

Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues": An Historical Story of Double-Consciousness and Its Relevance in Today's America

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Abstract

This article explores James Baldwin's short story "Sonny's Blues" is one of the best examples of how African-Americans are sandwiched between two warring ideas—double-consciousness. This essay examines the story through Du Bois' theoretical framework of double-consciousness. His theory is an idea of being one person with two identities owing to the clash between oppressive and dominated societies. The ideology of double-consciousness is reinforced in the story through the thoughts and action of two brothers: Sony and his unnamed brother (narrator). These two brothers view the world differently and adopt different approaches to life. Sony intends to essentialize their ancestral norms through music, whereas his brother wishes to secure a better life by assimilating into the world dominated by whites. The story is often analyzed under the lens of racial tensions, brotherly ego, classism, slavery, family reunion, and many more themes. After analyzing "Sonny's Blues" as the primary text and drawing on other scholarly articles, the article has discovered that different vocations can serve for people with double identities as an outlet for expressing their traumatic experiences and other elements such as mutual respect, inclusiveness, and empathy can foster a better society to live in.

Keywords: oppression, blues, double-consciousness, struggle, assimilation

Introduction

Du Bois' theory of double-consciousness was developed in the 19th century to counter the issue of color war in the United States. Needless to say, his idea is still relevant in today's context in the U.S. Even though he positioned this inhumane issue and a lot of official laws were enforced to criminalize racial violence and discrimination, the subtle racist attitudes can still be felt in everyday life. The arrival of Obama in the White House was expected to mark an era of racial harmony and blur the line between whites and non-whites in 2009. Unlike many former presidents, he was perceived

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to ease racial tensions and bridge the gulf between whites and non-whites. During Obama's presidency from 2008 to 2012, a "drop in Obama's vote among whites cannot be attributed to greater racial resentment" (Weisberg 452). Herbert F. Weisberg claims that "the increases in the Republican vote among the very low and the neutral resentment categories are suggestive of either policy-based change or a return to normal voting" (452). However, the situation in the U.S. has become worse than before and the number of hate groups and hate crimes have been soaring up in social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and other untraceable platforms. As the internet is become more accessible, "social networks constitute platforms through which hateful rhetoric is spread and normalised and minority groups are systematically targeted" (Alkiviadou 19). White supremacists' obsession with "miscegenation," echo the ongoing racial tensions. Grant claims that "the cross between a white man and a Negro is a Negro," and 'the cross between a European and a Jew is a Jew.' Race mixing [is] destroying" manosphere ideology (Kimmel 62). Upon Obama's entry as a president, many angry white men's aggression and disappointing expressions started surfacing in different news outlets and digital platforms. This resentment is echoed in Limbaugh's comment "It's Obama's America, is it not? Obama's America, white kids getting beat up on school buses now" (Kimmel 52). New narratives of racism have emerged. Now white supremacists present themselves as if they were being victimized by race-favoring policies and pacts. The recent presidential race between Kamala Harris and Donal Trump and the election result in the US has also indicated the ongoing racial war rather than ideological wars.

This is the 21st century, and "Sony's Blues" still resonates among different people of color or diasporas, including African-Americans. Joseph and Golash-Boza still find Du Bois' "double-consciousness" relevant to the present scenario. They are justified in their argument that "double consciousness symbolized the psychological impact of living in a racist society on 20th century African Americans" (1). And this makes even sense today. It may not be visible and acceptable to white supremacists and extreme groups but the untold reality is people of color are being othered regardless of their citizenship in the U.S. They have documents, yet their status has not been embraced and digested. Joseph and Golash-Boza make it explicit that "Societal treatment of African Americans as a 'problem' contributed to the development of 'the Veil,' a lens through which they viewed themselves from the perspective of White Americans. Despite being citizens, African Americans were not fully as such" (2). Sixty-seven years has passed by since the publication of James Baldwin's 1957 story "Sonny's Blues; however, the racial issue has been renamed and redefined but the crux has become a stubborn fact in the lives of African-Americans and other people of color.

