

Intersectionality in Contemporary Rap

W.E.B. Du Bois, the first Black sociologist who received his PhD from Harvard University, came up with the concept of a double consciousness. This concept describes the two behavioral scripts, one for moving through the world, and one for incorporating the external opinions of prejudiced onlookers, which are consciously maintained by Black people (Dalton, 2019, p. 31). In Du Bois's book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, he talks about how the problem of the twentieth century is the color line and continues to outline his thoughts about having a double consciousness (1903). This idea of having a multifaceted conception of oneself is most prevalent in the Black community. Society's perceptions of Black people and other people of color have influenced the way those individuals view themselves and the world surrounding them. These people have to take these identities and make sense of both "consciousnesses" through their single body. Du Bois's thought about the problem of a color line exists not only in the twentieth century, but also in the twenty-first century.

Contemporary artists in today's music industry are beginning to incorporate heavier themes into their songs that many are not used to hearing on their local radio stations. Many modern day artists are becoming more comfortable with addressing the realities behind what media may deem to be "controversial topics". These realities often have to do with race, gender identity, sex, the current social climate, etc. A few of the many artists that touch on these types of subjects include Kendrick Lamar, Amine, Childish Gambino, J. Cole, H.E.R, and Noname. Noname's song "Song 33" explores and contributes to W.E.B Dubois's concept of the double consciousness.

To preface, J. Cole released a song called "Snow on tha Bluff", a song he released after George Floyd's and Oluwatoyin Salau's death. In his song he addresses an unnamed woman who

speaks out about the social climate and media (Henry 2020). It had not been long until the artist, Noname had heard his song and knew it was about her. Noname then responds to J. Cole's song a mere two days later, creating the song "Song 33". In this song, Noname raps about the topics of the social state of the United States, mentioning the patriarchy, the disproportional targeting of black women, and a response to Cole's song. She raps, "I saw a demon on my shoulder, it's lookin' like patriarchy...Why Toyin body don't embody all the life she wanted? A baby, just nineteen...One girl missin', another one go missin' One girl missin', another one...Yo, but little did I know all my readin' would be a bother It's trans women bein' murdered and this is all he can offer? And this is all y'all receive?" ("Song 33", 2020). Noname's song contains the concept of Du Bois's double consciousness, because she raps about the identity of a woman and the identity of being Black in American society. Since J. Cole is half Black and half White and is a man, he is at a higher advantage to Noname, who is an outspoken, darker-skinned Black woman. "Song 33" brings up that being a Black woman in American society is difficult. Black women go missing or get killed often without all of the media trying to get them justice and trans Black women are being discriminated against for simply existing. Noname's song makes listeners think twice about society and the constructs that are hammered into people's brains the minute they're introduced into the world. Women are already held at a high standard to take on the nurturing, mother role, and adding onto that list, being Black in America adds so many more implications to someone's consciousness. Since Noname is educated and outspoken about the social climate, people online and even J. Cole himself were taken aback. They were surprised by her response with "Song 33" because of the social constructions that have been forced upon individuals. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness is outlined in Noname's song and is more prevalent in modern music, especially in today's social climate.

References

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