
One example of this was pointed out by Du Bois in his previously mentioned essay, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” where he chronicled his own experiences with the double consciousness. For example, Du Bois discussed that at times when he engaged in a conversation with a White person, the White individual desired to show where they stood in the racial landscape. They would make statements that reminded Du Bois he was a problem, as illustrated below;

I know an excellent colored man in my town...Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I [Du Bois] smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I seldom say a word.

Being a problem is a strange experience,—peculiar even for one who has never been anything else (1996:7).

Du Bois was not a problem because of his learning, thoughts, or actions, but because he resided in Black skin, at times he was pleasant or angry with these interactions, yet knowing his existence was a hiccup in world history left him feeling peculiar. This illustrates how a Black elite (talented tenth) could experience double consciousness.

Furthermore, Du Bois recited a fictional story that demonstrated how a Black intellectual experienced double consciousness. In the story, the character Black John was raised in a small town and left to attain a college education. While there Black John began to go through a transformation, “He felt angry now when men did not call him ‘Mister,’ he clenched his hands at the ‘Jim Crow’ cars, and chafed at the color-line that hemmed in him and his” (1903:166). Upon finishing his education, Black John returned to the town of his birth. He came across the Judges son, White John, attempting to rape his sister. Black John kills him. He was tracked down and executed for an offense a White man would have walked away from. Black John was crushed by
the materiality of racism (Ciccariello-Maher 2009:382). This materiality was something that Du Bois asserted that the Black intellectual faced.

Du Bois also argued that through education, Blacks were able to have a broader view of the racial milieu. They would analyze the burden that fell upon their backs, and come to know the “dead-weight of social degradation partially masked behind a half-named Negro problem” (Du Bois 1903:12). In this way, Blacks learned their place in history. That is, they were cognizant of the socio-historical forces concerning the racist acts committed against them and their community; consequently, they were able to see both sides of the racial divide with greater clarity. This led them to experience a higher awareness of double consciousness than non-educated Blacks.

Even though Black intellectuals had a greater awareness of double consciousness they were not the only individuals to experience the phenomenon. Blacks in lower classes related to it because of their similar capacity for reflection. Du Bois seemed to have thought that double consciousness was ubiquitous throughout the Black experience when he said, “this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand people” (1903:10). In referring to the “ten thousand people,” Du Bois was alluding to the entirety of the Black population. Since Blacks varied in education, experience, and wisdom, the level of understanding double consciousness was different for all, but no less real. All Blacks, as Du Bois asserts, have experienced this internal relation to the world to varying degrees. I now turn to discussing the relationship between double consciousness and blues music.
Double Consciousness and the Blues

The reality of double consciousness was made manifest through the musical traditions of the south, in particular blues music. This was evident in the double structure that was used in innumerable blues songs. Thematic pairs of good and bad, courage and cowardice, rich and poor were the foundation of many blues tunes (Oliver 1982:182). The strong prevalence of this binary structure in the blues possibly came from Blacks who experienced double consciousness.

The blues came out of the heartache of being Black in America—it was a form of therapeutic release from pain and stress. The blues “lifted the singer out of his depression, anxiety, loneliness, awareness of his ‘mistreated’ state, and enabled him to cope with the condition” (Oliver 1982:197). It allowed the artist to express their pain at living in the prison of racism. Blues music was a medium for Blacks to accept the disadvantaged life they had, and work to transcend it through musical expression.

Due to the pain, tension, and striving of Black culture, blues music cultivated a high level of feeling and passion. This could be heard in the roughness and howling within the singers’ voices, the pounding rhythm, and the blue note (Smith 1992:46). The blue note was when the third, fifth, and seventh notes within a musical scale were flattened. This produced the characteristic sound of sadness in the music. All of these features, combined, created a musical genre that was uniquely emotive.