James Baldwin's 1957 short story "Sonny's Blues" chronicles two brothers at various points in their lives. The story is narrated from the first-person point of view of

the unnamed narrator because this is the authorial intention to put Sonny at the center of readers' attention. The title of the story itself reveals the story is likely to revolve around Sonny. The two protagonists of the story Sonny and the unnamed narrator are poles apart in their views of life. Sonny wants to essentialize the Black heritage by becoming a jazz pianist, which the narrator finds a regrettable career aspiration. Contrarily, the narrator attempts to escape the brutality of Harlem by assimilating into mainstream society, internalizing all sorts of prejudices of White society. These varying approaches of the brothers act as discord which creeps into the relations of the brothers. Goldman has produced critiques of "Sonny's Blues" focusing his attention on the "new [faltering] relationship between the brothers" (232), Reilly on the image of "the Black ghetto," and Stone on the use of two terms "grace" and "Grace." Albert perceives this story as Baldwin's metaphorical use of the "blues." In addition, there are some researchers who have interpreted the story from historical, biblical, cultural, and social lenses, etc. Their claims make sense and have a connection. I do not outrightly disagree with these critics' understanding of the story and their analyses. However, I argue that Baldwin's story "Sonny's Blues" is representative of several hidden narratives that emphasize the universality of diasporic experiences of double-consciousness, its relevancy even in today's context and a strong need for a troupe of new narratives to clashing ideologies of whites and non-whites.

Warring Thoughts in African-Americans' Minds

Du Bois' "double-consciousness" is a psychologically disturbing and confusing experience of "twoness" especially in the lives of African-Americans because of their constant struggle to overcome racialized oppression and marginalization in America's mainstream society. Mocombe believes that "the experience of black Americans is the strivings of two thoughts, one African and the other white American, within one dark body" (46). It is a mental condition where conflicting ideals push each other constantly, resulting unease and turbulence in one Black person's body. Some scholars have also associated this warring condition with transcendentalism by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Phenomenology of Spirit² by GWF Hegel. Nevertheless, double-consciousness has been an instrumental lens to analyze African-Americans' experiences in different fields such as cultural studies, literature, history, and politics.

Du Bois coined the term "double-consciousness" in 1903. And today this feeling of split identities has become common not only among African-American communities but also among any communities whose identities are comprised of a hyphen (-), such

2. As per Ralph Waldo Emerson, transcendentalist philosophy is a belief that humans have the natural ability to think beyond their physical world but their thoughts are influenced by people they interact with in society. GWF Hegel also claims a similar idea that society and culture shape people's identities and are responsible for people's success or failure.

as Irish-Americans, Indian-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and the list goes on. I argue that this theory is not getting outdated but becoming a focal premise on which many arguments can be based. It is obvious that in the 1900s “double-consciousness” was a strange notion, but it is becoming a familiar and common terminology, and it has a lot of potential relevance to today’s context.

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 twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals on one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (as qtd. in Pittman, par 6).

Both the narrator and Sonny embody dark bodies and inherit Black heritage but they put up with a strange sensation of “warring identities.” They initially attempt to resist mainstream society’s domination but they later wish to thrive in the dominant society, adopting different approaches. Sonny strictly promotes the Black tradition of jazz and performs “Am I Blue,” which, in fact, is composed and written by whites and he performs this song in the presence of black and white audiences—his intended audiences. This scene also implies that there is a strong possibility of co-existence, collaboration, and compatibility. On the contrary, his brother, the unnamed author, conforms to the white ideology to pursue a better future. Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues” is the finest narrative of two brothers who embody the philosophy of “double-consciousness.”

Story Analysis

To counter-argue the critical stance that sees “Sonny’s Blues” as a story of misunderstanding between two brothers, freedom, apartheid, the image of the Black community, and many more, this article begins with an argument that every action of these two brothers is guided by not reasoning but two “internal warring ideas of African and Americans” in their bodies. In other words, these two brothers’ strain has been marked by a plethora of hyphenated designations of the national identity of African-Americans.

