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Whence Comes Black Art?: The Construction and Application of “Black Motivation”

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**Whence Comes Black Art?:
The Construction and Application of “Black Motivation”**

by Derrell Acon

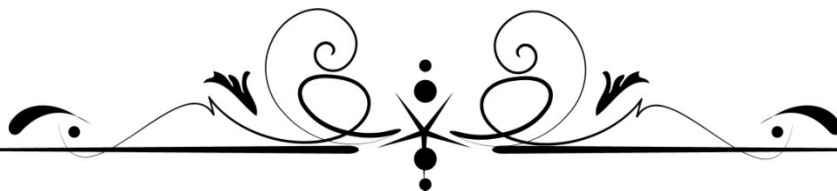


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Whence Comes Black Art?:
The Construction and Application of “Black Motivation”

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Submitted to the following Committee on May 2, 2011
for consideration for honors distinction:

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Whence Comes Black Art?:

The Construction and Application of “Black Motivation”

I. Introduction (3)

II. Black Motivation (8)

EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE (12)

The Educational Perspective and Black Motivation (21)

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE (23)

Double-Consciousness (29)

Victim Status (35)

Du Boisian Sympathy (37)

The Sociological Perspective and Black Motivation (39)

PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE (43)

“Acting White” and Stereotype Threat (45)

Double-Consciousness (51)

Self-Concept (53)

The Psychological Perspective and Black Motivation (57)

CONCLUSION (60)

III. Black Art (66)

The **Artistic** ‘Gift of Black Folk’ (72)

Organizing: *Art or Propaganda?* (75)

Double-Consciousness (81)

The Sixth Sense (90)

‘MAKING IT’ (104)

“besting others” (115)

IV. Conclusion (121)

Works Cited (125)

Whence Comes Black Art?: The Construction and Application of “Black Motivation”

I. Introduction

George Schuyler, in his tragically misguided 1926 essay for *The Nation* magazine, “The Negro-Art Hokum,” suggests that the only difference between Blacks and Whites is the color of skin, and that both races experience the same social, psychological and educational forces in America. He blatantly disregards American racism and inequality, and in his attempt to put forth his advocacy of color-blindness he merely projects and perpetuates the most racist of ideals within our country. Schuyler views the concept of Black Art very narrowly and insists on the impossibility of such an idea because of the supposed Americanness of the art. His essay initiated debate with many during the Harlem Renaissance—including celebrated writer Langston Hughes—and his view of colorblindness in America continues to live on even today. Schuyler inquires, “In the homes of black and white Americans of the same cultural and economic level one finds similar furniture, literature, and conversation. How, then, can the black American be expected to produce art and literature dissimilar to that of the white American?” (663). This type of thinking wholly disregards the fact that despite the cultural and economic level of the individuals, the literature and conversation in the homes of Black Artists are going to be significantly different from White artists in the country. No matter the similarity of social or socioeconomic class of the two groups, the experiences and thus the sociology will differ fundamentally because of their respective racial groups. Schuyler’s statement—as does much of his essay—unfairly groups all people together with no special attention to those who actually *produce* the art. I will argue that certain psychological and sociological characteristics of

African Americans coupled with the ego-oriented system of American education create an experience specific to the race, and one that is therefore noteworthy.

As a Black American student who considers himself a Black Artist, I found Schuyler's comments very strange when I read them for the first time in my Harlem Renaissance class a few years ago. I know what I feel and experience and *produce* is not like everything else "American." Why, though? This was the impetus of the whole project. I was so interested in how my personal life experience as an African American colors my art, interested in what made me feel, as a child, that the other children's ignorance was holding me back, and interested in why I sometimes feel I can save the world if I just think hard and long enough. I have found through my work for this thesis that there is something to these pensive churnings. The accounts of many novelists, poets, composers, singers, essayists, sociologists, educators, psychologists, and so on have confirmed my suspicions: there is a Black Art. Schuyler's notion that Blacks are "subject to the same economic and social forces that mold the actions and thoughts of the white Americans" is simply not true (663). The actions and thoughts of Blacks are molded by the specific educational, sociological and psychological experiences of the racial group in this country, and my conception of *Black Motivation* will be used to conclusively refute claims against a distinctive Black Art in America. Schuyler was wrong, and I will prove it.

Moreover, even when some agree that there is indeed Black Art in America they limit the category to only include art which is obviously conceived out of the Black community—such as the blues, jazz and hip hop. In addition to my critique of Schuyler I also reject the traditional narrow definition of Black Art with my conception, and advocate a more expansive one to also include all art that is produced through Black Motivation. Correspondingly, I will not tackle Black Art in its entirety but will focus on art that is not always put into that category, which I

feel is properly termed as “Black Art.” Briefly here, such examples include literature and classical musical compositions by African Americans. Also, a Black person singing Italian opera or German ‘lieder,’ for instance, still produces Black Art.

Although Schuyler made his extravagant claims during the Harlem Renaissance the implications still hold weight for Black Art as it exists today, and thus a response is imperative. “Here’s the difference this time around. It’s not that there are black artists and intellectuals who matter; it’s that so many of the artists and intellectuals who matter are black. It’s not that the cultural cutting edge has been influenced by black creativity; it’s that black creativity, it so often seems today, is the cultural cutting edge” (Gates 1). These words by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in his article, “Black Creativity: On the Cutting Edge,” get at the importance of distinguishing Black Art from the pack today. For, if Antonín Dvořák was correct in his assessment that a truly national music will come in part from the distinctive art of African Americans (qtd. in R. Jones, “H. T. Burleigh” 1) or if Lundquist and Sims have it right in “African American Music Education: Reflections on an Experience,” that “Americans’ African musical heritage is the most powerful force in contemporary global music-making” (311), this response is critical. Further, from W. E. B. Du Bois: “And so by fateful chance the Negro folk-song—the rhythmic cry of the slave—stands today not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas” (*The Gift of Black Folk* 274). According to Du Bois, the Black Artist has a prophetic sight of utmost importance in this country, one able to perceive and inject beauty like no other. It is this “second-sight” that exemplifies a reason to explore the concept of Black Art.

All art is seemingly created with a purpose, from some motivation within the artist. Thus, I propose that if a distinctive artistic motivation of African Americans can be constructed we will

arrive eventually at the conception of a true “Black Art.” Schuyler failed to realize (or ignored) this: “Little of any merit has been written by and about Negroes that could not have been written by whites” (662). This is simply not true. Schuyler’s notion of a color-absent American art scene is false, and is greatly refuted by the specific construction of Black Motivation, which produces Black Art. This thesis will construct that motivation and explore its manifestations in the art of Blacks in America. I will construct Black Motivation from three perspectives: educational, sociological and psychological.

I hold that one of the most important aspects of Black Art is its emphasis on communicating one’s life experience to others. One’s art is a representation of one’s own self. Not only does the expression of art allow for a very genuine and natural human connection, but it is also a way to share one’s story as means for gaining understanding. In that spirit, as this paper progresses so will its focus on myself as a Black Artist become more specific. I will construct Black Motivation and then move on to apply the concept, exploring Black works such as poetry, essays, novels, short stories and compositions. The thesis will culminate in a recital, in which I will supplement and further illustrate concepts from the written paper with my own and others’ Black Art. This will be the final showing of what Black Art means—and how it applies—to me, and in that way represents my own contribution as a Black Artist, as an African American, an American, a human being. This project is a connection; its goal is to *gain understanding* through the exploration of an experience.

It is extremely important to recognize the significance of Black Art, if for no other reason for its artists. Black Artists, or those who creatively use their distinctive life experiences to ‘tell a story,’ are among the most important vehicles within the Black race to carry it forward. As we look back in history, whether to the speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. or to the paintings of

Aaron Douglas or to the many singers, poets, composers, etc. who continue to *create* possibility, it is these Black Artists who have had some of the greatest impact in progressing the race and our society. Du Bois counted these artists as a significant part of the group that he termed as ‘The Talented Tenth,’ in his essay by the same name, and notes that the Talented Tenth “must be made leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people. The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men” (33). This theory of Du Bois has, with good reason, been accused of being problematic in its dependence on elitism. Although some aspects of his theory are debatable, I focus on the truth of its claim that the exceptional few *lead* the many. It has unquestionably been the case thus far in this country, and I maintain that this leadership occurs through the Black Motivation of those exceptional individuals.

This leadership I have discussed is a crucial element of Black Motivation. Part of the reason individuals with Black Motivation are so driven to succeed is to better their race, and so clearly Black Artists are not the only group who possess Black Motivation. Although I believe that all who act through Black Motivation engage creatively with society in their ability to transform and manipulate a stigmatized position into productive achievement, I do not consider in depth all individuals with Black Motivation within this paper. I have chosen to focus on art because of my personal relationship to it, but state here that other African Americans—such as activists, historians and educators—also act through Black Motivation, and are a part of Du Bois’s Talented Tenth.

We need not agree with the static exclusiveness of Du Bois’s concept to acknowledge the extreme need for this “talent” of which he speaks; the goal must be to recognize and expand what he calls the “tenth,” or whatever its real fraction may be. As Du Bois insinuates, these men and women will destroy the inherent wedge debilitating African American achievement and

equalize the chances of success among all races of this country—and of the world. Black Motivation is that “mighty prophecy” of a people, a new realization for Blacks and a new determination for all (Du Bois, “Criteria for Negro Art” 3). Daniel C. Thompson concurs in an arresting description of Black Art: “The various creative institutional innovations introduced and developed by Blacks have not only contributed significantly to their survival and progress, but in a much larger sense they have multiplied cultural choice for all Americans and, through the process of diffusion, have enriched the culture of contemporary civilization” (59).

II. Black Motivation

The main argument of this paper is that Black Art springs from a specific type of motivation: Black Motivation. This section of my thesis will focus on constructing and developing the concept of Black Motivation. Many scholars have written about motivation and how it can relate to art, yet my concept—in its unique take on how different aspects of the Black experience in America interact—is a new contribution to that body of scholarship. In order to distinguish my original construction of this concept from various scholars’ discussion of motivation, including other discussions on motivation in Black American populations, I will always present Black Motivation in capital letters. Additionally, I will also use capital letters to denote the presence of Black Motivation in “Black Artists.” This distinction distinguishes Black Artists from artists who do not possess Black Motivation. For example, a Black person who creates art exclusively within a Black community does not necessarily possess a Black Motivation (this point will be further illuminated as the paper progresses).

To begin, I will examine the root of the concept and define my use of motivation. From there we will explore educational, sociological and psychological perspectives of the unique relationship of Black people in America with motivation. Each different perspective informs the

construction of Black Motivation through its additions and elaborations. I purposely deal with similar—and sometimes the same—concepts within the three perspectives, in an effort to use what each look has to offer to holistically illustrate the different angles and intricacies of Black Motivation. Concepts such as double-consciousness and internal/external motivation, in particular, are used throughout all three perspectives in capacities sometimes of subtle difference. This manner of comparison and examination is significant because often the material derives from separate fields of study (e.g., educational, sociological and psychological) and yet it brings us to the same conclusion—that the Black experience is discrete and distinct, and that there are verifiable things to say about it. This approach to constructing Black Motivation—with its valuable breadth—is true to the interdisciplinary aspect of the Ethnic Studies field. The arguments and conclusions become all the more applicable and convincing when they are handled in such a manner. From those three perspectives I will discuss how Black Motivation comes about, as that terminology is coined within this paper. Also, throughout this section I will use excerpts and pieces of Black Art to exemplify and clarify certain aspects of the concept, as well as briefly refer to personal experiences of my own, which may help illuminate how individuals interact with Black Motivation.

I will concentrate on two main types of motivation: internal and external. Those individuals who are motivated internally rely on a perception of personal control. With these individuals success is the result of hard work, and while these persons still believe in an inherent problem of the system, they often view failure as a lack of trying hard enough. With the external motivation, though, there is a sense of outside forces controlling one's achievement. While it is possible for externally motivated individuals to believe in some sort of personal control over their success, they ultimately believe that their fate is decided elsewhere. According to Dr.

Gordon Berry and Joy Asamen's *Black Students: Psychosocial Issues and Academic*

Achievement, Black students who are internally motivated “achieved better in school, expressed more self confidence, and had higher aspirations than those who were external” (53). And even though similar results were also true for White students who were externally motivated, it was found that when faced with failure the White students are more able to recuperate and keep trying. Although possible explanations for why White students were better able to recover from external motivations exist and will be presented later in this paper, the emphasis here is on the difference: the fact that those Black and White individuals with the same motivational mindsets have different experiences within society. This distinction for African Americans coupled with the ego-oriented educational system of America (which I will discuss later) creates an experience specific to the race, and thus is the underlying foundation of my construction of Black Motivation.

I make another instructive qualification here, that my usage primarily of Black vs. White relations is intentional. Through my research and personal experience, I find that it is most helpful to discuss most of the proceeding concepts and theories about Black individuals in American society relative to the majority racial group, White Americans. Much of the literature I utilize acts under a similar presumption, and thus this move also provides a better continuity from those words and thoughts to how they relate to my own. Additionally, this conversation about the distinctive experience of Blacks may “provide a context that allows us to grapple with the notion that not all racial minorities occupy the same political position in society, that their respective cultures have different meanings, that racial minorities occupy different spaces in the American psyche” (Perry 9). As African American education authority Fred Bonner II notes in *African American Giftedness: Our Nation's Deferred Dream*, if we are to understand the

exceptionality of Blacks' education experience we must "focus attention on understanding the unique academic, social, and cultural needs of these students" (643-644). Thus, in this paper I do not intend to exclude other minority groups, but rather focus on the specificity of the Black experience.

Although aspects of these ideas and experiences can exist for other minority groups in America, I discuss here how they all come together in a distinctive way for African Americans. Being associated with a racial caste group inevitably comes with a set of challenges, but these challenges are "heightened and particularized" for African Americans. "For no group has there been such a persistent, well-articulated, and unabated ideology about their mental incompetence. Thus both African Americans' castelike status and the larger society's ideology about their intellectual competence create a distinctive set of dilemmas for African-American youth and even adults" (Perry 105).

The simple qualifier "black" does not necessarily mean that Black Motivation will forever be only applied to Black individuals; rather this paper uses it to suggest that the concept was created within an African American context and has arisen out of the distinctive, holistic experience of that particular American racial group. Black Motivation will be constructed from the unique educational, sociological and psychological experiences of Blacks in our society. In the end, the concept may productively be applied to other racial or ethnic groups in some instances, just as similar ideas (including the "Black Experience" and "Black Art") have since their inceptions become used in relation to more than just Black Americans.¹ I do not intend for my terminology to be exclusionary; I do not intend it to deny similarities between the challenges

¹ In *Sociology of the Black Experience*, Daniel C. Thompson describes Hispanics as being a part of the "Black Experience" in many instances. Also, in *The Black Arts Movement*, James Edward Smethurst includes Asian American and Latino/a production in the category of "Black Art."

and responses of African Americans and those of other minority groups. I from the start acknowledge that there are similar minority experiences in American society, and further emphasize the merely discrete—and not exclusive—nature of the experience and resultant Motivation of Blacks I proceed to explore.

EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Sandra Graham, in her discussion on “Motivation in Afro-Americans,” refers to a concept known as the Need for achievement (*Nach*); or “the desire to do things well and to compete against a standard of excellence” (Berry 41). In the effort to work out why Whites out-achieve Blacks in America, many studies turned to *Nach*. It was commonly held that Whites simply had a greater *Nach*; this hypothesis has since been negated. It was realized that the problem did not lie with Blacks individually—nor did it with Whites—but rather with the “system” itself. American society is designed such that it hinders the African American race from achieving its full potential, which, in turn, leads to an even more complex occurrence: a division within the race providing for only a very specific type of Black individual to achieve. This happens because of America’s ego-oriented society. Kaplan and Maehr—in their discussion on “the implications of achievement goal theory on the achievement motivation of African American students in predominantly White school settings”—describe two different kinds of goals in the American classroom: task goals and ego goals. *Task goals* are those that put an emphasis on learning, improvement, and mastery (producing students who perceive the school as “emphasizing learning and improvement”), while *ego goals* emphasize social comparison and evaluation (students here perceive the school as “emphasizing grades, high ability, and besting others”) (25). Though both environments work well for different individuals, Kaplan and Maehr concluded that African Americans worked best within a task-oriented environment. “Studies

suggest that schools which emphasize task goals...are more conducive to Black students' academic success and well-being than are those that emphasize ego goals" (1). American society's emphasis on ego-orientation fails to fully facilitate the (general) motivation of Blacks; and, in that way, suppresses the ability of African Americans to achieve in the United States. In regard to motivation, society has assumed (or worse, ignored that it is not the case) that both races of students are spread across the same spectrum of *Nach*; that Whites and Blacks occupy the same space in an analysis of 'who is most driven to achieve.' This is far from actuality. African Americans' educational and achievement experiences are different from any other racial group in the country: "African-American students face challenges unique to them as students in American schools at all levels by virtue of their social identity as African Americans" (Perry vii); and, further, "the task of achievement is fundamentally shaped by the very identity of African Americans as African Americans. It is not different in minor ways or at the edges, but substantively a different task" (87). There are certain competencies required of Black students specifically because they are African American—it all comes together to produce "inordinate ambivalence and affective dissonance around the issue of academic excellence in the school context" (Perry 4, Fordham 2). Fordham, with his previous remark, provides yet more illumination—and, moreover, confirmation—to the belief inherent to an external motivation of the "conflict and distrust between Black Americans and schools, making it more difficult for Blacks than for whites to believe what the schools say and to behave according to school norms" (5).