In the 1950s, Black blues artists such as Big Bill Broonzy and Muddy Waters traveled to London, and were welcomed by enthusiastic fans. Furthermore, blues great B.B. King discussed his experience with White fans in England when he said they “knew about the blues before I came there...[T]hey were interested in what I had to offer, and they came to listen” (Daley
These Black artists helped establish the British blues boom of the 1960s, which produced famous White musicians such as The Rolling Stones, John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers, Mick Fleetwood, and Eric Clapton.

Debate has been fierce as to whether Whites could play the blues or not. Some have said Whites could not play the blues because they did not have the right cultural proximity to the original sources of blues music. Others, though, have argued that an individual from any race could play “real blues,” and to do so would take mastery over the genre and integrity within it. “Real blues” then, could be defined as a person who has mastered the elements of rhythm, melody, lyrical arrangement along with being non-exploitive of the art form. But the most important factor in playing the blues, was expressing the feeling of the blues (Rudinow 1994:134).

Ethnomusicologist Dr. Mike Daley posited that the increased popularity of the blues among Whites in the 1960s came from recognizing a lack of “authenticity in white rock music” (2003:161). Daley thought Whites were yearning for a music that let them express their feelings.

Eric Clapton was one of those who was craving authenticity in music. For instance, he recounted one of his first experiences hearing the blues when he said;

the first time I heard blues music, it was like a crying of the soul to me. I immediately identified with it. It was the first time I’d heard anything akin to how I was feeling, which was an inner poverty. It stirred me quite blindly. I wasn’t sure just why I wanted to play it, but I felt completely in tune (Coleman 1986:28).

As seen in this passage Eric Clapton felt the blues deeply in his being—it communicated to
his soul, and he felt in total harmony with it. Clapton was struck by the energy and feeling in blues, and wanted that same experience for himself.

Clapton described another of his initial experiences with the blues by stating, “For me there is something primitively soothing about this music, and it went straight to my nervous system, making me feel ten feet tall” (Clapton 2007:33). Clapton had a figurative physical experience with the blues, it left him bigger and full of life. As he grew older his passion for the genre only increased, so much so that in 1965 Clapton stated he was “very critical and judgmental of anybody in music who wasn’t playing just pure blues” (2007:53). He was galvanized by the music and determined to play it in its original form.

Clapton found abiding inspiration in one of blues’ pioneers, Robert Johnson. Johnson was a Black man born in Mississippi in 1911. Clapton discussed his first memories of hearing Johnson in 1962 when he said, “I realized that, on some level, I had found a master, and that following this man’s example would be my life’s work” (Clapton 2007:40). In making this comment Clapton illustrated his strong desire to imitate Johnson. Clapton’s admiration for Johnson continued when in 2004 he recorded an entire album of Johnson’s songs, titled Me and Mr. Johnson. The album was also made into a DVD, where in one segment Clapton played in the same hotel room that Johnson did when he made a record in 1937. This demonstrates Eric’s passion to emulate the musical and physical style of Johnson by playing in the same environment.

Examining Eric Clapton’s relationship to the blues allows a snapshot of a White man’s relationship to Black culture. Clapton’s intense desire for musical authenticity within the blues

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2 Johnson was murdered in 1938 at the age of 27 when a man slipped poison into his beer for flirting with his wife.
places him in an ideal position to be studied as a potential bearer of double consciousness. Moreover, he is a master of the blues guitar, which was confirmed by being rated fourth on *Rolling Stones* 100 Greatest Guitarists\(^3\) list (2010). Additionally, due to Clapton’s fame, data was readily available concerning him, which made his music and physical image more effective units of analysis than a less-famous individual. I now turn to describing my methods used in examining Clapton’s relationship to the blues.

**Methods**

My units of analysis were songs, both written and covered by Eric Clapton, along with all album covers that had Clapton’s image on them. Using a random sampling method, I selected 10 songs from five subsequent decades starting in the 1960s, for a total of 50 songs\(^4\). I chose Clapton’s songs over time so as to examine the potential changes he might make in taking on double consciousness. Also, I looked at his songs over time to compare potential changes in taking on (or not) elements of double consciousness with what was occurring in Clapton’s personal life. Of the 10 songs selected for each decade, five were written by Clapton and five were covered by him (i.e. written by someone else). These songs were found off of the internet data bases *eclyrics.net* and *The Eric Clapton Lyric Archive*. I then catalogued all 44 album covers\(^5\) that had Clapton’s image on them. The album covers were found in the discography section of Eric Clapton’s page in the online encyclopedia *Wikipedia*.