Despite having been born into the same parents, Sonny and the narrator have allowed their individual “blues” to guide them and move further in their lives. The narrator, who is the breadwinner, is a high school algebra teacher who grew up in Harlem. According to Herrera, in the 1950s, Harlem was, and is, a predominantly black neighborhood. In that decade, the Black population in Harlem reached its peak numbers at 98 percent. Nonetheless, since then, on account of the outstanding amount of social and physical changes, Harlem has observed a massive change in the face of Harlem. Herrera claims that “[p]resently, roughly 60 percent of Harlem’s population

is black” (par. 4). The narrator is married to a woman named Isabel and seems content even if they have lost one of their children. Forgetting the past, he wants to integrate himself into the dominant society because “his own position on the middle-class ladder of success is not secure” and upholding his tradition is not taking him to any better place (Reilly 157). He feels sympathetic toward those Blacks who still live like animals in a state of utter poverty and destitution in Harlem. While escorting Sonny back from prison, he looks out the window of the cab and reflects:

Some escaped the trap, most didn't. Those who got out always left something of themselves behind, as some animals amputate a leg and leave it in the trap. It might be said, perhaps, that I had escaped, after all, I was a school teacher or that Sonny had, he hadn't lived in Harlem for years. Yet, as the cab moved uptown through streets which seemed, with a rush, to darken with dark people, and as I covertly studied Sonny's face, it came to me that what we both were seeking through our separate cab windows was the part of ourselves which had been left behind. It's always at the hour of trouble and confrontation that the missing member aches. (Baldwin 24-25)

He looks upon the streets of Harlem as a place he has left behind, but he has attained moderate success in comparison to other people from his community. He is a homeowner, a respectable professional due to his job and education, and a responsible family man. However, he constantly has flashbacks of his nasty memories, chasing him like his shadow. “When he meets Sonny, he is in control of himself but very shortly he is flooded with complex feelings that make him feel again the menace of the 110th Street bar where he had stood with Sonny's friend. There is no escaping a feeling of icy dread, so he must try to understand” (Reilly 157). The narrator found it increasingly difficult to pierce through Sonny's veil and see him for what he wished to achieve. On the other hand, being a high school lad, Sonny moves from place to place. He has been presented as a complex character. “Sonny is the representation of the problems the black community experienced after slavery. He is lost and struggling and addicted to drugs. The world is trying to usher him into a role that he wants no part of” (Neely, par. 11). Even after the civil war, promises are limited to documents only. The future of Blacks seems bleak or remains in limbo. Neely argues that the blacks had to leave the south to “recoup the losses incurred by the abolition of slavery, the south began to pass and selectively enforce a series of laws designed to imprison and disenfranchise blacks. This led to Jim Crow. . . thousands of blacks fled the south for the north during the Great Migration³” (par. 1). significantly boosting Harlem's

3. The Great Migration is the largest movement of blacks from the south to the north between 1910 and 1970. This mass movement was prompted by the idea of escaping slavery, racial violence, better life, education, etc. It is expected that six million blacks were relocated.

African American population. In 17870s, white supremacy retained their power and passed strict racial division laws called “Jim Crow,” making African-Americans second-class citizens with limited opportunities. “While a small number of African Americans were able to become landowners, most were exploited as sharecroppers, a system designed to keep them poor and powerless” (“A New African American Identity,” par. 2). The southern part was not a conducive atmosphere for uplifting the living standards for Blacks. The Whites could do anything they liked as if rules were aimed at Blacks only. At that time, Whites were enjoying privileges while Blacks were forced into complying with unfair laws and regulations. Their (Sonny's and the narrator's) mother fulfills her responsibility of passing down to new generations by way of revealing some details about how their father turned into a crazy man, and this is important as Corfield believes understanding the connection between past and present is absolutely fundamental for a good understanding of the condition of being human. In short, History matters, as it is not just “useful,” but it “essential” (par. 3). She, their mother, a living history for them, recounts the mishap emotionally:

Then he heard a car motor and that same minute his brother stepped from behind the tree, into the road. And your father started to run down the hill, he says he don't know why. This car was full of white men. They was all drunk, and when they seen your father's brother they let out a great whoop and holler and they aimed the car straight at him. They was having fun, they just wanted to scare him, the way they do sometimes, you know. (Baldwin132)