As Theresa Perry continues in *Young, Gifted, and Black: Promoting High Achievement Among African-American Students*, there is an immediate disadvantage in terms of motivation by just being Black. Living in "a society that views Blacks through the lens of diminishing

stereotypes and low expectations” results in very significant implications (110). When Blacks are constantly swimming upstream against nay-saying and too-low expectations, it is no wonder that this type of threat has a monumental effect on their drive to achieve. These ideas make for the most prominent type of motivation in African Americans: an external one. Steele describes it as the “stereotype threat” (111). While most people in America have experiences similar to the stereotype threat, African Americans are most, or at least distinctly, affected by it because of the over-exploitation of stereotypes dealing with laziness and affirmative action and other such notions of Blacks not trying hard enough. “The task of achievement, [argues Perry,] is distinctive for African Americans because doing school requires that you use your mind, and the ideology of the larger society has always been about questioning the mental capacity of African Americans, about questioning Black intellectual competence” (5). It makes perfect sense that Blacks always grapple with a secret or explicit fear of confirming those stereotypes.

Also, as the renowned educationalist Janice Hale-Benson comments on the distinctiveness of the Black educational experience in her text *Black Children*, there is much evidence that supports the view that Black people have been so isolated in this society that they have been able to participate in a distinctive culture: “Evidence suggests that the culture of Black people neither began nor ended with the experience of slavery. Even though the acculturation process and the slavery experience may have altered the African culture that was transmitted, enough mechanisms of retention and transmission existed for survivals to have been possible” (18). This culture of Blacks within the American social landscape, which will continue to be explored throughout this paper, is what produces the distinctive character of their experience with stereotype threat; no other group in the country experiences the threat to the same degree. Social psychologist and educator Claude Steele further illustrates the distinction in his personal

account of his teaching experiences: “White students I have taught over the years have sometimes said that they have hardly any sense of even having a race. But Blacks have many experiences with the majority ‘other group’ that make their race salient to them” (115). Black students, specifically, internalize negative stereotypes as performance anxiety and low expectations for achievement, which they then fulfill. The “self-fulfilling prophecy” has become a commonplace among these students (117). Even when Blacks are able to reach the college level and beyond, there is always a fear in the back of one’s mind of doing something that would inadvertently confirm the stereotype that one is not trying (111); and in this way it is extremely easy for African American individuals to assume that the “system” is against them and consequently become very external in their motivational mindset. And as we have seen and will continue to see, these suspicions are not without substantiation.

Though the stereotype threat pushes a majority of African Americans to an external way of thinking it can also cause extreme cases of internal motivational thinkers. While some Black individuals use external motivation as a coping mechanism to avoid the stereotype threat, the threat is most poignant for those who refuse to cope with or concede to the system: “What exposes students to the pressure of stereotype threat is not weaker academic identity and skills but stronger academic identity and skills” (Perry 121). These cases are rooted in the idea that Blacks must prove society wrong and succeed no matter what; it results in two types of internal thinking: individual and collective. With the individual thinking there is a deep, personal motivation to achieve. Usually with these individuals there is a mindset of “making it on the White man’s terms,” as well as an internal drive to be “persistent in finishing college, desirous of advanced education beyond the baccalaureate, ready to work and borrow to further their education, and committed to professional careers” (Gurin 181). The collective thinkers—though

still possessing a very deep sense of motivation—get their drive from a different source: each other. These are internally motivated individuals who believe that they have control over their achievement but choose to use the control for the betterment of the race. Of course, it is possible for individuals to display characteristics of both types of internal motivation. In fact, it is often the case that Black Artists are simultaneously motivated because of their personal will to achieve and their desire to ‘better their people.’ Gurin and Epps, in the section of their book entitled “Collective Achievement: Group Action and Collective Commitments,” refer to collective thinkers as activists. They remark, “The activists were striving to achieve, but they were working for group products and accomplishments rather than [solely] for individual goals” (189).

There then is the polarization of those Blacks who are very externally motivated (the majority) and those few who are motivated internally. And with those few who *are* internally motivated there is a dogged strength that surpasses the *Nach* of Whites—for the obvious reasons of stereotype threat and the goal to “make it on the White man’s terms.” Du Bois reflects on this sentiment quite successfully in a passage from *The Souls of Black Folk*: “I was different from the others...shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil...and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows. That sky was bluest when I could beat my mates at examination-time, or beat them in a foot-race, or even beat their stringy heads” (2). Here he discusses how the very powerful sense of motivation can shine through, and notes three of the main areas in which it does: academics, sports, and (unfortunately) violence. The word “beat,” then, hints at what Kaplan and Maehr would later call ego-orientation; and further suggests that those Blacks who are able to succeed within the ego-oriented environment do so not naturally but rather because of a very specific experience—and are therefore distinguished from their successful White counterparts. This idea is very prevalent

in internally motivated Blacks because, in the current educational system, they are forced to *compete* with their White counterparts. For more White students, graduating high school and going on to college and to ‘bigger and better things’ (as it is often phrased in the Black community) is commonplace; though for most Blacks who are able to do the same it is generally for very specific reasons, and because of a very specific and deep drive. And while it is conceded that there are those non-Blacks within the country that have similar experiences of difficulty, the Black experience continues to be distinct.

While this type of extreme motivation is often viewed as a positive force, it can easily be gathered that it is potentially dangerous. Several implications incur when individuals achieve merely to beat others or prove society wrong. First, as Hale-Benson points out, it is dangerous for internally motivated Black individuals to look *only* to out-achieve their counterparts. What if their counterparts’ performance is mediocre or not the best that the internally motivated Black individuals’ success could be potentially? This locks these thinkers into boxes and raises issues of potential societal underdevelopment: “Neither Black nor white people will be able to survive and achieve in this society if they are mediocre” (Hale-Benson xvi). Though Hale-Benson’s comment here may seem a little exaggerated, her attitude that mediocrity is no good for anyone, and that Blacks must lead the pack if they must, is one worth considering. Moreover, she is not alone in this belief: “The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity” (Wilson 6). “The emphasis of traditional education has been upon molding and shaping Black children so that they can be fit into an educational process designed for Anglo-Saxon middle-class children” (Hale-Benson 1). If this is true, and her statements about the prevalence of mediocrity in our society are as well, then it may be the case that the distinct mindsets of Blacks are key to progressing society forward. Schuyler himself conceded that “the

adults of today are what they are because of the education and environment they were exposed to a generation ago,” and so it is strangely ironic that he deems it “sheer nonsense” to talk about racial differences when Blacks get “the same or similar schooling” (663); for it is the ego-domination which permeates the same schooling that creates the difference. As Hale-Benson and countless other education specialists will agree, paying no special attention to distinct learning styles has its consequences—an unaccommodative school environment that ignores the culture specificity of Blacks can negatively affect one’s self-perception, social orientation and world view (85).

Another polarization within the Black race that adds to the discussion of Black Motivation is a result of the socially constructed perception of “acting White.” In the education system since Blacks are overwhelmingly outnumbered (by Whites) in the group of students able to operate within the ego-oriented environment, the skill is perceived as “acting White.” Generally, Black students “have been duped into thinking that to pursue intellectual excellence is to pursue a ‘white’ prerogative; is to ‘act white,’ to pursue a hopeless dream” (Wilson 105). Students’ peers discourage them from trying hard and from achieving. This fact is what leads Perry to comment on the aforementioned achievement gap, that it is “attributed to a peer culture that doesn’t value achievement, and worse, one that associates school achievement with being white” (8). This drives a wedge between the race: those who are “acting White” contrasted with those who perceive themselves as staying true to the race. The prevalence of this idea is evidenced by the imbalance of Black vs. White drop-out rates, and by the reluctance of young African Americans to study or enjoy classical music because of a fear of being seen as “acting White.” In my own community, for example, my interest in opera is often seen as being “too good for Black people” or as seeing myself as ‘all that.’ Even with a very understanding family

there is always an underlying sense that one is somehow viewed as a part of a different race—not Black, not White, just different. This otherness, though, is a natural feeling of those who possess Black Motivation. In her study of how Blacks cope with the “burden of acting White,” Signithia Fordham not only talks about Blacks’ increasing cognizance with age of the implications of what it means to be Black in America, and its resulting negative effects on their academic performance, but she also discusses this special group of those who *continue* to be high-achievers despite the realizations of their stigmatization. It is not an easy task, though, as she continues that “all of the high-achieving students—males and females—wrestle with the conflict inherent in the unique relationship of Black people with dominant group institutions: the struggle to achieve success while at the same time retaining the support and approval of other Black people. In the school context, the immediate issue for the high-achieving students is how to obtain good grades, the support and good wishes of the adults in the school, while minimizing the perceptions of their peers which frequently suggest that they are guilty of ‘acting white’” (46).

In Langston Hughes’ essay, “The Negro and the Racial Mountain” (also published in *The Nation*, as a direct response to Schuyler’s essay), he outlines the implication of the “acting White” phenomenon in his claim that “the word white comes to be unconsciously a symbol of all virtues. It holds for the children beauty, morality, and money” (Hughes). The concept is found throughout the literature. Lundquist and Sims: “Somehow many have come to equate exemplary performance in school with a loss of their African American identity; that is, doing well in school is seen as ‘acting white’...*Thus they purposely learn how not to learn*” (317).

Additionally, Fred Bonner explains that many internally motivated Blacks who want to achieve *must* suffer this burden. “For African American students, initiation into the ranks of gifted and talented typically begins with the realignment of their cultural behavior to fit the mold of what

teachers deem acceptable conduct” (647). Here lies another slope on Hughes’ ‘racial mountain,’ an idea of what a Black Artist must conquer in order to be successful: how do I succeed in school without “bleaching” my Blackness? Black Artists must conquer this construct and produce great art despite the potential for being viewed as “acting White” by their dark brethren. Also worth noting is how this occurrence leads to many Black Artists making a point of expressing their Blackness through their art; and even within intellectual art forms (e.g. poetry, prose, literature, etc.) they are then able to retain their identity as Black. These individuals use mechanisms such as speech, content and subject matter to portray an air of Blackness that can be used to counteract any notions of their lack thereof. Nevertheless, all of these artists are subject to the same construct and consequently are a part of the same experience. Which side of the wedge the Black Artist chooses to abide is a nonissue for our present purposes; Black Motivation erects rather from the polarization itself.

Naturally, the “acting White” phenomenon is mightily correlated relative to the motivation of Black students in America. Kaplan and Maehr concluded that sometimes “African American students perceive evaluative situations as threatening because of the potential confirmation such situations might portend of negative stereotypes about their racial/ethnic group” (26). And so in the ego-dominated settings of American classrooms the students will create the “acting White” construct as a defense for themselves; it becomes their excuse not to try. This is especially a problem for young would-be artists who are tragically not given a chance to adequately hone their crafts. Bonner discusses the lack of the identification of African American giftedness, stating that “black students, particularly males, are three times as likely to be in a class for the educable mentally retarded as are White students, but only one half as likely to be in a class for the gifted or talented” (643). Bonner correlates this statistic to the lack of

attention by American society to the failing conditions for the nurturance of Black motivation (not to be confused with my concept, Black Motivation). Because Black motivation is so unique it is often confused with a lack thereof among teachers with whom the job of nominating gifted students lies. Often times these teachers are middle-aged and White. This tends to be a problem because the tests are often a measure of which students have a better grasp of White, middle-class culture, as opposed to a measure of what knowledge and information they have acquired (646). Black students are then forced to respond accordingly, and so a few will “make it on the White man’s terms” while the majority will suppress their talents, supposedly so as to not be seen as “acting White.” Teachers, as a result, misread this response and dismiss potential geniuses as class clowns. It becomes another confirmation for those external thinkers who believe the system is against them, stemming strictly from the one-sided motivational approach of American society. Bonner puts it so simply yet poignantly: “Lack of motivation to excel is usually a result of a mismatch between the student’s motivational characteristics and opportunities provided in the classroom. Students are typically highly motivated when (1) the social climate of the classroom is nurturant, (2) the curriculum content is relevant to the students’ personal interests and is challenging, and (3) the instructional process is appropriate to the students’ natural learning style” (653).

The Educational Perspective and Black Motivation

From the educational perspective we take that Black Motivation encompasses one’s ability to navigate successfully through what has been termed an extraordinary experience. The unique and significant challenges mentioned are the same ones that push individuals possessing a Black Motivation to the very top of the pack. These students begin with “stronger academic identity and skills,” and use the stereotype threat and “acting White” phenomena to their

advantage. Black Motivation involves what Perry has described as a unique theory of education: “This philosophy of education emerges out of limitations, out of constraints, out of the struggle for education, and out of the lived experiences of African Americans. The narrative of Frederick Douglass and his interaction with his master and mistress who forbade him from learning how to read and write captures this improvisational form” (95). As with Douglass, the improvisational style of a Black Motivation drives individuals to “make it on the White man’s terms”—whether the White man likes it or not. Black Motivation includes a *Nach* that, by necessity, surpasses every other racial group in the country. As Fordham explains in her study, the Black individual who is most driven to achieve and refuses to forgo academic excellence and the attendant school success has “developed a unique and specific set of strategies which enables him or her to cope with the ‘burden of acting white’ in the school context” (46).

Individuals must escape not only the negative implications of their discouraging peers, but also must fare well within an ill-suited educational system—they turn it all on its head to benefit their educations. Perry describes it as a tradition: “The African-American intellectual tradition is replete with testimonies of individuals who have grappled with the dilemma of reconciling one’s dual sociopolitical identities—American and African American; member and outsider, citizen, but without the rights and privileges of full citizenship” (80). She mentions here what will be presented as “double-consciousness,” by historian and sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois, in the sociological perspective section of this paper. Her fundamental argument, though, that African American intellectual achievement requires a superb ability of reconciliation is the basis of the educational leg of the current thesis. Black Motivation, after all, moves its possessors to a mindset capable of unbounded and superior accomplishment. “The pursuit of education...is seen and presented as intense, persistent, and supported and fueled by an explicitly

and continually articulated belief system...[It] functions as a counternarrative, one that stands in opposition to the dominant society's notions about the intellectual capacity of African Americans, the role of learning in their lives, the meaning and purpose of school, and the power of their intellect" (Perry 49). Not only does Black Motivation include an internal motivation, but also a relentless and prominent desire to prove the nay-sayers wrong.

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

A major premise of this thesis is that a specific Black Motivation exists partly because of the distinctive sociological journey of Blacks in America. The many experiences—and concurrent responses—of African Americans in this country together create a specific *Black experience*. “The history of Black people in American society has been in virtually every aspect unique. No other ethnic group in the U.S. underwent the experiences of enslavement and the subsequent reluctance of government to enforce the laws in protection of its citizenship rights” (Center for Social Organization Studies 1). And, the very first thought of Daniel C. Thompson’s *Sociology of the Black Experience* reads: “[Black Americans] have been subjected to a unique range of experiences endemic to the special substatures they occupy within all major categories...[T]hey are not usually allowed to be called simply farmers, [etc.,] they are instead regarded as *Black* farmers, [etc]. This means that even when they are performing common social roles they usually have uncommon experiences” (ix). Thompson’s notion that the experiences of African Americans are sometimes paired with the qualifier “black” is one that will be explored later when I discuss Black Art. It stems from an idea that even when Blacks engage in the same activities, tasks, work, business, etc. as other Americans, there is specificity about their performance because of the uncommonness of their general sociological experience. This truth represents the main idea of my sociological construction of Black Motivation.

As was stated in the educational portion of this paper, a problem arises when there is a mismatch between the set-up of an individual and the system or environment in which that individual is expected to act. From a sociological standpoint, this mismatch occurs first when one's sociological experience at home does not match the wider society. For example, if a child is taught at home to value equality and general welfare, this may cause problems for that same child when that child realizes that society rather values competition and 'survival-of-the-fittest.'

African Americans are constantly abruptly thrown (from the home) into a society that thoroughly considers one's skin color in lieu of social equality. Dr. Amos Wilson references the work of psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark in *Awakening the Natural Genius of Black Children* to discuss how societal factors such as racism and ethnic difference direct the sociological "behavior" of Blacks: "By or around age 3 Afrikan American children are conscious of some ethnic differences e.g., 'White' vs. non-white or 'Black' (Clark & Clark, 1958). Thus, it is apparent that the foundation of personal identity, of self-perception, and of self-evaluation begin construction very early in life. These 'self' factors fundamentally shape and direct other related 'selves' or personality factors and through their mediation, shape and direct behavior of all types throughout the rest of the individual's life" (100). Several minority groups in the United States might experience similar happenings, just as the educational perspective suggested of all students whose motivational mindsets are mismatched with their school environments, but Wilson gets at the peculiarity and uniqueness of the Black experience in his discussion. He elaborates on this idea of sociological mismatching, noting that if a child's social and intellectual growth originating at home is to be continuous to the school or the larger society, "it must be further stimulated and reinforced by social and learning experiences fostered by [those] institutions outside the home environment" (79). Wilson also refers to Kevin Marjoribanks' 1972 research

on the issue, which included the finding that “there is a cultural difference between [Blacks and Whites] in the home experience in parent-child interactions, even within the same economic stratum” (70). This is another refutation of Schuyler’s assertion that similar economic or social positions of Blacks and Whites signify similar American sociological experiences. At the point there is not a continuous social or intellectual growth from the home to other environments—including school and the larger social atmosphere—the Black individual will either suffer or figure out innovative ways to succeed within an ill-suited system, but in any case is initially at a disadvantage. Janice Hale-Benson, in her work on schools, refers to the disadvantage as *culture difference*, occurring when “children have not had experiences that provide them with the kind of information that is usable in school. A child might have a storehouse of information, but it is not the background that is required for the school curriculum” (39).