When I analyzed songs, both written and covered by Clapton, I looked at individual verses (i.e. a paragraph of lyrics) to see if they contained lyrics associated with the themes of

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\(^3\) The *Rolling Stones* 100 Greatest Guitarists list contains guitarists from all genres.

\(^4\) For a total list of songs, refer to Appendix A.

\(^5\) For a total list of album covers, refer to Appendix B.
double consciousness\(^6\) as defined by Du Bois: tension, racism, classism, internal conflict, and/or merging into a truer self. Tension was defined as the strain between what Clapton actually experienced, as compared to his expected experience. Racism was established as lyrics that implied or directly discussed prejudice and/or discrimination based on race. Classism was interpreted as lyrics that tacitly or directly discussed prejudice and/or discrimination based on class. Internal conflict was defined as an outside force influencing self-perception. And finally, merging into a truer self, was understood as lyrics that implied or directly discussed a longing to merge his double self into a better and truer self.

When I found a verse with one, some, or all five elements they were marked. A verse could have a possible total of five elements; hence, the higher the number, the more elements of double consciousness in the verse. Regarding the album covers, I looked for Clapton emulating aspects of physical Blackness. For instance, Clapton having clothes, hair, and/or body language that denoted a Black style. One example might be an afro. Finding such signs could suggest that Clapton was taking on not just mental aspects of Black consciousness, but physical ones as well. I first present and discuss findings from the lyrics, then turn to presenting and discussing findings from the analysis of album covers.

**Lyrics and Double Consciousness**

Table 1 contains the results of my analysis of songs written and covered by Eric Clapton. During the five decades this study looked at, there were 49 total elements of double consciousness found in Eric Clapton's songs. In the 1960s Clapton manifested seven elements of double consciousness (six written, one covered), while in the 1970s he manifested 20 (ten

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\(^6\) Refer to page 3 for Du Bois' original definition of double consciousness.
written, ten covered). The 1980s had the least elements of double consciousness with zero.

During the 1990s expressions increased to 12 (two written, ten covered), the 2000s decreased slightly with 10 total elements of double consciousness (six written, four covered).

When looking at the element with the most aspects of double consciousness we can see that classism was first with 16, followed by racism and merging into truer self—each with 10 elements total. The element with the least amount of double consciousness was internal conflict with six elements total.

Table 1. Comparison of Double Consciousness in the Songs Written (w) & Covered (c) by Eric Clapton

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of Double Consciousness</th>
<th>1960s w/c</th>
<th>1970s w/c</th>
<th>1980s w/c</th>
<th>1990s w/c</th>
<th>2000s w/c</th>
<th>Total Elements of Double Consciousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Songs with Double Consciousness</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>5/7 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>2/0</td>
<td>4/3 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>3/2</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/4</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>4/6 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classism</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>3/6</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/5</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>4/12 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Conflict</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>3/0</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>2/0</td>
<td>6/0 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merge into Truer Self</td>
<td>2/0</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>2/0</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>6/4 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Elements of Double Consciousness, written vs. covered</td>
<td>6/1</td>
<td>10/10</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>2/10</td>
<td>6/4</td>
<td>24/25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Elements of Double Consciousness</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Various factors help to explain the results. In the 1960s Clapton was in various bands: The Yardbirds, John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers, Cream, Blind Faith, along with Delaney and Bonnie and Friends. Throughout this era Clapton worked with many different artists, possibly limiting his expression of double consciousness to only seven in this decade. In the 1970s
Clapton went solo in his musical career, faced an all consuming drug problem, and a tumultuous love life. These three factors combined could have strongly contributed to the high numbers of double consciousness (20) manifested in that decade, and the fact that he had no instances of merging into a truer self.