Their (the narrator and Sonny's) uncle was killed intentionally by a car which “was full of white men” (132). She also reveals the similarity between Sony and their uncle. Their uncle used to perform on the weekend. Like Sonny, “[their] father's brother would sing, he had a fine voice, and play along with himself on his guitar” (132). She adds that their father had never in his life seen anything as “dark as that road” after the lights of that car had driven away. “The road” connotes hopelessness, prejudice, suppression, anxiety, death, tragedy, and so forth. “Dark Roads” in Harlem can be associated with anguish, despondency, despair, and gloom. Additionally, it can be argued that Sonny's forefathers were passionate about music, and they had to develop such a passion because they barely got opportunities in other segments of society. History.com Editors put forward the argument that their involvement in music “gave these [Black] artists pride in and control over how the Black experience was represented in American culture and set the stage for the civil rights movement” (par. 35). The very sorry thing is those white men escaped legal punishment easily even if they had perpetrated crimes. The reason behind his mother's giving an account of past tragedy is to remind the narrator that “[he] got a brother. And the world ain't changed” (133). The White community's domination continues to prevail.

During the Great Migration of Blacks, Harlem, New York underwent a lot of transformations. “[T]he Harlem Renaissance, which was an explosion in black art, literature, and music. ‘Sony’s Blues’ by James Baldwin, takes place” (Neely, par. 1). Contrastingly, Sony is often lost and for him the only way to achieve salvation and mental peace is to slip into drug addiction. In New York, Blacks were facing the problem of education and employment. “They were the last hired and the first fired for most jobs. Harlem was often a rude shock to poor blacks fleeing the South” (Admin, par. 5). Positive aspirations drove them from the south to the north, but they ended up being poor, unemployed, and criminal. Notably, they were major targets of infamous New York xenophobic attitude⁴. Since then, American society is believed to impose monoculturalism by causing “a flattening out of difference” and erasing all distinctive cultures of none-white communities to marginalize them (Morrison 3). This ideology has left Blacks and other minorities in a fork.

Though Sonny does not find a place in the Whites’ society like his brother, he has unconsciously developed a sense of belonging and inclination toward America’s prosperity, peace, and development. He has shown a desire to do a patriotic duty by serving in the U.S. Army. His brother has also served in the army. His brother remembers their mother telling him something after their father’s death. At that time the narrator “was home on leave from the army” (Baldwin 26). Sonny once told the narrator [his brother] that he did not want to stay in Harlem. It was almost impossible for Blacks like them to thrive under unfavorable conditions in Harlem. Sonny had to muster the courage to tell his brother, “I want to join the army. Or the navy, I don’t care. If I say I’m old enough, they’ll believe me” (33). They had not forgotten the cruelty of America. However, their behavior still mirrors their selfless love to live and serve the country that treat them like step-children or foes, and they are unwilling to return to the soil of their ancestral origin where they have never been. On the one hand, Sonny makes efforts to get rid of the physical and mental scars left by Harlem. On the other hand, instead of going to school, he spends his time “down in Greenwich Village, with musicians and other characters, in a white girls’ apartment” (36). This dualism can be directly linked with Dubois’ “theory of double-consciousness” and his inability to choose either of the identities—African or American.

Sonny seems aimless and undirected in his life. What he aspires to be at the moment is to become a jazz musician. For him, music is his best friend, for it is an outlet for his frustration and pessimism. Concerning music, he is determined. In the letter to be mailed to his brother, he writes “I feel like a man who’s been trying to

4. If we look back on the Great Migration, New York is remembered as a center of racism and xenophobia. New York witnessed a lot of racial violence such as Harlem Race Riots in 1935 and The Harlem Race Riots in 1935 between whites and blacks in Manhattan. Those violent incidents were sparked by small incidents between a young black man and a white shopkeeper.

climb up out of some deep, real deep and funky hole and just saw the sun up there, outside. I got to get outside” (Baldwin 22). He is so passionate about his music that his sister-in-law’s family is astounded by his behavior. Isabel, the narrator’s wife, “finally confessed that it wasn’t like living with a person at all, it was like living with sound” (35). He himself “sensed, from so many thousands of miles away, that Sonny was at that piano playing for his life” (35). Sonny seems to have an aura of music. At this point, it is difficult to say whether they love or hate America. So, these brothers are suffering psychologically at the hand of Whites, as they are part of the African diaspora.

