**Published in 1903, W.E.B. DuBois wrote about the concept of double consciousness—being both black and American—in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*.**

“It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two 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. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He wouldn't bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.” **[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Sixty-five years later, Martin Luther King, Jr. also touched on the concept of double consciousness in a 1968 speech “*A New Sense of Direction,*” which was given to the SCLC and spoke on the changing nature of the Civil Rights movement and the rise of black power.**

Every man must ultimately confront the question, "Who am I?" and seek to answer it honestly. One of the first principles of personal adjustment is the principle of self-acceptance. The Negro's greatest dilemma is that in order to be healthy he must accept his ambivalence. The Negro is a child of two cultures, Africa and America. The problem is that, in the search for wholeness, too many Negroes seek to embrace only one side of their natures. Some, seeking to reject their heritage, are ashamed of their color, ashamed of black art and music, and determine what is beautiful and good by the standards of white society. They end up frustrated and without cultural roots. Others seek to reject anything American and to identify totally with Africa, even to the point of wearing African clothes. This approach leads also to frustration because the American Negro is not an African…The American Negro is neither totally African nor totally Western. He is Afro-American, a true hybrid, a combination of two cultures.

Who are we? Let us not be afraid to say it. We are the descendants of slaves. We are the offspring of noble men and women who were kidnapped from their native land and chained in ships like beasts. We are the heirs of a great and exploited continent known as Africa. We are the heirs of rape, fire and murder, and I, for one, am not ashamed of this past. My shame is for those who became so inhuman that they could inflict this torture upon us. We are also Americans—abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny, is tied up with the destiny of America. And, in spite of the psychological appeals of identification with Africa, the Negro must face the fact that America is now his home, a home that he helped to build through blood, sweat and tears. Since we are American, the solution to our problem will not come through seeking to build a separate black nation within a nation but by finding that creative majority and together moving toward that colorless power that we need for security and justice.

1. **How did the concept of double consciousness evolve from when DuBois originally wrote about it in 1903 to when MLK spoke about it in the midst of the black power movement in 1968?**

1. **DuBois was a pan-Africanist from the North while MLK was a Baptist minister from the South. Do you think their backgrounds influenced their feelings about being African American? Or did the time period play a larger role?**
1. Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk.* New York, Avenel, NJ: Gramercy Books; 1994 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)