The 1980s was the weakest of all decades for double consciousness (0), in part due to Clapton going to drug rehab and being compelled to go in a different direction musically. He later remarked that “there was no reason for me to be making records at all,” concerning the years that came after his rehabilitation (Clapton 2003:212). Also, Warner Bros., rejected Clapton’s first solo record after rehab, saying there “weren’t enough potential hit singles among them” (2003:217). Clapton decided to let go of his song writing responsibilities, and allow Warner Bros. to coordinate what he played, along with producing his album Behind the Sun in 1985. Furthermore, Clapton’s good friend and pop musician Phil Collins collaborated on the album, and infused it with drum machines and synthesizers, which took Clapton’s music down a new course, and away from the blues.

Through the 1990s, expressions of double consciousness increased in each category except internal conflict (12). Clapton returned to making blues centered music in this decade with the albums Unplugged, Pilgrim, and Riding with the King. On Unplugged’, Clapton covered songs from blues greats like: Big Bill Broonzy, Muddy Waters, Jesse Fuller, and Robert Johnson. As well, the album Riding with the King was a collaboration between Clapton and the celebrated blues guitarist and singer, B.B. King. Ultimately, switching back to playing blues music increased Clapton’s expression of double consciousness throughout the 1990s.

7 Clapton won a total of six Grammy Awards for this completely acoustic album.
Within the 2000s there were higher numbers of Clapton wanting to *merge into a truer self* (10). This could be attributed to Clapton’s new life as a husband and a father of three girls. He commented on the decision to marry his wife Melia by saying, “I was happy to know that my life was entering a new, fuller phase” (Clapton 2003:279). During this time, Clapton seemed to have transformed into a deeper person.

_A Closer Look at Lyrics_

Looking at the lyrics of individual songs written or covered by Clapton can provide further insight into how double consciousness manifested in his music. A good example of a song that showed facets of double consciousness was, “Better Make it Through Today,” written by Clapton for his album _461 Ocean Boulevard_, which was released in 1974.

> Life is what you make it,
> That's what the people say.
> And if I can't make it through tomorrow,
> I'd better make it through today.
>
> I have had my share of troubles;
> It's nothing new to me.
> When I look around me,
> All I see is misery.

These lyrics indicate that Clapton was divided between the hope of being able to choose a life of his own, while he deeply recognized the pains of his current circumstances. When he said, “When I look around me, all I see is misery,” Clapton was possibly describing a social condition which depressed him. Furthermore, there was a sense of acceptance of the troubles he encountered being juxtaposed by those who said, “Life is what you make it.” Also, he was faced
with a bitter conflict between his personal experience and what the world told him was possible. This was made manifest through his battle with heroin. Many of his friends thought he was going to kill himself. But he moved to a small town in England, got clean, and started to make hit records again.

The song, “Singin’ the Blues,” written by Mary McCreary and covered by Clapton in his 1975 album, *There’s One in Every Crowd*. This song described elements of double consciousness through the struggle of economic hardship.

I've been working so hard,
Just came home from my job.
Looked down in my wallet,
Good God, I've been robbed.

Now where can my money be,
All my hard-earned pay?
What am I going to do now?
I got my bills to pay.

Ain't no way to get even
Because, you know what I mean,
Every time I make me some money
Somebody's going to take it from me.

For Du Bois, part of double consciousness was exhibited through the friction between being American and Black. A prevalent aspect in the American value system when this song was created was the American Dream. This meant being able to work, and based on that work, achieve a certain level of prosperity and comfort. Yet, for most Black individuals, this was a
fantasy. Despite their efforts, they were trapped in jobs that did not pay enough, and lead to circumstances that were detrimental. This song encapsulated that struggle.