Historical Context/Harlem Renaissance

Sonny and his unnamed brother (narrator) were brought up in Harlem, New York. New York has been known as the hub of Black cultural and intellectual life since 1920s. Harlem was witnessing prosperity for whites, but it “did not feed [and comfort black] people, and as the 1920s ended, the economic circumstances of most Harlem blacks did not reflect the prosperity that had . . . Blacks were still streaming into Harlem from the south during the late 1930s and 1940s to escape racial persecution and take advantage of job opportunities” (Burrell 323). In this sense, life in Harlem was difficult, yet it was better than life, in the South. For that hope, many artists from the black community kept moving there. Writers such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, musicians and such as Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, and many other artistic and intellectual figures made Harlem and New York City a haven for culture “Sonny’s Blues Study Guide 65).

The use of childhood imagery in “Sonny’s Blues” plays a significant role in understanding their later lives. Childhood is believed to be the best stage of life. John Milton once said that “the childhood shows the man, as morning shows the day.” It is important to study the past lives of Sonny and the narrator in order to make some connections between their pastness and future. “One of the most important passages in this story is the description of Harlem’s stultifying environment, a place where children are ‘smothered’” (Clark 198). Sonny and the narrator were born and raised in one of Harlem’s ghettos. Growing up in the ghetto is worse because they are robbed of their childhood. A bad childhood upbringing has the potential to bring unpredictable consequences at a future date. Such children tend to transition to maturity unnaturally. In “Sonny’s Blues”, “[t]he high school kids that the narrator must teach show every evidence—even in their youth—of having already ‘matured’” (199). “[T]hey were growing up with a rush and their heads bumped abruptly against the low ceiling of their actual possibilities” (199). This quote echoes the narrator’s frustration that still is felt by many inner-city Blacks. “This is yet another example of Robert Merton’s strain theory. Society presents poor blacks with a goal but no reasonable way of

obtaining said goal” (Neely, par. 8). The narrator, here, attempts to reiterate the “pain of institutional racism and the limits it places on African American opportunity” (Teran, par. 2). He sounds anxious and worried as, like Sonny, his students are also transforming into adults. His students have started to realize “the severity of their community’s predicament.”

Past Memory Hunt and Dialogue as a Bridge

Morning shows the day. Childhood experience prepares humans to grow and prepare to confront hard times. “Wordsworth characterizes youth as a time of ‘light’: adulthood ‘on the other hand, embraces us like the doors of a prison closing around us, darkening our lives” (qtd. in Clark 199). Childhood can indicate what the adult life will be like. Baldwin’s narrator has glimpses of flashbacks of their childhood throughout the story. When they are driving home, they happen to see parks, trees, buildings, etc. and these things immediately drive their memory back to their childhood days.

So we drove along, between the green of the park and the stony, lifeless elegance of hotels and apartment buildings, toward the vivid, killing streets of our childhood. These streets hadn’t changed, though housing projects jutted up out of them now like rocks in the middle of a boiling sea. Most of the houses in which we had grown up had vanished, as had the stores from which we had stolen, the basements in which we had first tried sex, the rooftops from which we had hurled tin cans and bricks. But houses exactly like the houses of our past yet dominated the landscape. (Baldwin 24)

Although the present situation of Blacks looks better on the surface—almost “ornamental,” it does have a more serious underlying crux in Harlem. Dilemmas, double-consciousness, drug addiction, and hopelessness, among others, are still deeply rooted in the consciousness of those who survived the civil war. “According to Pew Research Center data, approximately 8 out of 10 African-Americans say they have experienced personal discrimination because of their race or ethnicity, citing an increase in white supremacist hate groups” (qtd. in Atkas, par. 8). Words in the constitution and institutional handbooks have been changed but not put into practice. Jenks has rightly said because of the civil war “Some things have changed for the better; some things have worsened; there’s still work to do” (par. 7). Her claim echoes the racial tension still persists. Baldwin claims some Blacks still take drugs and participate in musical stuff to escape from an otherwise painful reality. “For Sonny, heroin is a seductive outlet for his blues, but he knows that in the end it will kill him” (Sonny’s Blues Study Guide 4). Sonny is just a representative of young Black people who were living in the neglected Harlem neighborhood. It was a very common phenomenon to find adolescents taking drugs in Harlem in the 1930s to release their