It must be emphasized then that it is not only the failure of schools to accommodate the learning styles of Blacks, but also the societal system itself that causes the social experience of African Americans to be distinct. “The despair, hopelessness, and anomie experienced by large sectors of the Black urban populace today are not the by-products of the absence of an urban Black cultural agency. Instead, they are the result of a sustained, systematic denial of opportunity, both perceived and real” (Wilson 108). This type of systematic disadvantage almost certainly produces “stereotype threat,” and the resulting stifling of motivation in Blacks. When Blacks experience the stereotype threat (and many authors assert that all Blacks do to some extent), the consequence of the hopelessness and extreme anomie is a problematic, external motivation. An external motivation coupled with a mismatching of social wants/needs strip one of the ability to be innovative, to come up with solutions, skills and tools necessary to fare most advantageously within a society that is not particularly compatible with a person’s sociological

toolset developed in the family and subculture. It is a vicious circle: not only is society ill-suited, but because it produces external motivations in most Blacks it puts them at a further disadvantage. Thus, even if a person were to set out and succeed despite a sociological mismatch, more likely than not his or her external motivation would deter success because that individual would receive no substantial encouragement from society. Wilson describes this tragic phenomenon in his inquiry into what happens when a disadvantaged individual lacks the ability to succeed and create alternatives. Even when externally motivated thinkers try to ‘play the game,’ they cannot be convinced of equality when they believe their ‘competition’ is systematically destined to win: “It is in the system, the competitive system that [is] set up— where they have to compete in order to make it. In the effort of competing they produce for their society. It’s the competition that keeps the system going. If we have no one to overcome, then what will motivate us to produce and move forward?” (Wilson 12). These persons do not feel capable of “beating” *anyone*, and thus have no drive to try. This lack of progress, as Wilson might term it, is no doubt linked to the low achievement of Blacks in the United States.

Many of Du Bois’s works, as well as works by other artists, thoroughly explore an idea of hope, and that through one’s Black Motivation and action positive societal change will occur. I will consider this belief in more depth in the Black Art section of this paper but introduce it here to again draw the distinction between a Black Motivation and the motivational happenings of the majority of Blacks in the country. It is important to turn again to *Souls*; Du Bois elaborates on the distinctiveness of the Black experience and how it is also extremely beneficial to American society, bringing more than violence and low achievement. “Herein the longing of black men must have respect: the rich and bitter depth of their experience, the unknown treasures of their inner life, the strange renderings of nature they have seen, may give the world new points of view

and make their loving, living, and doing precious to all human hearts. And to themselves in these the days that try their souls, the chance to soar in the dim blue air above the smoke is to their finer spirits boon and guerdon for what they lose on earth by being black” (73). He especially hints here at Black Motivation, the power of the “longing” of some Blacks who strive to bring beauty to society instead of bowing down to the inconvenience of their position. This is the flipside to Wilson’s previous comments on those externally motivated Blacks in need of help. Black Motivation involves those who “progress” society tremendously, for there is no way for those who do not live within what Du Bois describes as a veil to understand the experience of Blacks if they are not informed. Therefore, not only does the peculiar point of view of Blacks have much to offer society, it is also paramount to any chance of solving equality and race issues within the country. It follows that Black Motivation is the solvency for the tragic phenomenon of which Wilson—and I—have previously spoken. Du Bois discusses this previous notion of the veil in some of his reflections on Alexander Crummell: “So he grew, and brought within his wide influence all that was best of those who walk within the Veil. They who live without knew not nor dreamed of that full power within, that mighty inspiration which the dull gauze of caste decreed that most men should not know” (141). It is no wonder then that Du Bois disagreed so passionately with the words of Booker T. Washington, who claimed in his 1895 “Atlanta Exposition Address” that a segregated America could work. Washington: “No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top...In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress” (168-169). The extreme power of Black Art to teach and inform society is only possible within a community, an environment in which all races interact as one toward the progression of the society. Thus,

Washington's reasoning behind his advocacy of the "separate but equal" doctrine is faulty and simply not true.

Du Bois further explains in *Souls* that the fears and suspicions of externally motivated, Black individuals are not without good reason. "Even to-day the masses of the Negroes see all too clearly the anomalies of their position and the moral crookedness of yours. You may marshal strong indictments against them, but their counter-cries, lacking though they may be in formal logic, have burning truths within them which you may not wholly ignore" (72). *Souls* also discusses the internal motivation of Blacks, and how one's hope and determination can save one from the otherwise expected low achievement: "What in the name of reason does this nation expect from a people, poorly trained and hard pressed in severe economic competition, without political rights, and with ludicrously inadequate common-school facilities? What can it expect but crime and listlessness, offset here and there by the dogged struggles of the fortunate and more determined who are themselves buoyed by the hope that in due time the country will come to its senses?" (114-15). This hope Du Bois describes is a key element of Black Motivation; it begins with an internal motivation and includes a belief that eventually—with the right efforts—there will be a brighter day.

A sociological perspective of the Black experience in America does not suggest that society completely differs from the wants and abilities of Blacks, but rather that the unique package of a Black life is not adequately supported by the society around it. Furthermore, in this section I do not assert that society should be transformed to resemble Black communities and homes. In fact, I concede that Black home life can sometimes be destructive, and in most cases it is more beneficial to transform the social environments of Black homes to more successfully prepare its inhabitants for society at large. "Families generally create and maintain social and intellectual

environments which can accelerate, maintain, or impair the intellectual and social achievement of their children...The enhancement of parental self-esteem, self-acceptance, cultural pride and identity, are important factors in transforming the social-emotional and intellectual environment of the home” (Wilson 70, 74-75). A better hope would be that the larger society take into better consideration the grand plurality of this country. The intended focus is how these discussions of the sociological experience of Blacks come together with other aspects of the Black experience to create Black Motivation. The determination of one to succeed despite the “disadvantage” is a sign of a Black Motivation, and will continue to be explored from several angles.

Double-Consciousness

The distinctive sociological experience of Blacks in America is explored copiously throughout the works of historian and sociologist—and Black Artist—W. E. B. Du Bois. A major aspect of his contribution to the understanding of the Black experience in America comes through his idea of “double-consciousness.” Du Bois introduces the concept in *Souls*, in the first chapter “Of Our Spiritual Strivings”:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and 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. 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. (10-11)

Du Bois's use of psychological terminology to describe these very sociological goings-on and responses, Dickson Bruce posits, is to lend authority to the concept, and his doing so is of crucial importance as we continue to explore double-consciousness. Bruce points out that only by first legitimizing the distinctive experience of Blacks could Du Bois argue that the racial group's "second-sight" was equal or superior to the ordinary sociological view of the majority group: "Because the idea of double consciousness explicitly emphasized the integrity of distinctive states in the individual who was its subject, it helped Du Bois to get around the dilemma his idea of distinctiveness so long had posed. Double consciousness allowed for a sense of distinctiveness that really did entail equality, a sense of distinctiveness that did not imply inferiority... Thus he could base his discussion on a body of psychological knowledge more firmly established during his time, one identifying the possibility of different but equally functional ways of dealing with the world" (243). Considering this idea in light of the educational perspective, it might be useful to correlate double-consciousness with the stereotype threat phenomenon. Similar to that concept, it implies a concern on the part of Black individuals with perception. I will discuss this more psychologically—specifically how double-consciousness can lead to unique mental processes—in the next section. The sociological focal point, though, is that African Americans' relationship with double-consciousness shapes their societal experience. Individuals are constantly burdened with the contemplation of what others may think, in a continuation of the unceasing African American relationship with external motivation. In a reflection on the implications of

double-consciousness, I argue that internally motivated Black individuals only have that motivational mindset because they refuse to be externally motivated and constantly burdened by a belief that others control their achievement. Blacks are always aware of other's opinions of them; thus the internally motivated Black person is only able to decide *how* those opinions and judgments affect his or her American sociological experience. Thompson and Du Bois would agree; my main argument does not depend on a "Who has suffered most in American society?" game, but I rather contend that the experience of Blacks in this society is just different altogether. Double-consciousness, then, is an explicit response to this experience and "emerges as strategically shaping African American responses to the problems of disenfranchisement, poverty, and the denial of civil rights after the suppression of Reconstruction" (Wells 121). For every sociologist there is a different twist, but the underlying fact remains the same: there is something distinctive about the particular experience.

Du Bois describes different aspects of his coined conception, and thus gives us many examples—implicit and explicit—of its application. In *The Gift of Black Folk*, he notes that in American wars, for example, Blacks appear "always with double motive, —the desire to oppose the so-called enemy of his country along with his fellow white citizens, and before that, the motive of deserving well of those citizens and securing justice for his folk" (82). Always in a double war, Black individuals fight with the contradiction of the universality of the American Dream and their respective inequality in this society. Du Bois describes this duel in *Souls*: "[The African American] would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul 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” (11). This passage also alludes to another truth of double-consciousness, that there is an underlying paradox (to be Black or to be an American?); and, for African Americans, there is no resolution, and they must interact with the paradox as an ordinary, complex characteristic of their social lives. The two consciousnesses are experienced as mutually exclusive, and yet the Black experience includes a dogged attempt to reconcile them anyway. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. expresses in his introduction to Du Bois’s *Darkwater* that “the worst feature of this double consciousness is that the two lives, of the understanding and of the soul, which we lead, really show very little relation to each other. Each of the consciousnesses occupies a more narrow and more limited field than if there existed one single consciousness containing all the ideas of the subject” (xiv).

Another indicator of the distinctiveness of the Black experience with double-consciousness, significantly, is the initial lack of acceptance of the concept. Similar to the refusal of educationalists to accept and embrace the unique learning styles of Black students, double-consciousness was too out of the ordinary for earlier sociological scholars. Lyubansky and Eidelson, in their essay “Revisiting Du Bois: The Relationship Between African-American Double-Consciousness and Beliefs about Race and Nationality Group Experiences,” explain that “many scholars simply found the concept of a dual identity incomprehensible, whereas others pathologized the phenomenon, assuming that it was dysfunctional because of its sharp contrast to the unidimensional personality structure presumed to be characteristic of the dominant White culture” (4). Yet, the clear societal implications of the concept gave it substantiation—not only for its effect on Blacks but also, by extension, for its effect on all peoples within the country: “The ideological and tactical responses of the Blacks to their own peculiar, circumscribed,

powerless condition in American society have thus resulted in much more than the advancement of narrow Black interests. They have served as an effective social catalyst triggering basic changes throughout the society, and affecting the outlook and circumstances of various segments of the total population” (Thompson 52). It is also worth drawing here the connection back to the “lack of progress” Wilson characterized as indicative of the majority of the Black population; Black Motivation, and its profound use of double-consciousness, is what Thompson describes as a positive catalyst within American society. Du Bois’s concept has become a major component of all discussions on the Black experience and its respective sociology, and continues with an authority that at this point must color any theory about the sociological elements of the Black race in America. “Double consciousness allowed Du Bois’s social scientific project to invest itself with the authority of the natural sciences; his political project drew on the authority of scientific knowledge but also transformed that authority, so that its textual extravagance enacted its argument” (Wells 135).

A brief discussion of the specific implications of double-consciousness on Black Motivation here relies on Du Bois’s assertion of a “second-sight.” He from the beginning saw double-consciousness as the groundwork for a distinctive American thinker. His thoughts on the “talented tenth,” and that there exists a layer of the African American population meant to elevate the masses, denote a concession that although all African Americans act within American society with a double-consciousness the specific interactions themselves are individual. Though his “Talented Tenth” theory lacks full logical substantiation and statistical proof, double-consciousness must be read relative to his advocacy of such a group of individuals (Wells 121-122). That is to say, the elite group Du Bois described is able to use its sociological peculiarity to its advantage, to become leaders. It is a skill and an advantage as a Black American. For Du

Bois, there are those within African American society who are better able to navigate through the effects of double-consciousness, and thus one's relationship to it has a potentiality for distinction within the race. This again parallels the polarity of internally and externally motivated Blacks, in that Black Motivation is associated most specifically with the talented individuals who best navigate through the distinctive space—in the case of double-consciousness, those for whom it becomes an advantage.

What I call potentiality is similar to what Wells describes as “access” in the following comparison of African American double-consciousness to S. Weir Mitchell's feministic application of the theory:

Double consciousness functioned as a point of exchange for both Mitchell and Du Bois. If African Americans were veiled off from a public sphere, double consciousness meant for them a painful awareness of what went on in the discursive space they were forbidden to inhabit bodily, a space that Du Bois's writing entered and transformed. If the feminine subject was understood as fixed, double consciousness allowed it to wander into a literal public space, to stand outside a window or talk into the street. In both cases, the very doubling of consciousness that produced spoiled identity also sponsored the subject's access to disturbing practices of language, writing that does not keep its place, that has designs upon the reader's quiet night's sleep. (130)

Wells goes on to argue that double-consciousness gives individuals the ability to perform within arenas in which they can form rational opinions and decisions in “political matters, that is, matters relevant to the entire society and in need of regulation” (130). Not only does this notion connect back to a previous idea that double-consciousness equips its subjects with a gift of

“second-sight” pertinent to the societal community at large, but it also distinguishes that those who are able to use this “space” strategically (as did Du Bois and Weir Mitchell’s female subject) have the capability of acting the most advantageously within our political society.

As Du Bois points out, Blacks are often forced into double-binds, and I hold that it is only the “dogged strength” of those internally motivated individuals which leads a select few to success. Thompson acknowledges such a sociological bind in his discussion of post-secondary education: “Their increasing choice of white colleges underscores a major paradox and reveals an inherent dilemma in the Blacks’ struggle for equality and full participation in American life. They feel compelled to hold onto their racial roots and identity, but they also want to be accorded all of the rights and privileges their qualifications merit, regardless of their racial identity” (19). A subtle implication of Thompson’s argument here—one that he may not have even intended—is that for complete success it is imperative that Blacks attend “white” colleges. There is a sense that one must “mak[e] it on the White man’s terms,” if one is to truly be successful (Gurin 181). This marks the thinking of one who possesses a Black Motivation. Such a motivation drives a person to tilt a bit that social mirror, described by Wilson as casting one’s reflection of one’s social self (100), to reveal a self able and superiorly equipped to surmount American society.

Victim Status

A nasty by-product of double-consciousness is what Jerry Gafio Watts describes in *Black Intellectuals* as the victim status, or the state of being torn between one’s own values of freedom and the desire to deny freedom to others (19). Within a society in which the Black community is oppressed Watts feels it is a natural response for some individuals to want to “be like” the dominant group. This concept can be seen as the even more negative sociological flip-side of the “acting White” phenomenon discussed in the educational discussion. Rather than avoiding

Whiteness, individuals look to adapt into their own personalities what they perceive as the power of the majority group, or victimizer. “In this struggle, the victims often desire to be like the victimizer. More precisely, the victimizer is seen in the eyes of the victim as being the ‘free person.’ As such, freedom becomes associated with the dominance of other human beings” (18). Such a concept is surely problematic, and is an example of one of the alternatives an externally motivated Black may choose in response to the oppression of American society. As Watts continues in his text, Blacks in American society seeking to succeed have their ethnic legitimacy brought into question and may “confront various levels of self-generated doubt about the utility of their enterprises vis-à-vis black America or the world at large” (23).

It would seem that this conflict for Blacks is again linked directly to the way of society and its dealings with the racial group; a juxtaposition of competition and insecurity produces what Watts characterizes as neurosis in his book (xii). Lyubansky and Eidelson argue that this juxtaposition results in feelings of injustice and helplessness, ideas no doubt associated with an external motivational mindset: “The *injustice* belief highlights the in-group as the victim of unjust treatment by other groups. Such grievances are often based on individuals’ belief that in-group members receive substandard outcomes due not to their own inadequacies but because some other, more powerful out-group has created a biased or rigged system...[and] the *helplessness* belief refers here to the individual’s conviction that the in-group is unable to favorably influence or control events and outcomes through political or economic means” (6-7). I argue that it is Black Motivation that navigates one through this type of disadvantage, and yet must concede that for *all* Black people (especially artists) the oppression has effects. As Watts asks, “How is it possible for black American intellectuals and artists to sustain artistically viable creative angsts and disciplines in the face of the sometimes overwhelming debilitations and

influences of racial subjugation? To what extent does the political situation shape the ability of the Afro-American intellectual to realize his or her creativity?” (10). These questions will be explored further in the Black Art section, but are instructive here to understand that nothing, not even a Black Motivation, can make one immune from the sociological consequences packaged with one’s racial identity as a Black American. What is more instructive, though—and will also continue to be examined—is the importance of one’s reaction to those consequences.