The first stanza lamented that regardless of how hard he worked Clapton could not get ahead, and in all actuality felt “robbed.” Moving to the second stanza, he expressed worry and psychological pain at not being able to pay his bills. In the third stanza he described a potentially racist and/or classist atmosphere by lamenting, “Ain’t no way to get even. Because, you know what I mean.” All of these pieces together clearly described sentiments within Du Bois’ double consciousness. This is relatable to Clapton because his two highest elements of double consciousness during the 1970s were classism with nine and racism with 10.

Clapton may not have experienced racial injustice in his life, but economic vicissitudes did beset him. Eric said that his family “could have been considered poor” during his youth (Clapton 2007:7). Potentially his austere upbringing helped him relate to the pains and privations of Blacks in America. Furthermore, Clapton’s heroin addiction in the 1970s was costing him so much that he was faced with the decision to work or sell his stuff to pay for his habit (2007:141). This scenario could have led Clapton to feeling a sense of emotional and material poverty.

An additional song with aspects of double consciousness that Clapton covered was “Rollin’ and Tumblin,’” off of his 1992 Unplugged album, originally performed by Muddy Waters.

Well now, come here baby, sit down on daddy’s knee.
Well now, come here baby, sit down on daddy’s knee.
I want to tell you about the way they treated me.

Well, I rolled and tumbled, cried the whole night long.
Well, I rolled and tumbled, cried the whole night long.
When I woke up this morning, all I had was gone.

This song could be seen as having characteristics of double consciousness. In the first stanza he recounted how he was treated badly (possibly by society), and the second stanza he expressed his emotional pain about his loss (perhaps economic). Due to the song being written originally in the racist atmosphere of 1928 America, it very well could have been about experiencing double consciousness.

Another song that demonstrated components of double consciousness was in his 2001 album *Reptile*, called “Superman Inside.”

Look in the mirror, even with a broken heart I’m fine.
Keep on pushing, getting closer to peace of mind.
Look in the mirror, even with a broken heart I’m fine.
Living is so sweet now with Superman inside.

No more running, ain’t going to hide away.
I’m standing outside in the pouring rain.

This song alluded to Clapton transforming into a finer self. As he looked into the mirror he was broken, but accepted it. He was working hard to have peace, and he saw that it was coming. Moreover, he realized that he had the strength inside to face his foes. To liken this to Du Bois, “Superman Inside” is when a Black person realized that they were “to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his powers and his latent genius” (1903:9) “Superman Inside” could be seen as a metaphor for virtuous strength and the power to act with intelligence. I now turn to discussing the results of the album covers analysis.
Album Covers and Double Consciousness

As previously noted, in the album covers I looked for examples of Clapton exemplifying aspects of physical Blackness. In Table 2 album titles with an asterisk were identified as having characteristics of physical Blackness.

Table 2. List of Album Covers Depicting Elements of Physical Blackness (PB)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five Live Yardbirds</td>
<td>Bell Bottom Blues</td>
<td>Just One Night</td>
<td>Unplugged</td>
<td>Riding with the King*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Your Love</td>
<td>Eric Clapton</td>
<td>Steppin' Out</td>
<td>Tears in Heaven</td>
<td>Reptile</td>
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<tr>
<td>Having a Rave Up</td>
<td>Live Cream</td>
<td>Money and Cigarettes</td>
<td>The Cream of Clapton</td>
<td>Me and Mr. Johnson*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonny Boy Williamson and The Yardbirds</td>
<td>After Midnight</td>
<td>August</td>
<td>Change the World</td>
<td>The Road to Escondido</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blues Breakers with Eric Clapton</td>
<td>Live at the Fillmore</td>
<td>The Cream of Eric Clapton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fresh Cream</td>
<td>Guitar Boogie</td>
<td>Journeyman</td>
<td>Clapton Chronicles: The Best of Eric Clapton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disraeli Gears*</td>
<td>Live Cream Volume II</td>
<td>Crossroads</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strange Brew: The Very Best of Cream*</td>
<td>The History of Eric Clapton</td>
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<tr>
<td>20th Century Masters: The Millennium Collection: The Best of Cream</td>
<td>In Concert - Derek and the Dominos</td>
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<td>BBC Sessions*</td>
<td>Eric Clapton's Rainbow Concert</td>
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<td>Gold*</td>
<td>No Reason to Cry</td>
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<td>Sunshine of Your Love</td>
<td>Slowhand</td>
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<td>White Room</td>
<td>Backless</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goodbye</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 out of 14 covers with PB</td>
<td>1 out of 13 covers with PB</td>
<td>0 out of 7 covers with PB</td>
<td>1 out of 6 covers with PB</td>
<td>2 out of 4 covers with PB</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In the 1960s Eric was on 14 covers with four of them displaying physical Blackness (35%), while in the 1970s his image was on 13 albums with one having traits of physical Blackness (7%). Throughout the 1980s he was on seven covers, showing zero facets of physical Blackness (0%), consistent with the absence of double consciousness elements in lyrics he wrote and covered in the 1980s. The 1990s had Clapton’s image on six covers with one characteristic of physical Blackness (16%), while in 2000s two out of four albums with his image had those...
traits (50%). Upon observing the album covers I recognized characteristics of physical Blackness on 18% (8 of 44) of the albums where Clapton’s image was present. When viewing all the eight album covers they denote a distinct level of Clapton aligning with physical Blackness.