stress and hopelessness. Balden himself was born in 1924 in Harlem, and his father was a preacher. His hometown was thronged with Blacks due to the acute repression and tyranny of the Jim Crow laws in the South. In his own words, “Harlem was a dreadful place . . . a kind of concentration camp, where at the age of ten he was beaten by two police officers because of the color of his skin” (9). When he turned 24, he decided to flee “the dehumanizing society of New York to avoid becoming engulfed by the fury of the color problem” (9).

Different life aspirations and perspectives separate two brothers. From the very beginning, readers are aware that the two brothers are separated. The unnamed elder brother of Sonny learns from a newspaper that Sonny has been arrested for “peddling and using heroin” (Baldwin 17). The dialogue between the narrator and a friend of Sonny reveals the reasons that have separated them. The conventional linearity of the narrative has been subverted in this story. So, dialogue is at the center of the story. The death of Grace paved the way for the reunion between the two brothers. He wrote a letter to Sonny and “went to meet him when he [Sonny] came back to New York” (23). When the narrator was serving in the U.S. Army, Sonny was supposed to live with his sister-in-law Isabel’s family. Instead of going to school, he was practicing music with some friends. On knowing that Sonny was bunking school, Isabel shouted at him. That incident drove him out of the house. One morning, before she went to work, “she suddenly realized that all of his records were gone. And she knew for certain that he was gone” (36). Finally, he joined the navy to solidify his love for the country where he is deemed as outcast and unwanted.

Past memories are always beautiful, but they do not always remain intact. One Saturday afternoon, the narrator is alone by the window, watching Seventh Avenue. He happens to catch sight of the sidewalk across from him, which is beside the entrance to a barbecue joint. “[S]ome people were holding and old-fashioned revival meeting” (Baldwin 140). His narrator realizes that society gradually changes. His selection of this setting in the story “portrays the fact that the Africans were an oral culture and those traditions have not been lost on the later generations” (Neely, par. 3). Another significant element of this setting is the impact of music. He then notices three sisters in black and a brother, carrying on the revival—original cultural music. To his surprise, the revival is different from “early African culture; however, there are still elements of the parent culture in the new arts forms” (par. 3). It can be concluded that their original culture has undergone slight transformations over the course of time.

“Listening” is very powerful. It helps to resolve problems, whereas “hearing” perpetuates problems. One Saturday afternoon, the narrator does not “hear” but “listens” to his brother in the living room. The narrator sees a group of singers singing in the street. He sees Sonny also standing on the edge of the crowd. He keeps on standing at the window. After some time, Sonny returns to the room and asks him if he

wants some beer. They talk about the song sung down in the street. Baldwin arranges a meeting between the two brothers at a perfect time. In the absence of Isabel, the narrator's wife, and children, they talk to each other, feeling more comfortable. This time, the narrator does not ignore his brother's words. He listens to Sonny. And Sonny "asks his brother to 'listen', that night, to his music. That street song is thus a prelude to the brother's first honest talk and carries us to the finale when Sonny plays for the narrator" (Goldman 232). Dialog is so powerful that it can sink differences and heals egoistic wounds.

Unlike Goldman, Tracey transcends the idea of communication as a solution to separation and disagreement between the brothers. She writes "'Sonny's Blues' deals not only thematically with the cross-roads between the blues and jazz, but addresses the need for a new form of cultural narrative as a repository for the experiences of African Americans" (Salenius 691). She subtly argues a mere dialogue cannot solve the problem of African Americans. She claims that Baldwin is "advocating the necessity of African Americans' self-awareness of the context of their own cultural forms, and particularly of the hybrid narratives that result from their appropriation" (693). "It has become difficult for them to unify their black identity with their American identity" (Edles and Appelrouth 351—52). For her, "Sonny's Blues" is not to be confined to a family feud but to look at it from a new lens. Here, we can focus our attention on double identities within the same body. African-Americans have hyphenated their identities. Neither are Baldwin's characters able to select one of these double identities nor are they able to adopt both. They are entangled with double-consciousness or identities. Both Tracey and Salenius do not want to limit Baldwin's story to varying ideas, nature, choices, family feuds, fraternal quarrels, or career aspirations. Transcending these ideas, they have stressed the conflict and duality of inner landscapes. Salenius talks of "Baldwin's description of the inner conflicts and interracial relationship formed between the characters" (884).