Du Boisian Sympathy

The political or social situation undoubtedly substantially shapes the ability of even the internally motivated Black individual to realize his or her creativity. I move now to a logical question: How so? As we have witnessed with Black Motivation, it is not simply that society automatically crushes one or stifles one’s creative spirit; seeing as Black Motivation presupposes that the individual is somehow navigating his or her self successfully through society *despite* (or rather, empowered by) the debilitations and influences of racial subjugation. One of the ways in which the political and social situation affects the creativity of African Americans is the duality created by the racial suppression of Black individuals—particularly those with an internal motivation. Self-ability and determination are still accompanied by one’s human desire for empathy. Consider W. E. B. Du Bois; with his experienced double-consciousness and introduction to the racial world, though he expresses a “dogged strength” to succeed no matter what, his heart still yearns for sympathy from that other world that has shut him out by a vast veil. “I became painfully aware that some human beings even thought [my brown skin was] a crime. I was not for a moment daunted, —although, of course, there were some days of secret tears— rather I was spurred to tireless effort. If they beat me at anything, I was grimly determined to make them sweat for it!” (*Darkwater* 6). Du Bois’s thoughts here really exemplify the way of

Black Motivation. Rather than stifle his motivation to achieve, the extreme externalism and self-consciousness of Du Bois's societal experience make him want to work harder.

This "veil" of which Du Bois speaks, then, acts doubly as the source of misunderstanding and antipathy for Black and White Americans, and also as the source of potential human sympathy: "I studied eagerly under teachers who bent in subtle sympathy, feeling themselves some shadow of the Veil and lifting it gently that we darker souls might peer through to other worlds" (7). Even as an internally motivated student, Du Bois still appreciated and made use of the sympathy granted by his White teachers. The paradox arises: the individual with Black Motivation in this society wants to excel (above all, even) and will do so at all costs, but also wants society at large to value that success and understand the experience by which it is accompanied. It is a cycle that continually builds the character and sociological mindset of those individuals who are able to survive or, dare I say, conquer the paradox—those with a Black Motivation: "With all this came the strengthening and hardening of my own character. The billows of birth, love, and death swept over me. I saw life through all its paradox and contradiction of streaming eyes and mad merriment...hugging to my soul the divine gift of laughter and withal determined, even unto stubbornness, to fight the good fight" (10).

For Du Bois, sympathy involved those who lived without the veil knowing *and* acknowledging their fellow human beings who lived within it. It was more than merely acknowledging sameness, as Gooding-Williams points out in "Du Bois's Counter-Sublime," but it also meant being moved or "touched" by that knowledge of the sameness, of a common humanity and common destiny. "It is a movement beyond the knowledge or discovery of a shared identity to an expressed and explicit avowal of human community" (252). This Du Boisian sympathy is especially poignant when we consider his chapter in *Souls* on Alexander

Crummell. He held that the great tragedy of Crummell was that his life and achievements remained unknown to society at large. “Those who did not live within the veil could not understand the power, and thus ‘could have no sympathy for what Crummell endured’” (Gooding-Williams 250). While this sentiment was perhaps more topical during the extremely blatant racial struggles of Du Bois’s—and Crummell’s—time, the idea that a lack of understanding equates to a tragedy remains to be extremely informative in our society today. It essentially makes an argument that no matter how marvelous the art or how dogged the motivation, there must be some level of acknowledgement and understanding, or sympathy, conceded from society at large in order for the art to have the greatest effect. *Black Motivation*, then, in its insistence and persistence in traversing and conquering these given paradoxes helps progress society.

The Sociological Perspective and Black Motivation

“And then—the Veil. It drops as drops the night on southern seas—vast, sudden, unanswering. There is Hate behind it, and Cruelty and Tears. As one peers through its intricate, unfathomable pattern of ancient, old, old design, one sees blood and guilt and misunderstanding. And yet it hangs there, this Veil, between Then and Now, between Pale and Colored and Black and White—between You and Me. Surely it is a thought-thing, tenuous, intangible; yet just as surely is it true and terrible and not in our little day may you and I lift it” (Darkwater 119).

Du Bois in this previous passage speaks of a day that has not yet come. He empowers his readers with an immense amount of social power to lift years and years of hate, guilt, blood, cruelty and tears. It is the power of understanding and acknowledgement. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. notes in his introduction to *Souls*, Du Bois’s intention was to collect and analyze societal data about the facets of being Black in America, as “the veil offers the opportunity to see and to

report to America the truth of a divided nation” (xxviii). This is the major relationship between a sociological perspective and Black Motivation, for I maintain that it is only through the specific experience of a Black Motivation that one is able to use one’s double-consciousness as an advantage, to all at once experience *and* “see and report to America the truth.” Conquering society and succeeding despite its workings to the contrary are of great magnitude; as Kant via the Gooding-Williams text concurs, the act itself of overcoming or even progressing society yields a distinctive, superior sociological state of mind: “The consciousness of being superior to a power which previously made one feel inferior is what Kant’s (dynamical) sublime and Bloom’s counter-sublime share in common. For Kant, the mood of the sublime can recall ‘man’ to his supersensible moral destiny and thus to his essential superiority to some fearful object of nature before which he has felt impotent” (259).

The individuals in our society who work against a systematic grain and are still able to achieve at the top-most level are understandably in a unique position within it. It is their struggle and determination together that continue to drive them forward, propelling each characteristic all the more. In Du Bois’s words, “Nowhere have I met men and women with a broader spirit of helpfulness, with deeper devotion to their life-work, or with more consecrated determination to succeed in the face of bitter difficulties than among [Black intellectuals]” (*Souls* 70). These are those individuals whom we have followed from the educational perspective section of this paper, those for whom the ill-fitting education system of America was transformed into a great advantage of distinguishing academic ability. These are the ones who benefit from the “second-sight” of which Du Bois spoke, and for whom tomorrow holds a new day only if we can conquer the viciousness of the veil. “I have seen a land right merry with the sun, where children sing, and rolling hills lie like passioned women wanton with harvest. And there in the King’s Highway sat

and sits a figure veiled and bowed, by which the traveller's footsteps hasten as they go. On the tainted air broods fear. Three centuries' thought has been the raising and unveiling of that bowed human heart, and now behold a century new for the duty and the deed" (*Souls* 33).

There are several major implications related to a look at American society and Black Motivation. The most obvious, perhaps, is what the Black sociological experience has to offer society. This is not to say, necessarily, that only those with Black Motivation have an instructive experience, but rather that only *those* individuals are able to get through the afflictions of racial subjugation and suppression successfully enough to relate the story. "Manifestly some of the great races of today—particularly the Negro race—have not as yet given to civilization the full spiritual message which they are capable of giving" (Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races" 179). It is this spiritual message on which Du Bois commented that would move him to construct an "American Creed" of the Negro people, including a belief that the race has a contribution to civilization and humanity that no other race can make (183). This sentiment follows in countless pieces of literature on this experience of the African American, yet what is often not emphasized enough is that the suppression of the race also means a suppression of its contributions. Trapped by a vast veil, the people are ever looking for "sympathy." An individual with Black Motivation necessarily peers from behind that veil in his or her effort to progress society. Susan Mizruchi, in "Neighbors, Strangers, Corpses: Death and Sympathy in the Early Writings of W. E. B. Du Bois," connects Du Boisian sympathy to Kant's idea of moral duty. "Where we expect to find instinctive recognition of another's feelings, we now find race hatred. It is not simply that sympathy is absent; it is that sympathy is supposed to be there" (274). Not only, then, do Black individuals seek this acknowledgement from society at large, but it should be a given within a well-functioning society. As Watts points out in his work, it is through the stories of peoples'

worldly situations that we are able to strategically “revise the common lessons for survival that need to be passed from generation to generation” (100). These stories are not told without societal acknowledgement of their importance.

It is then both informative and exemplary to consider the sociological contributions of W. E. B. Du Bois, because his sharp eye to the “specific shadings and hues of humanity” gives him a great strength in the exploration and analysis of the experience (Higginbotham in *Darkwater* xxvi), as a sociologist and as one who possesses a Black Motivation. Those who speak from a Black Motivation of the Black experience have effectively “reached a deeper sociological depth than social scientists themselves” (Thompson 13). As Thompson offers, the Black experience “says some very concrete and verifiable things about inherent social and psychological realities characteristic of the Blacks’ perennial struggle to survive and advance in a rather hostile, biracial American society. Therefore, the concept does speak to certain fundamental aspects and themes in the national culture as well as to basic realities and experiences peculiar to the Black condition” (13). With the combination of their unique experience within American society and their interactions with such sociological powers as Du Bois’s double-consciousness and his idea of sympathy, these individuals are in “an intense dialectical condition of self and social awareness, which can be understood as a kind of sociological sixth sense” (Mizruchi 289).

“High in the tower, where I sit above the loud complaining of the human sea, I know many souls that toss and whirl and pass...Of them I am singularly clairvoyant. I see in and through them. I view them from unusual points of vantage. Not as a foreigner do I come, for I am native, not foreign, bone of their thought and flesh of their language” (Darkwater 15).

PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

As seen with the discussions on the educational and sociological aspects of Black Motivation, analyzing the distinct experience of Blacks in America using separate perspectives comes with an overlap. Yet, as I stated earlier, these are necessary steps of analysis for a true understanding of my conception of Black Motivation. The psychological perspective will offer a look into the psychological workings and implications of the Black experience in America. Briefly revisiting through a psychological lens the effect of schools on Blacks, as well as reconsidering double-consciousness and the “acting White” and stereotype threat phenomena, will further clarify and expand the construction of Black Motivation. Additionally, I will discuss the psychological idea of *self-concept*, and its manifestation in that construction.

In Joseph White and Thomas Parham’s *Black Psychology: An African American Perspective*, they attempt to study, analyze, and define a psychology from an African American standpoint using the authentic experiences of Blacks in America, which they describe as “Black Psychology” (11). Approaching the psychological perspective from this angle is instructive, as the “sixth sense” that Du Bois and Mizruchi described gives the discussion an added credence. Similar to Du Bois’s view of Black sociologists, White and Parham explain, “With their combination of direct experience obtained by growing up in the Black community and academic training in the basic models of psychology, [Black] psychologists [are] uniquely qualified to formulate the theoretical principles and applied direction of Black psychology” (22). This is not to say that all psychologists mentioned in this section are African American; specifically, the findings on *discounting* and *devaluing* (to be discussed) are of White psychologists. Rather, using theories that apply distinctively to Blacks (usually established by “Black psychologists”),

and informedly applying to the Black experience those theories which are not originally specific to the race, is most advantageous toward the end of constructing Black Motivation.

In the educational perspective I presented the concept *Nach* (or Need for achievement), from Sandra Graham's work on the achievement motivation of African Americans. This terminology has been widely used in scholarship to discuss the underachievement of Blacks in America, and, in this paper, was previously paired with goal theory to explore the educational elements of that underachievement. The psychological idea of *domain* is included in a further discussion on the problem of Blacks within mismatched environments in America. In Forbes, Schmader and Allen's study on the "role of devaluing and discounting in performance monitoring" (2008), they describe students as explicitly motivated to succeed in academics in correlation to how much they value the domain. "When individuals find themselves in a valued domain, motives are activated that automatically guide attention toward goal-relevant stimuli" (2). *Domain* relates to the environment in which one is expected to achieve, and the study reveals its faultiness as a chief psychological cause of the underachievement of Blacks, especially in the American school system. Additionally, from psychologists White and Parham:

[A]cademic achievement is stifled when motivation to achieve is nonexistent and the desire to achieve is challenged by environmental obstacles preventing goal attainment...Ironically, the very institutions that are supposed to encourage achievement are the ones that hinder it. Nowhere is the example clearer than in some of our schools. (97)

The sharp increase in the suicide rate of young Blacks lends credibility to the notion that their lives are characterized by higher levels of stress. Ironically,

much of the stress, tension, and even hostility that Black men must endure originate from sources intended to support them. Nowhere is this dilemma more accurately illustrated than in the educational system. (151)

The concept *domain*, though, is one that applies even outside of schools. The experiences of one's life all come with specific domains, such as the work place, the home, and any other societal construction in which an individual is expected to "achieve." I would argue that with such effects as double-consciousness and stereotype threat at play, the lives of Blacks are comparable to Forbes, Schmader and Allen's aforesaid thoughts on motivation in academic domains. Blatantly for Blacks, forever exists the notion of evaluation—of the self, of society, and from society of one's self.

The achievement hindrances and stress levels mentioned by White and Parham can be directly applied to the distinctive academic situation of Blacks in America, as well as to their characteristic position within American society. A Black Psychology, as they have described, includes considering how the psychological implications of domain-related underachievement connects to that uniqueness. The psychological perspective of this paper employs that method of psychology to construct the third leg of the concept of Black Motivation.

"Acting White" and Stereotype Threat

Just as Black Psychology has a central voice in an elaboration on the underachievement of Blacks in schools, —and, by extension, in society—it also deals on a more general level with the "acting White" and stereotype threat phenomena. There is no question of the existence and effects of the "acting White" phenomenon, but the explanations of its starting place are various. With more of a psychological slant than what I have mentioned so far regarding the notion of "acting White," White and Parham write: "In their attempt to explain what they considered to be

‘universal human phenomena,’ Euro-American psychologists implicitly and explicitly began to establish a normative standard of behavior against which all other cultural groups would be measured...[T]he word ‘different,’ when applied to people, became synonymous with ‘deficient,’ rather than simply different” (4). This is an atrocious parallel to those external beliefs, mentioned in the educational and sociological perspectives of this thesis, within the Black community that “White is right.” Then, not only does a Black Psychology help one explore the distinctive psychological experiences of African Americans, but it also acts as a corrective buffer from the deficiency systematically assigned to Blacks’ response to their defective *domain* that is American society.

Similarly, the Forbes, Schmader and Allen text describes another response to the social stigmata involved with an African American experience, as we revisit the idea of stereotype threat. “Stigmatized minority students often experience stereotype threat, a fear that their performance may confirm negative stereotypes, in situations where their intellectual merit is evaluated. To cope with these intellectually threatening environments, some individuals psychologically disengage from performance feedback” (1). Although psychological disengagement is traditionally discussed regarding educational contexts its relationship with the stereotype threat extends it to be considered within American society at large as well. It allows individuals to “buffer self-esteem from threatening feedback in stereotype-relevant domains,” as well as to survive the respective negative outcomes (1); and, for African Americans, life is stereotype-relevant.

Two main types of psychological disengagement are depicted: *devaluing* and *discounting*. *Devaluing* involves a mental decision to ignore the potentially negative effects of stereotype-relevant domains. Individuals minimize the bearing of society on their lives to such a level that

their performance is not hindered by their stigmatization within the society. For example, an individual can engage in psychological patterns that refuse the effect of a societal holding that because one is Black one is less intelligent than one's White colleague or school mate or spouse. As a result, this individual would be less likely to have such a stereotype affect his or her personal performance. An act of *discounting* one's domain is more problematic: individuals completely dismiss society and its potential negative effects. An individual engaged in this act might attribute all negative societal experiences to stereotyping, and thus would be able to continue on in a belief that society is just against him or her. *Discounting* individuals are not motivated to seek solutions to the problems associated with their stigmatization, but rather—to avoid any sense of stereotype confirmation—dismiss the issues altogether as external to their ability. Respectively, internal and external motivations are concepts familiar to us that can be utilized to further understand and articulate the positions of these psychological ideas of *devaluing* and *discounting* within our investigation of Black Motivation.

An internal mindset is mightily advantageous when considering the effects of psychological disengagement. The text explains, “Stigmatized minorities who value academics respond to stereotype threatening cues by becoming implicitly vigilant for performance relevant stimuli and more efficient in responding to them. These results highlight the increased motivation to excel that situations of stereotype threat elicit” (11). From this passage I only highlight the thought on the effect of one becoming “implicitly vigilant” to achieve, and do not agree with Forbes, Schmader and Allen's implication that those who do not internalize their motivation devalue academics. It is a mistake to hold that the vast population of externally motivated African Americans is simply not trying or does not value achievement; rather, external

motivation and *discounting* for this group are results of an inability to successfully negotiate the effects of an ill-fitted domain.

Related to the discussion of internal motivation in the educational perspective, Forbes, Schmader and Allen explain that those stereotype-threatened individuals who *devalue* are equipped with a superb motivation to achieve. Not only do they possess a motivation greater than the externally motivated individuals who *discount*, but they are also better equipped than those who are not as threatened by stereotype threat (i.e., the majority group). The reasoning behind this is their ability for early error detection and more efficient conflict management. If situations of stereotype threat give these individuals an opportunity to disconfirm negative stereotypes, they engage in faster motivational processes (Forbes 2). This can be likened to the idea of “making it on the White man’s terms,” because these individuals activate this superior psychological functioning in an effort basically to prove society wrong.