Two of the 16 albums with characteristics of physical Blackness were recorded between 1966-68, the BBC Sessions and Gold. In the BBC Sessions cover, Eric Clapton is on the right, and on the Gold album he is in the center. In each photo he had a large afro, which had to be permed because of his naturally straight hair.

One example of Clapton’s desire to take on Blackness occurred in 1966, when he met Jimi Hendrix in London for the first time. Jimi went to a club to jam with Cream (Eric Clapton’s band), and proceeded to play the song “Killing Floor.” Multiple accounts cite that shortly after Eric got his hair permed like Jimi (guitarsite.com). This suggests that Clapton was desirous to take on physical components of Black consciousness.

One of the more telling covers was Me and Mr. Johnson, released in 2004. This cover showed the only two known photos of Robert Johnson, one on the wall in the background, and
the other on the table beside Clapton. Clapton was sitting in the chair and dressed in a similar suit and tie as Johnson. In addition, the guitar Clapton was holding was almost identical to the one Johnson had in the background wall photo. This cover implied that Clapton was Robert Johnson—that he was representing Johnson’s deep Southern Blackness, and the double consciousness that Johnson experienced living in Mississippi during the 1920s.

The findings suggest from examining Clapton’s songs and his album covers that he did exhibit a type of double consciousness. He became a racial immigrant, lived on foreign soil, spoke the language, and infused the culture into his bone and sinew. Clapton’s lyrics revealed that he felt a similar tension as Blacks in regards to attaining prosperity. He showed through his lyrics, both written and covered, that Black consciousness was something he was familiar with. Also, his physical appearance on certain album covers denoted a distinct level of aligning with physical Blackness.

**Conclusion**

Can Black consciousness, as defined by Du Bois’ double consciousness, be taken on by those who are White? My expectation was to find that double consciousness could be taken on by Whites, as they have felt similar heartache, loneliness, and pain as Blacks, caused through societal marginalization by various social forces. For instance, many Whites have experienced poverty, while at the same time told by society they should be a part of the middle and upper-
class economic landscape. I argue that an experience such as this could have the potential to create a similar psychological bifurcation that Du Bois outlined with double consciousness.

The potential for Clapton experiencing double consciousness hinges on the process Du Bois described of educated Blacks taking on White culture. The Black intellectual would become versed in the qualities and values of White culture, i.e., manners, mode of speech, history, etc. This information combined in the educated Black individual to produce something new in “Western ideological, political, and philosophical thought: the formation of racial mutation and hybridity” (Rutledge 1996:81). Thus, educated Blacks had stepped across the color line line to take on Whiteness.

Conversely, Clapton crossed the color line to take on Blackness. The data shows he immersed himself into the blues; he learned the vernacular, style, and groove of the music. This helped him gain a portion of the essence of Black living as experienced through double consciousness.