Albert, in his reading of James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues", views the jazz motif as contradictory which many researchers have overlooked. Towards the end of the story, having been inspired by Creole, Sonny plays "Am I Blue?" in front of a "racially mixed audience in a Greenwich Village" club [which] gives credence to these ideas and helps to explain what might otherwise appear to be some explicable incongruities" (184). On the one hand, Baldwin's character Sonny shows a desire to essentialize cultural heritage and unite fellow Black people. On the other hand, his selection of the song "Am I Blue?" by Whites contradicts his idea of preserving the cultural heritage of Blacks. So, he perceives "Sonny's aspiration of becoming a pianist" as a desire to essentialize cultural heritage and culturally bind people who share the same heritage, but he considers Sonny's selection of the song "Am I Blue?"

as a song far-removed from the Black experience. Notably, he doubts if Baldwin is aware of the selection of the song, which unleashes controversy.

Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" is loaded with a great deal of imagery and symbols of the post-civil war existential crisis encountered by several Blacks. Neither have these Blacks been loved and their contributions to America's development been recognized nor have these Blacks been willing to return to the place of their forefathers' origin—an unknown land. Blacks are struggling with these two situations on account of "double-consciousness" of Blacks. In the present context, the existence of manosphere communities, hate speeches, racial violence, and people's comments on different social media platforms also prove that the present generation of blacks are also combating the psychological war of double-consciousness in the black bodies. Baldwin deserves appreciation for doing a brilliant job of illuminating WEB Dubois' theory of "double-consciousness" with the narrator and his younger brother, Sonny. The narrator succeeds in assimilating into "American" culture, while Sonny represents an American of African descent. "Both the narrator and Sonny are products of a shared traumatic history, but represent two different ways of responding to it" (Davis, 2021). Which of the brothers did a good job? What is the solution? Can teaching people about tolerance and acceptance help? Should a resistance group be formed? Should more awareness be raised? Should strict rules be enforced? These questions are to be pondered.

Conclusion

Latest research still demonstrates that deeply rooted racism has crippled African-Americans. Different research sources like Pew Research Center, news sources, and scholarly writings have indicated that the number of racist or hate groups such as The Ku Klux Klan (KKK), Proud Boys, Black Separatists, White Nationalists, and Christian Identity are burgeoning in the U.S. When such groups increase and operate at an alarming rate in the U.S., the hope of achieving solidarity among different racial communities and fighting extremism slims down. If the government does not criminalize and neutralize racist and extremist beliefs from the consciousness of publics through a positive strategy and collaboration between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, the threat of a second civil war may soon begin to loom on the horizon. Therefore, Du Bois' theory of double-consciousness is still relevant and significant to discuss both racism through the minds of Sonny and his brother and other hyphenated identities such as Asian-American, Muslim-American, Irish-American, Filipino-American, etc. This lens can be helpful when it comes to analyzing how race, culture, color, and origin determine their degree of inclusion and exclusion in the U.S. context. Upon a closer examination of Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" and the dimension that I have attempted to bring to the table, it is likely to steer the discussion to one of the other equally significant facets of this story. I conclude by

stating “Sonny’s Blues” has unearthed the evidence of how double-consciousness is still very relevant to contemporary society of the U.S., making it difficult for African-Americans to reconcile their identities as Blacks and as Americans due to horrendous events in the past and its permanent marks upon their group consciousness. Sonny’s singing of “Am I Blue” composed by Whites and mutual understanding between the brothers through dialogue can be a big takeaway. Adhering to what Jenks has rightly said that the civil war has resulted in both merits and demerits, I conclude that, in addition to advocacy for inclusivity, dialogue, tolerance, and strict law enforcement, there is a strong need for a new genre to deal with such a long standing and persistent issue.

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