Further emphasizing the distinctiveness of internally motivated, stereotype-threatened individuals, the text goes on to consider Error-Related Negativity (ERN), a component related to the effect of errors on the performance of individuals. Stronger ERN amplitudes represent a more efficient psychological relationship with error-related stimuli. “Consistent with the suggestion that motivation can heighten alertness for errors or conflict, past research has shown stronger ERN amplitudes when individuals internally motivated to not be prejudiced experience automatic stereotype activation” (3).²

Forbes, Schmader and Allen also explain, though, that while this previous type of psychological disengagement (*devaluing*)—with its implications for early stage motivational processing involved in monitoring and responding to errors—may be generally viewed as

² Forbes, Schmader and Allen’s use of “prejudiced” refers to an idea that those who *devalue* have mentally conditioned themselves to be insignificantly affected by the effects of stereotype-relevant domains.

advantageous, *discounting* is a negative type of psychological disengagement. Among stereotype-threatened minority students, “discounting may have implications for later construal processes” (1). The externally motivated individuals associated with the act of *discounting* have the least efficient psychological functioning in achievement and performance situations, because they censure the real and imagined wrongdoings of society as a way to cope with the stereotype threat. In the authors’ words, “Whereas the value placed on a domain might be expected to predict an early stage of error detection, discounting academic feedback may necessitate a later evaluation of errors so that negative outcomes can be attributed to external factors rather than to the self” (2). Furthermore, of an individual who engages in *discounting*, psychologist Amos Wilson adds that it is quite possible “to consciously note certain incompetencies, inadequacies, and impairments in his personality and yet feel good about himself if he perceives these factors as not important to his self-definition, social acceptance and standing or paradoxically, perceives their existence as enhancing his self-definition or social status” (102). These individuals lack incentive to try harder. The *Nach* spectrum polarity of Blacks, then, is no wonder—the internal and external motivations of the race are closely linked to unique psychological processes of striking significance.

In “Constructing a Psychological Perspective: The Observer and the Observed in The Souls of Black Folk,” Shanette Harris analyzes the mental functions of W. E. B. Du Bois. She concludes that Du Bois suffered (or profited) from an inferiority complex, and refers to his psychopathological strivings for success and superiority as “behaviors that are executed to overcompensate for perceived deficiencies” (234). Harris seems to rely on a sentiment similar to the accusatorial fold of the “acting White” phenomenon, suggesting that Du Bois selected a lifestyle that would make him more acceptable to Whites in America and “allow them to see that

his interior or ‘soul’ was just like theirs” (229). Her findings represent how Black Psychology can be fallaciously applied, and brings light to my previous notion of how considering Black Psychology *in conjunction* with more traditional psychological concepts and theories is most valuable for a thorough construction of Black Motivation.

What Harris describes as an inferiority complex can more productively be viewed as the stereotype threat. Du Bois was acutely aware that, especially as a primary African American societal figure, he was always under watch. This next argument from Harris misrepresents Du Bois’s motivational mindset as external and fails to adequately consider the very probable possibility that Du Bois’s strivings were rather an attempt to “make it on the White man’s terms,” and seek the sympathy and empathy he had described elsewhere in his work. “The development of an inferiority complex in Du Bois stemmed from his racial identity, attitudes, feelings and behaviors; he responded to his alleged inferiority based solely on race by overcompensating in matters of intellectual achievement” (239-40). A consideration of the work of Forbes, Schmader and Allen informs that Du Bois’s success-oriented being and determination were not products of overcompensation, but rather the natural psychological response of a stigmatized, stereotype-threatened minority individual. Let it be said, any chance Du Bois had to disconfirm a negative stereotype about his racial group was vigilantly accepted. Furthermore, what Harris describes as Du Bois’s rationalization in this next passage can more fittingly be understood as a successful *devaluation* of his domain, resulting in a realistic belief of his superior ability to achieve. “Du Bois chose to strive for superiority and eradicate feelings of inferiority by seeking to obtain European ‘prizes.’ He rationalized that the attainment of these prizes would bestow upon him an equal or higher status than that of members of the European American racial group” (228).

Double-Consciousness

While Harris's thoughts on an alleged inferiority complex of Du Bois are problematic, her in depth analysis is instructive in solidifying and clarifying my utilization of the "acting White" and stereotype threat phenomena in my construction of Black Motivation. In the same way, she offers a very insightful psychological framework by which to consider the double-consciousness concept. Harris argues that African Americans have a keen spiritual sensitivity that allows them to see race and social matters with "a kind of sixth sense" (227). Again we see this idea of the Black experience producing, as a positive effect, an ability to understand American society in an advantageously peculiar fashion. Harris describes African Americans' sensitivity as being more humanistic than that of their European American counterparts. They are able to access emotions usually inaccessible to actors within American society—and it is the double-consciousness, or one's ability to see one's self through the eyes of others, which sparks that ability. Harris uses *Souls* to explain:

Du Bois describes the external experience and its context that were powerful enough to make obvious emotions that were previously inaccessible to him. Du Bois recalls the moment that the impact of his physical self on the social environment was made salient and transformed him into a marginal figure in the supposedly safe harbor of the classroom. In this instance, however, 'the other's' perspective of him was made clear, undeniably signifying his difference: 'I remember well when the shadow swept across me...In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card, —refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it

dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil' (10). (227)

Similarly, in “Looking at One’s Self Through the Eyes of Others,” Shawn Michelle Smith describes the psychological advantage of a double-consciousness as an African American subjectivity. She explains that it is “mediated by a ‘white supremacist gaze,’ and it is therefore divided by contending images of blackness—those produced by a dominant white culture, and those maintained by African American individuals, within African American communities.” The negotiation of these contrasting images of Blackness produces the “psychological and social burden of attempting to assuage ‘two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals’ (*Souls* 11)” (189). Although a burden, this negotiation provides very crucial instruction to a psychological perspective of double-consciousness. Particularly, the experience of dealing with these contending images of one’s race produces perceptions that can provide insight into the mind-set of that racial group. Harris explains of Du Bois, “He becomes the filtering agent through which whites could learn what it means to be black. He discusses issues to encourage sociobehavioral change within the African American community and to develop European American empathy toward African Americans” (218).

Importantly, this psychological view of double-consciousness also extends a level of value to this very paper. As a Black person, I internalize aspects of culture both internal and external to the “veil.” Because my frame of reference—and double-consciousness—is shaped by psychological defenses, beliefs, values, and internal strivings, like *Souls*, my account becomes a sort of “looking glass that allows us to glimpse the inner life and spirit of an observer through recorded perspectives of those [I have] observed” (218). Meaning is gauged from the ways in

which I handle the Black experience, and thus a personal hope is that my production here is also considered as telling a ‘life story.’ In essence, an African American account of the Black experience is in itself productive, —among other elements—because of the “sixth sense” by which it is composed.

Self-Concept

A psychological extension to the sociological perspective comes with a look at an idea known as *self-concept*. “[*Souls*] can also contribute significantly to psychological information as regards the role of social factors in the development of the self and the interrelationship between this inner essence and the collective in which it is embedded” (Harris 220). Du Bois, in his book, did a masterful job at relaying how the social stigmata and other elements indicative of a Black experience all combine to create a distinct sociological experience. Additionally, though, many psychologists agree that those social happenings have very specific psychological implications. White and Parham note that Blacks in American society—a “society that neither validates nor cultivates [their] existence”—are constantly exposed to racism and oppression. These factors mitigate the forces that influence their identity development (45). This conclusion regarding self-concept then relates to all three perspectives, in view of the fact that a “variable that undoubtedly influences the achievement aspirations of Black youngsters is self-concept...[It] is found to be in direct relation to how a person thinks others perceive him or her” (White and Parham 91). The notion is educationally, sociologically and psychologically relevant.

This passage from Harris advances an idea that the self-concept development of African Americans is, in fact, a unique one; as she also relates it back to her former thoughts of environment internalization and double-consciousness:

[Du Bois's] psychological response to identity progression and resolution during the early period of his life was intricately tied to a desire for his own and the 'Negro' identity that he presented as the wish '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' (11). This wish shows the difference between European and African Americans in their move to establish an identity, namely that identity development for African Americans is significantly more complex because of the racism that must be confronted. The tendency to be defined as 'a problem' and to be 'shut out from their world by a vast veil' (10) requires an integration of multiple internal selves that exist because of the internalization of a racially divided external environment. (238)

Although education and society may have occurrences and resulting repercussions of their own (as discussed in previous sections), Harris clarifies here that they all come together to impinge ultimately upon the psychology of Blacks.

As with most of the concepts stated in relation to this thesis, there are two sides of an African American self-concept. In *Awakening the Natural Genius of Black Children*, Amos Wilson describes these types as "alienated" and "wholistic" (104). Also similar to other ideas I have discussed, each of the self-conceptions relates especially to individuals associated with previously mentioned kinds of motivation and psychological modes of disengagement: externally motivated, *discounting* individuals and internally motivated, *devaluing* individuals, respectively. Strikingly, in Wilson's discussion of the *alienated self-concept*, not only does he essentially portray the textbook definition of a *discounting* psychological mindset, but he also alludes to the

commonality of this type of self-concept within the African American community—similar to what was stated of an external motivation:

This type of constricted self-concept may be in part inherited by the individual from the culture of his social group. Because the constructed self-concept ‘shuts out’ unpleasant reality and motivates the individual to perhaps pursue more immediate gratification, hedonistic pleasures, escape responsibility, permits him to engage in self-aggrandizing and palliative fantasies, charades, fads, and other types of retreats from reality, he may feel relatively secure and happy with this constricted view of himself. (104)

He further explains that these individuals build their identities on “extrinsic or external factors.”

They have little confidence and do not feel a real sense of control over their destiny.

“Consequently, even when [they] may possess unsurpassed intelligence or talent, [they] may feel that [they] can only achieve full and ultimate recognition when placed in the service of [their] White oppressors” (105-106). His narrative is, no doubt, a bit dramatic, but it corresponds to countless other accounts of the Black experience—regarding external motivation, the lack of “giftedness” in African Americans phenomenon, under-achievement, etc.

Wilson describes an individual possessing a *wholistic self-concept*:

He is motivated by his self-determined needs based on accurate, realistic, self-examination; self-knowledge and self-acceptance; on self-actualization, task-oriented problem-solving drives him to resolve conflicts which bedevil him and his ethnic group...He is realistically self-confident. He does not doubt his capacity nor that of his people to equal or surpass the accomplishments of others...He realizes knowledge of truth and the continuing, joyous pursuit of

knowledge are liberating...He recognizes that there is nothing foreign or alien about his pursuit of the highest level of cognitive competence of which he is capable...The wholistic self-concept is a broad, well-rounded type of self perception. (107-08)

External factors, for these individuals, only drive them to figure out new problem-solving techniques, to forever try harder—no matter what is thrown at them. It is truly the polar opposite of the complacency connected with an *alienated self-concept*. Those with a *wholistic self-concept* are more psychologically dynamic, and better able to adapt to new environments. This may shed needed light on their ability (as internally motivated individuals) to assimilate into the ill-fitted educational and sociological environments that make up American society. And it connects back to some original thoughts of the educational perspective that there is an achievement gap between African Americans and the majority group. Social psychologist and professor Claude Steele imparts in his scholarship on African American student achievement that “one’s self-image derives in large part from how one is viewed by others—family, school, and the broader society. When those views are negative, people may internalize them, resulting in lower self-esteem—or self-hatred, as it has been called” (116). And even more notable for a current mention, “Black students internalize negative stereotypes as performance anxiety and low expectations for achievement, which they then fulfill” (117).

Additionally, Wilson further contrasts individuals possessing “wholistic” perceptions with those possessing an *alienated self-concept*, noting the tragic deception of the latter group’s decision to *discount* within stereotype-relevant domains. Although this type of self-concept may make individuals who possess it feel good or better, it is not in the best interest of oneself or one’s social group. Its insistence on ignoring key sociological and psychological ramifications

of an oppressive society leads to the perpetuation of “group-wide poverty, dependency, socioeconomic subordination, self-negating and self-defeating behavior” (109). Individuals with *alienated self-concepts* are effectively stripped of the motivation to base important aspects of their selves on the appropriate use of their intellectual, psychological, and related socio-personal talents (110).

The Psychological Perspective and Black Motivation

Hale-Benson urged the development of a unique social-psychological theory, to be used when considering the distinctive experience of Blacks in American society. “This theory must identify the social, historical, and cultural forces that affect the development of learning styles in the Black community. This theory must also describe the psychological characteristics of Black children within the context of environmental factors that create and maintain them. It must seek to describe the cultural context out of which creative and intellectual responses occur” (5). The psychological perspective of constructing Black Motivation, in part, functions as my attempt to answer that charge. It is always a question of mine: what distinguishes a Black Motivation within the Black experience? This section has sought to answer that from a psychological standpoint.

Harris, in her discussion of Du Bois, recalls to herself those early childhood moments that influence our self-perceptions and self-definitions. “We recall with razor sharpness those defining moments when we were reminded of our ‘differences’ of ‘otherness’ from the mainstream or the group. Although each person is born with [an] innate motive for success, some external circumstance or experience must activate the desire to strive” (227). I cannot say for certain whether I agree with Harris that there must be something “external” that activates the desire to strive, for it could rather be realized without external influence or that what others

might call ‘fate’ accounts for its activation; but I have grown sure that the “desire to strive” itself is an aspect of Black Motivation. Individuals with Black Motivation use the racially distinctive psychological happenings advantageously to achieve *better*. As Jerry Gafio Watts says in *Heroism and the Black Intellectual*, “It is a psychological mind-set that generates a suffocating, debilitating desire to prove oneself either capable or superior, depending on the depth of one’s insecurity and the quality of one’s perceived talents” (120). That is exactly Black Motivation: suffocating, debilitating, but absolutely glorious. It is indeed a paradox.

Blacks respond to the distinctive psychological workings of their experience in a range of ways—including avoidance, counter-stereotypic behavior, disengagement, disidentification, etc. (Steele 124). In this section of my paper I have strived to illuminate the combination of specific responses, which creates effects resulting in a special motivation that exceeds all others: a combination which Steele describes as “water on parched land, a much-needed but seldom-received balm” (126), and which White and Parham describe as coming together to create a unique “space.” Black Motivation is the “psychological space, independent of the oppressor, where [individuals] can generate a sense of worth, dignity, and belonging” (18).

In this psychological look at the concept I also consider most intimately the negative possibilities and implications of Black Motivation. Wilson notes:

An individual can exhibit relatively high self-esteem because he has a broad, positive self-concept or because he has negated unacceptable aspects of his self-concept through various forms of psychological suppression, denial and distortion and can therefore only consciously perceive the constricted, though positive aspects of his self-concept as representing the whole of who he is. The individual’s self-concept and related self-esteem, whether generally positive or

negative, may be founded on a relatively large or very restricted number of perceived personal characteristics. The latter part of the prior statement implies that an individual can unconsciously or unknowingly harbor negative perceptions about important aspects of himself and still ‘feel very good’ about who he thinks he is. Good feelings about oneself can be based on ignorance of reality and of oneself (i.e., lack of self-knowledge; false consciousness). (101)

Wilson argues here that an individual—whether possessing a *devaluing, wholistic* self-concept or a *discounting, alienated* self-concept—can, in an effort to cope with stereotype threat and maintain his or her self-esteem, ignore negative aspects of his or her personality. He implies that even if that person “feels good” for now, unconscious or unbeknownst held perceptions of oneself can be problematic down the road. This possibility exists for all Black individuals—including those who possess Black Motivation. There is no clear-cut way to assuage the weightiness of this aspect of constructing my concept, yet I contend it is not necessary for my present purpose. A Black Motivation can be unhealthy—as Watts, Du Bois (in his thoughts on the struggle of double-consciousness), and others would agree. Harris even goes so far as to describe Du Bois’s undying refusals to relinquish the irrationality of how racial group similarities were so easily dismissed because of visible difference as “cognitions and affects that could be considered today as psychologically traumatic” (227). Even if individuals primarily *devalue* stereotype-relevant domains, still the ridiculousness of it all can remain quite disturbing. This is a key contribution of a psychological perspective; though a Black Motivation has much to offer African Americans and society at large, I do not intend to imply that its existence is not associated with problematic aspects. Rather, I highlight that the concept exists, and only by first recognizing and understanding it can we use Black Motivation gainfully in the larger struggle to

truly advance the position of Blacks in American society: “Even though it is a worthwhile effort to elevate the standard of living and social-class position of lower-class children, that may not be the ‘end-all’ that has been assumed. These children would still retain the distinctive mental-ability pattern associated with their ethnic group. So the question becomes one of how we can make maximum use of these distinctive patterns of ability” (Hale-Benson 30). The same goes for the distinctive mental abilities packaged with a Black Motivation.

Finally, perhaps this psychological discussion of Black Motivation may also provide a bit of defense, too, for Black Artists who have been misunderstood. On *Souls*, Harris states, “Interestingly, Du Bois makes these proclamations as if his experiences were the same for other African Americans...As is frequently the case with theorists today, Du Bois mistakenly assumed that categories such as Negro or African American provide information about the spiritual or psychoemotional essence of a person” (239). I would offer, in refutation, that while such categories do not provide essential information about persons, they *do* signify an experience, a “striving.” Just as I would wish to vindicate Du Bois from this attack, I maintain the same defense of this section—and the paper, in its entirety. One runs a risk when one wishes to generalize across a people. There is no intention here to be reckless, but rather to gather and analyze the psychological experiences of African Americans. I emphasize, an ability to transform what has been termed by psychologists and others as—distinctly and uniquely—mentally “challenging” or “debilitating” into a conduit for achieving and superior mental performance denotes the psychological piece of Black Motivation.