Music itself, and especially blues, has a way of allowing people to transcend racial boundaries. The philosopher Dr. Steven Smith stated in his article, “Blues and Our Mind-Body Problem,” that the blues united people because pain was pain, and blues music was the expression of that pain. Through this common ground people were able to have a platform for common communication (Smith 1992:51). As demonstrated through the lyrics of Clapton, he felt similar struggles as many Black blues pioneers, but with one distinct difference. He did not have the constant burden of racism. He had taken on aspects of Black culture, yet he never had to face the same external racism as Black musicians.
In my research of historical information on Clapton, I did not find a single instance of him being limited by his race. In fact, Clapton’s race gave him a distinct cultural advantage over other talented Black artists, in that he could make Black music palatable for a White middle-class audience.

For Clapton this made his relationship with double consciousness an interesting one. Not having similar experiences with racism, he could never fully appreciate or relate to the specific struggles of Black blues musicians. But, the key word was *fully*. Clapton had lacked the cultural heritage of the blues, but he had demonstrated empathy in his relationship to it. This empathy had given him the feeling of the blues; hence, he was able to identify with it on a level of universal human struggle, rather than direct experience. Also, the ways in which Clapton took on double consciousness were similar to Blacks—through education and experience. Clapton learned to express double consciousness through his lyrics and physical style toward the blues.

Lyrically, Clapton exhibited a keen understanding of struggle and hope, which were key facets of double consciousness; thereby, he connected to it by a feeling of internal harmony and empathy. His embodiment of similar dress and appearance of the famous bluesman Robert Johnson showed that corporeally he had gone to great lengths to display his link with Blackness. It appears Black culture, through the blues, influenced Clapton’s self-perception immensely. These aspects helped to reveal a type of double consciousness that was different from the Black

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8 It should be noted that many critics saw this as the misappropriation of Black music, in which after an initial period of condemnation and rejection as being culturally inferior, blues eventually won praise for its artistic qualities, and then was appropriated by White imitators. The White imitators’ music was mass produced for a huge profit, and accepted in the mainstream as definitive. This pattern could be seen with Elvis, The Beatles, Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, and many others (Rudinow 1994:130). While this idea is important to acknowledge it is outside the scope of this paper.
experience of the concept. Clapton accessed double consciousness through feelings of shared humanity, rather than direct racial segregation. Hence, Clapton became a bearer of a kind of White double consciousness.

Future research should review every Eric Clapton song for aspects of double consciousness, and control for those co-written by him, rather than using a random sample. In addition, extending this research to other notable White male blues musicians of Clapton’s era, e.g. Stevie Ray Vaughn and Mick Fleetwood, would assist in showing if the pattern identified here is found elsewhere. Moreover, investigating if this same phenomenon is consistent across gender, for example with a female White blues artist, such as Bonnie Raitt. It would also be interesting to see if White double consciousness extends across age; therefore, researching if young White blues artists like 33 year old Joe Bonamassa or 30 year old Johnny Lang have experienced the double consciousness phenomenon might prove fruitful.