CONCLUSION

Through these perspectives—educational, sociological and psychological—I have constructed a distinctive and important type of motivation, “Black Motivation.” Each discipline

colors the concept in its own way, and only when unified do they articulate what I hope to express with this conception/construct.

It is often held that one grows stronger through one's struggle, and we might even analyze that the "unsatisfied desires" of disadvantaged individuals result in greater motivation to achieve than is present in those at more of an advantage in American society (Hale-Benson 50). While this may seem superficially reasonable, it does not correspond to the depressingly low achievement rates of Blacks relative to Whites in American society. I—and others—argue that Blacks are at a systematic disadvantage in this country, and in the "Black Motivation" section of this paper I have sought to explore the differing responses to such a position. This exploration is endlessly necessary and constructive, because within it exists a sub-group of Black individuals for whom the struggle and disadvantage and experience prove to be at the same time phenomenally advantageous.

In her text, Hale-Benson makes the case that Blacks must be *excellent*. "If history has taught any reality to the Afro-American community, it is that Black people have had to excel over white people in every field of endeavor in order to be given an equal opportunity" (157). What is necessary to add, though, is that only a few Blacks continue to consistently excel in this society. Call this group what one will,—whether it be the "Talented Tenth" or "Black Intellectuals" or individuals with Black Motivation—there is unquestionably something unique about their effort. This group is comprised almost entirely of persons who are able to readily adjust their behaviors to the norms of two cultures without 'bleaching their Negro soul.' This ability "depends upon the extent to which these cultures share values and norms for prescribed behaviors. An important factor in the dual socialization process is the amount of conflict there is between the remaining elements that are not shared. There can be some cultural values and

beliefs that are mutually exclusive” (189). As I have shown, there are many values, beliefs and expectations that are ostensibly mutually exclusive, and yet this select group is able to succeed—educationally, socially and psychologically. This group possesses Black Motivation.

In the following discussion, Asa Hilliard describes Black Motivation in the school setting and how it portends excellence: “Not only do the students of traditionally low-performing ethnic groups and income levels do well, but they excel, defeating even the wealthy suburban elites, soundly...Students who were holding back not only accept tough academic challenges, but thrive on them. Further, they even bring new power to the game” (146). I have sought to focus on these students, these Americans—these individuals. I have found their distinctiveness to derive from their experience as Blacks within American society. Let us turn briefly to Amos Wilson’s description of how experience *directs* intelligence:

The very essence of intelligence involves the use of pre-existing abilities and capabilities, past experience, contemporary circumstances and anticipated events in order to achieve intended goals or to resolve a problem. Intelligence is grounded in experience. Experiences, past, present, and anticipatory, are the precursory materials out of which intelligence is dynamically constructed and which intelligence interrelatedly processes in order to accomplish certain adaptive goals. (21)

What is most poignant about Wilson’s thoughts is the notion that a more vast and/or complex experience produces a greater and deeper potentiality for “intelligence.” It is then less of a mystery why Black Motivation springs from the distinctive and remarkable “Black experience.” Although the majority of African Americans are not able to metaphorically (and sometimes more than metaphorically) *survive* the societal landscape of America, those who are able to tap into the

advantages of the Black experience do more than survive: they achieve with commanding success.

The educational section explored the mismatch between the home culture and culture of the school, noting that “the assumption is that the culture of the school is the dominant culture, the culture of white mainstream America” (Perry 53). For *Black Motivation*, I highlighted the ability to use what Wilson describes as a natural “head start” (28) to succeed despite the ill-fitting American educational system—to “make it on the White man’s terms.” Wilson argues that Black children are born to meet the intellectual and academic challenges of America, and the world at large. “The cognitive-behavioral potential of this child is by all means first rate. However, potential must be actualized by the application of appropriate educational conditions” (42). I wholly disagree with this latter thought of Wilson; as I have attempted to illustrate, *Black Motivation* marks the ability to use, and succeed in spite of—if not as a result of,—inappropriate conditions in a way that benefits oneself. I assert that the “forced teaching” Wilson discusses in his writing as leading Black children to “reject or resist new learning experiences” (96) is associated only with externally motivated Black students. While *Black Motivation* leads some to superior achievement, the rejection and resistance Wilson discusses leads others to affiliate success with Whiteness and to the “White is right” concept—or, worse yet, to a “White is NOT right” exclamation, which might be correlated with the violent undercurrent in the Black American community.

A sociological study was done on this violence and urban unrest by the Kerner commission, created during the Johnson administration. White and Parham pass on that “after documenting the history of White racism in America, [the commission] concluded that Black folks had valid reasons to distrust White institutions, promises, and illusions of significant

progress in the elimination of racial oppression” (77-78). Emphasizing the implications of external motivation and the stereotype threat, White and Parham also discuss the fact that since Blacks are not expected to make “significant educational gains” less attention and encouragement are given to them (101). They cite J. M. Palardy’s 1969 psychological study, which “examined the differential perceptions of teachers and wondered what effect these perceptions would have on boys and girls learning how to read.” They found that although each child had previously shown excellent reading skills, when the boys were “taught by teachers who perceived their ability to learn to be lower than girls, boys were out-performed by girls” (102). As all sections of my paper have shown, the findings of Palardy’s study are exceedingly correlative to the experience of African Americans in schools and society.

White and Parham continue on in a study of their own involving the reception of Black giftedness, in which they examined the treatment of Black vs. White “gifted” students. “African-Americans, both gifted and nongifted received less favorable treatment than gifted and nongifted Anglos. In rank order, increased attention and encouragement were given to gifted Anglos, nongifted Anglos, nongifted African-Americans, and gifted African-Americans. In essence, African-American giftedness was penalized with less attention and praise” (102). Of course, we have witnessed a similar claim from Fred Bonner, but what is significant here, and how this finding really helps to conclude the construction of Black Motivation, is that not only were the “gifted” Black students given less attention than the White students, they were at the very bottom of the list (receiving less attention than even their so-called “nongifted” brethren). These to-be Black Artists have the most ‘catching up’ to do of any group in the American classroom, and yet we have found that their Black Motivation drives them all the way to the top.

These individuals, in spite of how they may be described,—whether problematically part of the “Talented Tenth” or unfortunately as “acting White”—achieve in spite of it all. They take all facets of American society in as mere chances to disconfirm the negative stereotypes held against their race. Their actions exclaim of their great need to achieve—for themselves, for their race, and for their country. It has been called an improvisational act, this ability to draw aside the “veil” enough to tell the story of the African American struggle. This ability to use one’s double-consciousness or sixth sense or peculiar point of vantage, to tell a prophesy. To speak of a new tomorrow. To speak of how we use today to get to that new day. Thompson describes these attempts at bettering the nation (and, more, the world) through one’s own racial group as rational acts of organization. “It is through effective organization that people in a complex society become united to achieve both the imperative survival goals and voluntary goals such as respect, prestige, pleasure, and social effectiveness. Ultimately, it is through rational organization that a distinct social group generates sufficient power to control the internal and external forces that shape the lives and destinies of individuals composing the group” (121-122).

“Black Experience.” “Black Psychology.” “Black Sociology.” “Black Art.” All such attempts to organize the experience of Blacks in American society have done so in the efforts aforestated by Thompson. Relying on older bodies of information and perspectives I have sought to add my own contribution to this very important organization of the experience, with my conception of Black Motivation. As has been seen, using the three perspectives—educational, sociological and psychological—has been very helpful in laying out what I find to be distinctive about the experience; and, most specifically, about the superior achievement of some of those who come out of it, namely Black Artists. The concept, Black Motivation, is only a next step in the continuing American struggle for racial equality and true democratic ideals. In

the next section, these ideas and findings will be applied to Black Art. Here, though, I accentuate what I believe to be paramount in my journey to constructing such terminology: it is part of a fight. My account of the experience and yearning for its documentation do not come from a lay curiosity or intriguing interest. I am a biased observer and have experienced these tellings. Black Motivation is me, and I—as Du Bois and countless others—communicate this story as a Black Artist in search of understanding. Yet, also like Du Bois, my narrative does not seek pity—for with these words, I myself revolt and rebel. Black Motivation is radical—although we who possess Black Motivation love this country, we will bang and hammer the American molding out of shape until it also depicts us and our less-able brethren.

“From the double life every American Negro must live...must arise a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence. The worlds within and without the Veil of Color are changing, and changing rapidly, but not at the same rate, not in the same way; and this must produce a peculiar wrenching of the soul, a peculiar sense of doubt and bewilderment. Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or to revolt, to hypocrisy or to radicalism” (Du Bois, Souls 127).

III. Black Art

My initial hypothesis is that if I can identify a distinctive type of motivation, then the art that it produces will also be distinctive. If I can identify a Black Motivation, then George Schuyler’s profession of color-absence during the Harlem Renaissance—and other similar ones of today—will be debunked. This is the aim of the first section of this paper, and now to “test” the hypothesis I will apply my conception to pieces of Black Art, and further illustrate how the different elements of Black Motivation become manifest in the art of those who possess it.

First, let us revisit Jerry Gafio Watts's inquiry regarding how the Black experience affects one's art: "[There is] a central question for black intellectuals and artists: How is it possible for black American intellectuals and artists to sustain artistically viable creative angsts and disciplines in the face of the sometimes overwhelming debilitations and influences of racial subjugation? To what extent does the political situation shape the ability of the Afro-American intellectual to realize his or her creativity?" (10). Watts also disagrees with Schuyler, in that he wonders how the Black Artist is able to produce successfully despite the *different* social, educational, and even psychological conditions of the Black experience—conditions which combine to create what Watts describes as a "unique vice" (15). As I have stated, it is a person's Black Motivation that is engaged to conquer this vice, therefore it must be that same Motivation employed by Black Artists. I want to stress here that even though my particular concept of Black Motivation is original, many others have also attempted to determine what makes Black Art "black." For example, Toni Morrison inquires of herself in her essay "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature": "The question of what constitutes the art of a black writer, for whom that modifier is more search than fact, has some urgency. In other words, other than melanin and subject matter, what, in fact, may make me a black writer? Other than my own ethnicity—what is going on in my work that makes me believe that it is demonstrably inseparable from a cultural specificity that is Afro-American?" (146). In this section I will explore possible answers, including Morrison's own elaboration on the inquiries. And I add to her list: What is going on in my life, or within my experience as an African American, that marks my art as apparently distinct? In a Center for Social Organization Studies report on the changing role of Black Artists (specifically Black writers), the sociologist Karl Mannheim is quoted presenting possible answers to some of the questions raised:

“Intellectual and cultural history is surely shaped, among other things, by social relations, in which men get confronted with each other, by groups within which they find mutual stimulus, where concrete struggle produces entelechies and thereby also influences and to a large extent shapes art, religion and so on” (10). I anticipate that Schuyler might argue that all Blacks do not share the same social relations, to which I would respond that in fact all Blacks do occupy a similar enough position within American society as to produce distinction. Also, in addition to the social relations Mannheim mentions, intrapersonal relations—such as internal motivation, psychological disengagement and self-concept—also influence the production, subject matter, style, tone, and significance of Black Art within American society. The distinctive experience of any given intellectual or historical group (e.g., Black Artists) will shape that group’s art.

Although I believe educational, sociological and psychological aspects of the distinctive Black experience come together to create Black Motivation, the resultant art and its uses are not always the same. There are those who believe that Black Art should be used solely for its ability to “prophesize,” as Du Bois might term it. For instance, Amiri Baraka declared in the midst of the Black Arts movement, “The Negro artist who is not a [Black] nationalist at this late date is a white artist, even without knowing it. He is creating death snacks, for and out of dead stuff. What he does will not matter because it is in the shadow, connected with the shadow and will die when the shadow dies” (qtd. in Watts 10). There were many such sentiments, especially during the Black Arts and Black Power movements, as Black Artists felt a need to create and/or emphasize a distinctive Black culture that stood in opposition to the dominant white culture (Smethurst 15). Some Black Artists were less radical and simply advocated a Black Art that communicates the history and story of the Black experience. Lundquist and Sims explain, “Perhaps we could all agree on the importance of an educational infrastructure that recognizes

the critical need to express oneself, one's family, one's memory, and one's history in art—to reflect musically on moments of celebration, poignance, understanding, and pain—that accepts the cultural complexity of the U.S.” (334). The Black Artist Aaron Douglas, in a note to his friend Langston Hughes, alludes to a program less radical than Baraka's but nonetheless rooted in the distinction of the art: “Your problem, Langston, my problem, no our problem is to conceive, develop, establish an art era. Not white art painted black...Let's bare our arms and plunge them deep through laughter, through pain, through sorrow, through hope, through disappointment, into the very depths of the souls of our people and drag forth material crude, rough, neglected. Then let's sing it, dance it, write it, paint it. Let's do the impossible. Let's create something transcendently material, mystically objective. Earthy. Spiritually earthy. Dynamic” (qtd. in Kirschke 187-188). And there are those who, like Du Bois, feel the distinguishing quality or purpose of Black Art is a 'fateful' one, a calling to “guide the group.” Wells refers to the Black Artist as the intellectual in this next passage relating to Du Bois's belief: “While blood, then, defined a group that has aspirations and messages, blood also demonstrates (studied scientifically) that the group is as illusory as it is critically real, that it resolves into a series of endlessly varied individuals who have been thrown together by historical experience, and for whom a common goal has thereby been chosen. Within this story of endless variation, the intellectual—surely the sign of variation itself—emerges. It is the intellectual who, according to Du Bois, can scientifically understand the range of variation, place him or herself within that range, and therefore find the best direction in which to 'guide the group'” (134). I underscore Wells's reference to a common goal and how the intellectual guides the group, as I discuss both ideas in more detail later in this section.

Though these beliefs do not rely on “race” biologically to define Black Art, they all still arrive at the same conclusion: that one’s racial group, in fact, does have some verifiable things to say about one’s produced art, despite what might be erroneously said by the larger society or even by Black Artists such as George Schuyler. Morrison elaborates, “For three hundred years black Americans insisted that ‘race’ was no usefully distinguishing factor in human relationships. During those same three centuries every academic discipline, including theology, history, and natural science, insisted ‘race’ was *the* determining factor in human development. When blacks discovered they had shaped or become a culturally formed race, and that it had specific and revered difference, suddenly they were told there is no such thing as ‘race,’ biological or cultural, that matters and that genuinely intellectual exchange cannot accommodate it” (126). So, arguments that purport that Black Art is nonexistent or non-distinctive are either outdated or more problematically a part of the racist nay-saying Morrison discusses. Also pulled from her quote is a belief of my own that the former insistence of “race” as “*the* determining factor in human development” has aided—if not produced—the latter and current fact that the Black race is real and very specific. In fact, “race” does matter and the discussion of Black Motivation provides the basis for a further discussion of how “race” can be explored using Black Art. Calloway-Thomas and Galloway use Du Bois’s work as an example: “A careful review of the literature of Du Bois shows that his insights have had incalculable influences on the way in which we interpret black expressive culture. One of the most marked characteristics of Du Bois is the ease with which he treats themes of liberation, political reaction, the terrors of slavery, and the impact of all these upon the consciousness of black people. No other aspect of Du Bois’s work carries as much intellectual explanation and strength for understanding black expressive culture as his conception of double-consciousness” (251-252). As do artists I will proceed to

discuss, Du Bois used his art to speak intellectually and creatively upon the Black experience in America.

This section, in that case, is the final response to Schuyler, for as Morrison further tells us, the simple assertion of “racelessness” does not make the notion true. “The act of enforcing racelessness in literary discourse is itself a racial act. Pouring rhetorical acid on the fingers of a black hand may indeed destroy the prints, but not the hand. Besides, what happens in that violent, self-serving act of erasure to the hands, the fingers, the fingerprints of the one who does the pouring? Do they remain acid-free? The literature itself suggests otherwise” (46). In response to Morrison’s questions here, I contend that the hands of erasure—whether they be George Schuyler’s or those of American society at large—are negatively affected when this distinctive art is not allowed to flourish. I will argue that the *racefulness* of Black Art bestows upon the Black Artist the most freedom and advantageousness; but also it is what provides America with an artistic gift from the country’s ‘Black folk.’ To be fair to Schuyler before I leave him alone completely, though, it appears that his reaction to the idea of Black Art derives from a very valid concern with the implications of the art. Other artists during the day and still today even, for example, would argue against the manner in which I have conceived Black Motivation, because they feel Blackness is too complex to be broken into separate components or perspectives (Smethurst 360). “To [Ralph] Ellison, any theory or argument that purports to have discovered unique boundaries and finite consistencies to the ways that blacks think, feel, or act is too restrictive to capture Negro humanity” (Watts 75). I argue in defense of Black Motivation that although I explore different aspects of the Black experience separately, considering the individual aspects (e.g., educational, sociological and psychological) is most useful toward an attempt to fully comprehend the nature of the distinctiveness. It is my unique

handling of the separate characteristics of that distinctiveness then that makes my paper an important addition to the larger body of scholarship. I find the broadness and strictness with which Blackness is usually handled to be problematic, and my paper necessarily explores the underlying specificity of contributing factors to the Black experience—and, by extension, to Black Art.

In this section, not only do I examine specific pieces of Black Art but I also consider the Black Artists who produce them. I will begin by outlining the implications of Black Art and why it is important, and also position this art into Thompson's earlier theory of "rational organization" of a people, and its importance. From there we will take a look at the specific instances of Black Motivation in Black Art.