My research has demonstrated that aspects of double consciousness can be experienced by someone who is White. Moreover, it has shown that a person may take on—through empathy—the racial experience of another. This opens up possibilities concerning Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness which have yet to be explored.
Appendix A - Full List of Songs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1960s</th>
<th>1970s</th>
<th>1980s</th>
<th>1990s</th>
<th>2000s</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunshine of Your Love</td>
<td>Why Does Love Got to Be So Bad</td>
<td>Hold Me Lord</td>
<td>My Father's Eyes</td>
<td>Modern Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Clapton &amp; Whitlock</td>
<td>by Clapton &amp; Whitlock</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strange Brew</td>
<td>Don't Know Why</td>
<td>Pretty Girl</td>
<td>Pilgrim*</td>
<td>Superman Inside*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Clapton, Collins, &amp;</td>
<td>by Bramlett &amp; Clapton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pappalardi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anyone for Tennis</td>
<td>Got to Get Better</td>
<td>Same Old Blues</td>
<td>One Chance</td>
<td>Back Home</td>
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<tr>
<td>by Clapton &amp; Sharp</td>
<td>in a Little While*</td>
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<td>Presence of the Lord*</td>
<td>Better Make it Through Today*</td>
<td>Tearing Us Apart</td>
<td>Fall Like Rain</td>
<td>One Track Mind</td>
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<tr>
<td>Badge</td>
<td>Carnival</td>
<td>Hold On</td>
<td>Needs His Woman</td>
<td>Three Little Girls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>Pearly Queen</td>
<td>Just One Night</td>
<td>Nobody Knows You When</td>
<td></td>
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<td>by John Lee Hooker</td>
<td>by Capaldi &amp; Winwood</td>
<td></td>
<td>You're Down and Out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Train Kept-A-Rollin</td>
<td>Please be With Me</td>
<td>Setting Me Up</td>
<td>Rollin' and Tumblin</td>
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<tr>
<td>by Bradshaw, Kay, &amp; Mann</td>
<td>by Charles Scott Boyer</td>
<td>by Mark Knopfler</td>
<td>by Muddy Waters*</td>
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<td>Another Man</td>
<td>Driftin' Blues</td>
<td>Rambling on My</td>
<td>Hoochie Coochie Man</td>
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<tr>
<td>by John Mayall</td>
<td>by Brown, Moore,</td>
<td>Mind by Robert</td>
<td>by Willie Dixon</td>
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<td>It Ain't Right</td>
<td>McGee</td>
<td>Johnson</td>
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<td>by Little Walter</td>
<td>Singin' the Blues</td>
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<td>Got You On My Mind</td>
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<td>Crossroads</td>
<td>Last Night</td>
<td>Hound Dog</td>
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<tr>
<td>by Robert Johnson*</td>
<td>by Walter Jacobs</td>
<td>by Lieber &amp; Stoller</td>
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<td>Stop Breakin' Down</td>
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<td>Blues</td>
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<td>by Robert Johnson</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*These songs had elements of double consciousness.

9 Songs listed without an author are written solely by Clapton.
## Appendix B - Full List of Albums

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1960’s</th>
<th>1970’s</th>
<th>1980’s</th>
<th>1990’s</th>
<th>2000’s</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five Live Bell Bottom Blues</td>
<td>For Your Love Eric Clapton</td>
<td>Just One Night Steppin’ Out</td>
<td>Unplugged Tears in Heaven</td>
<td>Riding with the King* Riding with the King*</td>
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<td>Yardbirds</td>
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<td>For Your Love</td>
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<td>Having a Rave Up</td>
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<td>Sonny Boy After Midnight</td>
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<td>Williamson and</td>
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<td>The Yardbirds</td>
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<td>Blues Breakers</td>
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<tr>
<td>with Eric Clapton</td>
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<td>Fresh Cream</td>
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<td>The Millennium Collection: The</td>
<td>In Concert - Derek</td>
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<td>Best of Cream</td>
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<td>Sunshine of Your Love</td>
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<td>White Room</td>
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<td>Goodbye</td>
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</table>

*These albums had elements of physical Blackness.
References


AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Ryan Gabriel was born in Oroville, CA and graduated from Brighton High School in 1999. He enrolled at Utah State in the spring semester of 2007 as an undeclared student, during his sophomore year he declared sociology as his major and philosophy as his minor. Ryan’s deep interest in sociology started when he took Dr. Christy Glass’s Sociology of Gender course. At that point he knew that he had found a major that could transform into a calling. Also, Ryan was president of Alpha Kappa Delta (Sociological Honor Society) during his junior year. Ryan spent significant time working at the university as a Supplemental Instruction Leader for Sociology 1010 and as an Undergraduate Teaching Fellow for various sociology classes.

Upon graduation Ryan and his wife will move to Seattle, WA where he was accepted to the University of Washington’s graduate sociology program. He will obtain his doctorate and plans on teaching and doing research at the university level after his graduation.