The *Artistic* 'Gift of Black Folk'

In *The Gift of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois described African Americans as being primarily artists (287). What exactly does Du Bois mean: that Black people are *meant* to be artists, that most of us are, that art is the best thing we can do? It puzzles me, but for some reason I agree. If a purpose of art is to add beauty into life and our world, then perhaps Black Artists are meant to inject "Black" beauty into America and the world. Or perhaps not; maybe Black Artists are simply in the best position to do so. Throughout my research no one seems to come to any real conclusions relating to this question, but all seem to agree that Black Artists have something unique to offer the country and the world—and I hold that that uniqueness stems from those artists' Black Motivation. Wilson believes that the Black Artist must change the world, noting that he or she "should bring something unique and different...[E]ven if [Black Artists] are concerned with the growth and development of America, we should bring something unique and different to it because it is in need of something new" (4). Wilson raises a similar

point as did Janice Hale-Benson about mediocrity, that it is the job of the Black achiever to raise the level of academic success in America. For Wilson and others, Black Artists need to add something *new* to the artistic scene. This newness is discussed by Morrison to answer her previous questions; for her, the innovation and boldness and difference of the art *are* its blackness: “In Afro-American literature itself the questions of difference, of essence, are critical. What makes a work ‘black’? The most valuable point of entry into the question of cultural (or racial) distinction, the one most fraught, is its language—its unpoliced, seditious, confrontational, manipulative, inventive, disruptive, masked, and unmasking language. Such a penetration will entail the most careful study, one in which the impact of Afro-American presence on modernity becomes clear and is no longer a well-kept secret” (“Unspeakable Things Unspoken” 136).

Morrison hints here also at another main question: how exactly does this art shape American culture? For Morrison, it is rather clear how African American culture has been affected by Western culture, but how African American culture affects and even shapes Western culture is less recognized and understood (126). The lack of recognition for such thinkers as Du Bois is baffling, because the American Negro has been a central thread of American history (*The Gift of Black Folk* 135). Not only has the African American race been a distinct asset to the country with its yearning for democracy at so many points—especially blossoming to “fuller efficiency” after the Civil War—during the country’s history (ii, 136, 183), but it has also “played a peculiar spiritual role in America as a sort of living, breathing test of our ideals” (iv). And this “determined willingness” was mightily important for both the national conscience and national policy in concrete ways (Thompson 9). Blacks continue to be this test of ideals and are in a “peculiar strategic position” to solve the race problems of the world (Du Bois, *The Gift of*

Black Folk 257), as “[Black suffrage] was the greatest and most important step toward world democracy of all men of all races ever taken in the modern world” (217).

As believe Morrison and Du Bois, Black Artists are the ones who must carry out this magnificent potentiality for affecting modernity, for they are the ones who hold the message. Even more, the Black Artist possesses a soul—or Motivation—that reflects a background of tragedy and produces beyond the sensuousness of beauty, and only through such an experience and ability can a race truly rise to the greatest heights of art. “No race can rise to the greatest heights of art until it has yearned and suffered” (Du Bois, *The Gift of Black Folk* 285-286). For example, Alain Locke revealed in “The New Negro” that Black Artists open up intellectual contacts between Black artists and those artists of other races by sharing their distinctive experiences. These intellectual contacts have been “richly fruitful not merely in the enlarging of personal experience, but in the definite enrichment of American art and letters and clarifying of our common vision of the social tasks ahead” (115).

Furthermore, Black Art has transformed the way art is received and understood in the United States (Smethurst 73). Henry Louis Gates, Jr. describes of this art’s ability:

This is an art that thrives on uncertainty, like much work of our Postmodernist times, but it also displays confidence in the legitimacy of black experiences as artistic material. Black artists seem to have become more conscious of their cultural traditions even as they have met with unprecedented mainstream success. Discarding the anxieties of a bygone era, these artists presume the universality of the black experience...They also know, however, that the facts of race don’t exhaust anybody’s human complexity. And that seems to be the enviable privilege of the new black artists...In its openness, its variety, its playfulness with

forms, its refusal to follow preordained ideological line, its sustained engagements with the black artistic past, today's artistic upwelling is nourished by the black cultural milieu, but isn't confined to it. (3)

This freedom enjoyed by Black Art, combined with the art's emphasis on "intellectual contact," is perhaps the root of its immense importance to the American art scene. Black Artists are willing to share their "enviable privileges" with all artists, and thus the art scene profits. As Du Bois told us in 1924, the Black Artist is so important in American literature, for example, that the technique and merit of his or her produced work tend to "merge into the broad flood of American literature and any notable Negro writer [becomes] *ipso facto* a national writer" (*The Gift of Black Folk* 308). And 21 years previous in *Souls*, he noted that the Black Artist in music has the capability to produce the "most original and beautiful expression of human life and longing yet born on American soil" (120). Du Bois had dramatic views about the power and gift of Black Art throughout his writings, and yet from the very beginning he always held his most important belief—and one I continue to emphasize today—that there is still more to come. From his 1897 essay: "Manifestly some of the great races of today—particularly the Negro race—have not as yet given to civilization the full spiritual message which they are capable of giving" ("The Conservation of Races" 179).

Organizing: *Art or Propaganda?*

The spiritual message Du Bois described was then—and is today—rejected by many Black artists. Some feel that it is not the job of the artist to propagandize. Artists such as Ralph Ellison believed that any artistic social or political engagement was antithetical to one's artistic pursuit (Watts 112), and other artists stated of Black Art that even if it did serve a political purpose, the moral or lesson should be subordinated to the art (*The Crisis* 192). Those on this

end of the spectrum believed that such propagandistic paradigms were restrictive and disempowering, and “stripped many artists of creative agency by dismissing and devaluing their work [when] it was either too abstract or did not overtly address a radical politic” (hooks, “An Aesthetic of Blackness: Strange and Oppositional” 68). On the flip side of the coin, some believe that nationalist and/or propagandistic implications are an inevitable part of Black artistic life. Wright explains that only by accepting these implications can we transcend them:

Negro writers must accept the nationalist implications of their lives, not in order to encourage them, but in order to change and transcend them. They must accept the concept of nationalism because, in order to transcend it, they must *possess* and *understand* it. And a nationalist spirit in Negro writing means a nationalism carrying the highest possible pitch of social consciousness. It means a nationalism that knows its origins, its limitations; that is aware of the dangers of its position; that knows its ultimate aims are unrealizable within the framework of capitalist America; a nationalism whose reason for being lies in the simple fact of self-possession and in the consciousness of the interdependence of people in modern society. (271)

Or, as Watts wrote of this type of thinking, the creative ambitions of the Black Artist are necessarily secondary to the political needs of his or her subjugated racial group, thus all Black Art needs to serve the “greater goal” (21). In its study on Black American literature, the Center for Social Organization Studies further exemplifies such a stance by comparing Black Art to modernism. “The literary style, or role, designated as modernism is distinguished by the fact that it has a rather narrow social context, namely that of literary circles, and its conception of its responsibility tends not to extend beyond an allegiance to ‘art for art’s sake.’ With the exception

of a few individual black American authors, modernism has been of slight consequence” (16-17). The CSOS implies that Black Artists have an ultimate allegiance beyond (or through) art to their people.

Completely aside from these polarized beliefs about Black Art’s potential political program, some such as Toni Morrison and bell hooks acknowledge the spectrum of possibility. Morrison notes, in her exploration of the African American presence in American literature, that “it does not ‘go without saying’ that a work written by an Afro-American is automatically subsumed by an enforcing Afro-American presence. There is a clear flight from blackness in a great deal of Afro-American literature. In others there is a duel with blackness, and in some cases, as they say, ‘You’d never know’” (146). And hooks holds, “Retrospective examination of the repressive impact a prescriptive black aesthetic had on black cultural production should serve as a cautionary model for African-Americans. There can never be one critical paradigm for the evaluation of artistic work” (70). For these Black Artists, the Blackness of their art is utilized as a means of “transforming [politics and Blackness] into intelligible, accessible, yet artistic modes of discourse” (Morrison 139). Morrison further argues that the debate over whether Black Art should be political is silly, because despite the controversy politics is inevitably packaged with the art:

In such a melee as [Black artistic production]—a provocative, healthy, explosive melee—extraordinarily profound work is being done. Some of the controversy, however, has degenerated into *ad hominem* and unwarranted speculation on the personal habits of artists, specious and silly arguments about politics (the destabilizing forces are dismissed as merely political; the status quo sees itself as not—as though the term *apolitical* were only its prefix and not the most obviously

political stance imaginable, since one of the functions of political ideology is to pass itself off as immutable, natural, and ‘innocent’), and covert expressions of critical inquiry designed to neutralize and disguise the political interests of the discourse. (132)

Even though Black Artists’ responses to their respective purposes as artists are various, the conversation of “art or propaganda?” is extremely important because the art has such amazing possibilities. Whether or not a Black Artist chooses explicitly to engage in a propagandistic effort with his or her art, the act of producing Black Art is organizationally instructive toward the end of bettering the Negro race and American society. “The workers of a minority people, chafing under exploitation, forge organizational forms of struggle to better their lot. Lacking the handicaps of false ambition and property, they have access to a wide social vision and a deep social consciousness. They display a greater freedom and initiative in pushing their claims upon civilization than even do the petty bourgeoisie. Their organizations show greater strength, adaptability, and efficiency than any other group or class in society” (Wright 269). Again, this strength, adaptability and efficiency have continually been described as distinctive and central to the Black artistic contribution to the world, for Black words are ever a vehicle for political action (Gates in *Darkwater* xii). The question is: how best do we organize this gift of Black folk? In “Art or Propaganda,” Locke also inquires, “Artistically it is the one fundamental question for us today,—Art or Propaganda. Which? Is this more the generation of the prophet or that of the poet; shall our intellectual and cultural leadership preach and exhort or sing? I believe we are at that interesting moment when the prophet becomes the poet and when prophecy becomes the expressive song, the chant of fulfillment” (260). It is all mixed together, and it relates back to Thompson’s theory and how we shall best rationally organize ourselves to

make a difference—not only for the race, but also beyond. And in art, that organization comes primarily through one’s experience and perspective, and through one’s Black Motivation with which the art has been produced. “Are [Black writers] being called upon to ‘preach’? To be ‘salesmen’? To ‘prostitute’ their writing? Must they ‘sully’ themselves? Must they write ‘propaganda’? No; it is a question of awareness, of consciousness; it is, above all, a question of perspective. Perspective is that part of a poem, novel, or play which a writer never puts directly upon paper. It is that fixed point in intellectual space where a writer stands to view the struggles, hopes, and sufferings of his people” (Wright 272).

Attempts to extract psychological meaning from the creative arts are new and not well explored (Hale-Benson 140), yet a look back at the psychological perspective of this paper may offer some connection between the two. These efforts to achieve and organize and ‘change the world’ are partly based upon distinctive psychological workings within the minds of individuals with Black Motivation, and the overall objective of that group involves a want to better their race, so that more may experience similar workings of superior ability. “Up to the present one may adequately describe the Negro’s ‘inner objectives’ as an attempt to repair a damaged group psychology and reshape a warped social perspective” (Locke, “The New Negro” 116). Watts also alludes to the problem of a polarity within the race (described in my paper as internal vs. external motivational mindsets; *wholistic* self-concept vs. *alienated* self-concept; *devaluing* vs. *discounting*; etc.) as being rooted in the psychology of the group. He argues that it can only be solved by a distinctive group within the race “that is aware of the psychological attitudes and incipient forms of action which the black masses reveal in their emotion-charged myths, symbols, and war-time folklore. Only through a skillful and wise manipulation of these centers of repressed social energy will Negro resentment, self-pity and the indignation be channelized to

cut through temporary issues and become transformed into positive action” (46). As I have insisted, through the “skillful and wise” navigation indicative of Black Motivation, Black Artists are able to transform the resentment and indignation into positive and productive work: Black Art.

Not only that but, as Hale-Benson points out, the Black Artists will also address the sociological problems dealt to the African American race. “Black creative artists emerged earlier than Black social scientists to articulate Black culture” (102). The ability of Black Artists to articulate Black culture to the world—through their sixth sense, double-consciousness, etc.—is yet another ‘mode of organization,’ described by Thompson as the means by which any repressed group can ultimately alleviate its struggle and benefit the larger society as a result. “The Negro mind reaches out as yet to nothing but American wants, American ideas. But this forced attempt to build his Americanism on race values is a unique social experiment, and its ultimate success is impossible except through the fullest sharing of American culture and institution” (Locke, “The New Negro” 116). This interpretation and sharing of Black culture, according to those such as Locke and Hale-Benson, are mightily essential to the struggle for educational, sociological, psychological, political and economic liberation (Hale-Benson 102). A creative canvas is used organizationally for Black Artists, as it gives “order and elegance to human experience” and brings meaning to American art (Calloway-Thomas and Garner 259). For example, Du Bois located *Souls* on an important line between words and music, “organically vocalizing his text at a moment of political and cultural crisis in the African American world” (Sundquist 326). Uses such as this one seem to redefine the meaning of “art for art’s sake;” because considering such a successful and powerful outcome as attained Du Bois, I would have “art” no other way. Locke, like Morrison, hooks and many others, believed that as the

propaganda debate dies down we are able to more fully realize that potentiality Du Bois had previously described, and are more able to use our “greatest single artistic asset,” the Black artistic voice (“The American Negro as Artist” 542). Locke imparts, “The great social gain in this is the releasing of our talented group from the arid fields of controversy and debate to the productive fields of creative expression” (“The New Negro” 118).

Double-Consciousness

As outlined in my construction of Black Motivation, the distinctive educational, sociological and psychological experiences of Black Artists are what distinguish that group—within the African American race and within American society. Du Bois’s concept of double-consciousness, which has appeared in all three ‘perspectives’ of my paper, is an excellent source for exploring the Black Artist’s relationship with Black Motivation. Double-consciousness for those with Black Motivation defines to a large extent their identities as artists. The psychologists White and Parham describe this relationship as comprising of “a set of dualities defined by being a part of, yet apart from, American society, in it but not of it, included at some level and excluded at others. This duality is at the heart of the identity struggle” (46). Although I do agree that the duality or double-consciousness of a Black person’s experience is at the heart of his or her identity, White and Parham’s use of “identity struggle” is problematic here by implying a negative outcome of one’s connection with one’s double-consciousness; a better phrase might have been “identity strengthening” or arguably “identity attainment,” especially for individuals with Black Motivation. As we have seen, Black Motivation presumes a successful negotiation with one’s double-consciousness, and beyond all else represents the adaptability of these distinctive individuals to “ill-fitting domains.” The adaptability and doubleness of the Black

Artist, for example, are two of the defining factors of his or her advantageous identity, and result in unique artistic contributions to American society.

I have investigated and described this adaptability and double-consciousness in my conception, and now I will locate them within Black Art. As I have stated before, I believe—like many others—that one’s experience inevitably reveals itself in that person’s art. Thus, I will first look specifically at selected Black Artists and their own double performances as they deal with the “rhetorical constraint to appeal to a general audience” (Wells 131). And then I will exemplify double-consciousness through its instances within the work of Black Artists.

Du Bois held that double-consciousness is especially poignant for Black artists, because they represent both the artistic beauty of America and the “soul beauty” of their own African American race (Wells 122). I add, too, that this double-consciousness is heightened by the fact that these artists not only see themselves through the eyes of White American society, but also through the eyes of their own race. Perhaps because Black Artists are viewed as the exceptions, they feel a sense that they reside in a region above the veil. This domain is what I described earlier as “just different,” and what Du Bois described as “blue sky and great wandering shadows.” Although this domain gives this group of artists a marvelous vantage point and a sixth sense-like ability, it is also a pressure position; and only the Black Artist’s Motivation keeps him or her from being torn asunder. “Black artists, [Ralph] Ellison reminds us, not only have to engage simultaneously in those practices and disciplines that allow them to perfect their craft, but given their social and political marginality in the United States, black intellectuals must be exceptionally self-motivated and resilient” (Watts 21).

For Black Artists, double-consciousness is a technique of expressing their art; it shapes their voice and always produces a double address to both African American and Caucasian

audiences (Wells 120). So, Black Art production does not resolve the experience and difficulties of double-consciousness for Black Artists, but rather creates “an alternate body, [that of one’s produced art,] with its assured voice and urgency of address” (122). In this way, the Black Artist’s double-consciousness allows him or her to move into spaces from which the Black person would otherwise have been barred (128). White and Parham said the following of Ellison’s novel: “The invisible man, the protagonist without a name to symbolize the invisible presence of Black people in the mainstream of American life, goes through a series of transformations before he discovers that attempts to avoid coming to grips with the struggle to define who he really is by becoming a carbon copy of someone else are doomed to fail” (73). White and Parham accurately describe the character’s struggles with double-consciousness, and yet I believe they come to the wrong conclusion about his ultimate resolution. I argue that Ellison wrote his invisible character to become eventually a Black Artist. The narrator epitomizes the use of Black Motivation as a means of transforming one’s double-consciousness into utility. Thus, I contend that it is not the main character’s discovery that attempts to be somebody else are doomed to fail that signifies his literary epiphany, but rather the epiphany is rooted in his realization that his double-consciousness can be used to his advantage.

At the beginning of the novel the narrator is presented to the audience as completely externally motivated, with a very destructive double-consciousness. In a very riveting scene, Ellison places his narrator within a racist human ‘dog fighting ring,’ in which African Americans are treated as animals and *unleashed* against each other. Even within the degradation of these individuals’ humanity, the narrator can only think about whether or not the White men will like a speech he was promised would be heard; he succumbs to their control—figuratively and literally. “The harder we fought the more threatening the men became. And yet, I had begun to worry

about my speech again. How would it go? Would they recognize my ability? What would they give me?" (24). Throughout the novel he more and more realizes his invisibility in American society, and then begins to explore its possibilities. The trajectory of the narrator's realization of his ability as an artist never concludes, and the novel ends with an epilogue in which he alludes to writing the piece of art the reader has just read. Ellison suggests through the power of his narrator's double-consciousness via his Black Motivation that the artistic possibilities are endless. The narrator comments, "I assign myself no rank or any limit, and such an attitude is very much against the trend of the times. But my world has become one of infinite possibilities. What a phrase—still it's a good phrase and a good view of life, and a man shouldn't accept any other; that much I've learned underground" (576). And as Wells supports, double-consciousness has such advantageous abilities precisely because of the narrator's "underground"-ness and unique position within society, for his experience with double-consciousness confirms the centrality of his fluidity or *invisibility* by exploring his limits (135). In this next passage from Ellison's preface, he describes how the power he wrote into his character was a similar power through which he acted to relay a propagandistic message of human universality (and we will forgive the contradiction from his earlier notion that art is lessened when engaged in propaganda):

So my task was one of revealing the human universals within the plight of one who was both black and American, and not only as a means of conveying my personal vision of possibility, but as a way of dealing with the sheer rhetorical challenge involved in communicating across our barriers of race and religion, class, color and region—barriers which consist of the many strategies of division that were designed, and still function, to prevent what would otherwise have been a more or less natural recognition of the reality of black and white fraternity. And

to defeat this national tendency to deny the common humanity shared by my character and those who might happen to read of his experience, I would have to provide him with something of a worldview, give him a consciousness in which serious philosophical questions could be raised, [and] reveal the human complexity which stereotypes are intended to conceal. (xxii)

Other artists such as Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Amiri Baraka and James Weldon Johnson also injected their own advantageous experiences with double-consciousness into their artistic work. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., for example, described Hurston as artistically embodying her doubleness (196). In his words, “It is this usage of a *divided* voice, a double voice unreconciled, that strikes me as [Hurston’s] great achievement, a verbal analogue of her double experiences as a woman in a male-dominated world and as a black person in a nonblack world, a woman writer’s revision of W. E. B. Du Bois’s metaphor of ‘double-consciousness’ for the hyphenated African-American” (qtd. in Hurston 203). Gates’s view that Hurston employed an additional double-consciousness originating from her womanhood is reminiscent of Wells’s commentary on the work of S. Weir Mitchell (discussed earlier in my paper). Some of the works of Langston Hughes and Amiri Baraka, on the other hand, represent their double experiences as artists and political activists. Hughes’s poem, “I, Too, Sing America,” speaks doubly: it speaks with an assured optimism to African Americans and with a light-hearted yet threatening certainty to American society at large. It speaks today of what is to come tomorrow—perhaps most striking, it uses the speaker’s double-consciousness to speak a prophesy that though today “they” see the speaker as merely dark, tomorrow “they” will notice his beauty; and it is implied by the use of “sing” that this beauty is represented at least partly in

I, too, sing America.

**I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the
kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.**

**Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.**

**Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed--**

I, too, am America.

art. Hughes's speaker completely embraces his double-consciousness and imagines a future in which his two strivings—to be an American and a Negro—are achieved. For now, though, it is his Black Motivation which alone keeps him from being “torn asunder” (to recall earlier wording from Du Bois's conception of double-consciousness). In contrast, Baraka's poem “Why is We Americans” speaks violence and rebellion. Whereas the speaker in Hughes's poem agrees with a thought from Booker T. Washington that no race who has anything glorious and valuable to contribute to society is long ostracized (156), Baraka's speaker is angry and rejects such a

notion. This speaker demands social equality, *or else*. The similarity, though, is the fact that double-consciousness is used in both cases advantageously and artistically toward the end of progressing the race forward; therefore, I would argue that each poem represents more or less a glimpse into its respective author's Black Motivation. While Hughes would sing America into a lulled submission with his artistic beauty, Baraka would perhaps blast equality into American society with his artistic shotgun. I highlight that both modes of artistic activism rely on the poets' ability to use their privileged vantage points of how Blacks are “seen” in American society.

James Weldon Johnson's novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, also deals with an artistic narrator. In this instance, the narrator lives his adult life primarily as a White man even though he is considered Black by blood. This notion of “passing” (indicating an individual's ability to “pass” as a White person given the lightness of his or her skin tone) is used in Johnson's novel as an exploration of the narrator's double-consciousness. The character

An excerpt from Amiri Baraka's "Why is We Americans":

then we can talk about bein american. then we can listen without the undercurrent of desire to first set your ass on fire. we will only talk of voluntary unity, of autonomy, as vective arms of self-determination. if there is democracy in you that is where it will be shown. this is the only way we is americans. this is the only truth that can be told. otherwise there is no future between us but war. and we is rather lovers and singers and dancers and poets and drummers and actors and runners and elegant heartbeats of the suns flame....but we is also at the end of our silence and sitdown. we is

represents a blatant example of the importance of how one views one's self through the eyes of others. Johnson's work superbly illustrates how closely linked double-consciousness is to Black identity in America. At the beginning of the novel the character lived life as a White child, yet when he discovers his Blackness he also discovers his double-consciousness (and eventual artistic gift to the world). "I grew reserved, I might say suspicious. I grew constantly more and more afraid of laying myself open to some injury to my feelings or my pride. I frequently saw or fancied some slight where, I am sure, none was intended" (15). This account from the narrator correlates to what I outlined earlier as external motivation and the "stereotype threat." A parallel

realization re-happens later in his life when he reveals to his wife that he has African American blood. Although he kept her love, he explained that he “was in constant fear that she would discover in [him] some shortcoming which she would unconsciously attribute to [his] blood rather than to a failing of human nature” (153). Again, the narrator struggles with the stereotype threat. This character’s fictional journey also exemplifies the grand power of double-consciousness in terms of Black Motivation. Through his monetary and social success as a White man the character proved the falseness of stereotype-related racial inferiority, and literally “made it on the White man’s terms.” Johnson created his novel to explore and critique the constructs of race and racism, implicitly arguing that the narrator is able to succeed just fine when he is literally Black (inside) and White (outside) at the same time. This experience for the narrator ultimately conquers both his extreme external motivation and the negative effect of the stereotype-threatened aspect of American society. Although the character does not accomplish much during the actual time that he “passes,” since he is positioned as the writer of the *Autobiography* the fictional narrator does do something to better his people and society at large in the end. The *Autobiography* sparked much needed discussions and debates about the realness of racial barriers and about the Black Artist’s acute consciousness of the unreconciled struggle with Blackness and Americanness.

Double-consciousness, of course, also plays a role in the art of Black performers. The famous bass-baritone and actor, Paul Robeson, explains in a letter to his wife, Essie: “Before I get so excited about my ‘art,’ etc., I must be the complete artist. There are so many things I would have done to make us money if I had not been afraid of my own ‘art...’ and it really hasn’t been so much about ‘art’ as thinking what people would say, which of course is silly” (qtd. in Robeson, Jr. 146). As a “leader of his race in New York,” Robeson’s professed fear of what

others might say about his art relates again back to one's concern with how one is viewed by others, or double-consciousness (141). He had an acute consciousness that his art was held as representative of the Black race—by American society *and* African Americans. He calls this desire to be a “complete artist” silly, but it is a feeling that is shared by all African American performers in some capacity, and leads to a unique set of decisions for the Black performer. The biography explains of Robeson's portrayal in *The Emperor Jones*, for example, “Paul took comfort from the fact that the response of black moviegoers was overwhelmingly positive: they loudly cheered the powerful and at times defiant images he had created. He gently turned aside or ignored most critics of this perceived ‘opportunism.’ He also rejected those who urged him to become a true prophet who preached political action” (207). Rawn Spearman gives another example of such a challenge for the Black singer in his essay on vocal concert music: “For the black singer with professional aspirations, the time of the New Negro presented a number of challenges. The black singer faced the choice of either shunning or spotlighting traditional Afro-American art forms” (47). This is just one of the many ways in which Black performers grapple with their artistic double-consciousness; they must constantly attempt to reconcile their Blackness and Americanness within a society that has not provided a smooth means by which to do so. The renowned musicologist Eileen Southern explained in her text that Black classical musicians have frequently found it important to have “black-music pieces” in their repertoires. I maintain that this sense of importance stems from those performers' concern with how they are seen by society at large and their brethren. Southern continues, “They simply had to learn both—the African American and the European” (424). I can personally attest to the multitude of “suggestions” to me as a Black singer to perform spirituals—both from African Americans and White people. The Black singer who does not sing spirituals might be subject to attacks similar

to the “acting White” phenomenon. Yet, if a Black singer were to sing exclusively spirituals or vocal literature rooted in Black folk melodies and harmonies, he or she would not be considered a ‘legitimate’ classical musician. As I have said, it is a duality which is only assuaged by a “dogged strength,” or Black Motivation.

I have chosen these few pieces of Black Art to exemplify their relations with double-consciousness,—and will also use performance to further exemplify it—but these instances are not nearly exhaustive. As Wells explained, double-consciousness is a *technique* for producing Black Art. This technique is rooted in one’s Black Motivation and is necessary to advantageously navigate through the doubleness of the Black experience. Ellison’s narrator nicely describes the glory of discovering the utility of one’s double-consciousness to reconcile the duality of Black vs. American: “If only all the contradictory voices shouting in my head would calm down and sing a song in unison, whatever it was I wouldn’t care as long as they sang without dissonance; yes, and avoided the uncertain extremes of the scale” (259). It is the Black Motivation of Black Artists that allows for this singing, and their art is the song. I concur with Wells in his argument that it is the double-consciousness of Black Artists that mediates between “the central importance of African American literature and music in contemporary culture and the relentless marginalization of African American politics and perspectives in public debate” (135). This notion further supports my earlier one, that the work of Black Artists is most readily able to progress the race forward.

The Sixth Sense

Another aspect of Black Motivation that equips those who possess it with the ability to progress society forward is an extension of double-consciousness. Described by Du Bois as a “second-sight,” many others have termed the ability to see America from an advantageously

peculiar point of view as a sort of *sixth sense*. With their double-consciousnesses, African American artists know what is thought and expected of them, as I have just outlined in the previous section. This facet of my application of Black Motivation to Black Art is perhaps the most crucial, as it relies on my earlier position that one's experience inevitably colors one's art. Commonly used definitions of Black art point to art that is blatantly grounded within African American culture (such as the blues and jazz), but what I insist is that through Black Motivation there is art that is correctly termed as "Black" because of the distinctive experience and concurrent motivation through which it is produced. This point is best articulated through a consideration of both the experience and "sixth sense" of Black Artists. As I have held, one's educational, sociological and psychological experiences are extremely instrumental in the development of perspective, and thus—whether or not it is conscious—they will color the art one produces. Richard Wright makes a similar argument, specifically for the Black writer, in his essay "Blueprint for Negro Writing." In his words, "At its best, perspective is a pre-conscious assumption, something which a writer takes for granted, something which he wins through his living...If his conception of the life of his people is broad and deep enough, if the sense of the *whole* life he is seeking is vivid and strong in him, then his writing will embrace all those social, political, and economic forms under which the life of his people is manifest" (273).

"The Publishers" of Johnson's novel understood the following: "It is very likely that the Negroes of the United States have a fairly correct idea of what the white people of the country think of them, for that opinion has for a long time been and is still being constantly stated; but they are themselves more or less a sphinx to the whites" (xxxiii-xxxiv). This aspect of double-consciousness is the sixth sense of artists (who use their double-consciousnesses advantageously), and is what gives these artists the power through their art to correct misconceptions about the

race. Since Black Artists understand well how they are viewed in society, they then can comment upon and/or critique problematic notions and stereotypes with/in their art. Furthermore, not only are these artists able to engage in social discourse, but their art also creates a counter-narrative to the belief by some of “racelessness.” Morrison concurs in the following passage from her essay on the African American presence in literature: “We are the subjects of our own narrative, witnesses to and participants in our own experience...And to read imaginative literature by and about us is to choose to examine centers of the self and to have the opportunity to compare these centers with the ‘raceless’ one with which we are, all of us, most familiar” (133). When one engages with Black Art, one also engages with the experience out of which—and Black Motivation through which—it is produced. Thus, the imaginative works of Blacks give rise to a glance into the distinctiveness and aesthetic of Blackness, which thoroughly contrast Schuylerian color-blindness.

A natural progression of my argument is that since Black Motivation has valuably distinctive qualities—including superior mental processes such as *devaluative* psychological disengagement and *wholistic* self-conception, as were described in the psychological perspective—the Black Motivation of Black Artists guides their experience in a way that they are better able to convey their artistic perspective because of that experience. This relationship of the artist with Black Motivation, I contend, is the cause behind that mysterious “second-sight” Du Bois described, and the “sixth sense” described by others. Let us turn again to the preface of Ellison’s novel where he describes this gift as an artistic strategy: “I asked myself, what else *was* there to sustain our will to persevere but laughter? And could it be that there was a subtle triumph hidden in such laughter that I had missed, but one which still was more affirmative than raw anger? A secret, hard-earned wisdom that might, perhaps, offer a more effective strategy

through which a floundering Afro-American novelist could convey his vision?" (xv-xvi). Ellison alludes to the same assurance expressed in Hughes's "I, Too, Sing America" as an ability to "laugh and grow strong" today for a new tomorrow. The Black Artist triumphs through laughter because it marks a refusal to let the racist and oppressive climate of American society negatively affect him or her. Just as was Hughes's poem, Ellison's text is soaked in his belief in the Black Artist's sixth sense, for it is his narrator's experience that leads to the eventual artistic epiphany. Ellison injects a great understanding of the power of experience and perspective into the character: "It was as though I'd learned suddenly to look around corners; images of past humiliation flickered through my head and I saw that they were more than separate experiences. They were me; they defined me. I was my experiences and my experiences were me" (508).

Although this concept of a sixth sense was not discussed as blatantly by Du Bois as I have chosen to outline, it certainly was present in his writing. As he continued to publish, he more and more articulated his understanding of the second-sight that he had described in his conception of double-consciousness initially presented in *Souls* (1903), so that even as soon as 1920 when he published *Darkwater* his theory of a second-sight was indirectly expounded upon ("indirectly" in that he never explicitly related it back to his original conception). The more somber tones of the 1920 text speak of an ability gained through the strife and, as Ellison and Hughes also put it, informative *humor* of the Black experience in America. "I have been in the world, but not of it. I have seen the human drama from a veiled corner, where all the outer tragedy and comedy have reproduced themselves in microcosm within. From this inner torment of souls the human scene without has interpreted itself to me in unusual and even illuminating ways" (xli). In a later passage from the book he not only supports my claims for Black Motivation but also concurs with "The Publishers" of Johnson's novel, that the Black race has an

important understanding of how they are viewed by the majority group within the country: “Out of little, unspoiled souls rise up wonderful resources and healing balm. Once the colored child understands the white world’s attitude and the shameful wrong of it, you have furnished it with a great life motive, —a power and impulse toward good which is the mightiest thing man has. How many white folk would give their own souls if they might graft into their children’s souls a great, moving, guiding ideal!” (100).

In the sociological perspective of my paper I quoted Mizruchi describing a “sixth sense” that equips the African American with a unique ability to add needed change to American society. This notion is very similar to one I claim here of the Black Artist, that he or she is able to use his or her double-consciousness and sixth sense to be innovative—creatively and socially. Gates explained in *Darkwater* that Du Bois, for example, responded to large historical and social events with his “fierce and biting” texts (xvi). Granted, Du Bois was a sociologist, but I make the case that his ability to comment and be instructive in societal struggles based on his knowledge of historical fact came from the sixth sense gained through his Black Motivation, rather than primarily through his expertise as a sociologist. The text itself supports my position by placing Du Bois’s realization of his exceptional acuteness of the truths of American society precisely within his experience as an exceptional Black person. “Slowly they became, not white folks, but folks. The unity beneath all life clutched me. I was not less fanatically a Negro, but ‘Negro’ meant a greater, broader sense of humanity and world-fellowship. I felt myself standing, not against the world, but simply against American narrowness and color prejudice, with the greater, finer world at my back urging me on” (8). Even in this third section of my paper, “Black Art,” Du Bois continues to be of paramount importance in my look into it all, mainly because he has written so deeply and vastly on the subject of the Black soul’s ability and uniqueness. *Souls*

is a testament to the power of African American communication (Calloway-Thomas and Garner 268), and it is a perfect example of Du Bois's sixth sense being employed to speak of the experience of his people. He spoke beyond sociology and with the text argued that Black Art was grounded in the experience of the Black community, and he "challenged black artists to transform images and to question the ethics of a community that excludes them from almost any affirmative representation in life and in art" (Kirschke 180).

Through the Black Artist's sixth sense, Du Bois would also have him or her appreciate and realize the African American "gift of art," and boldly reconceptualize beauty (181). This reconceptualization is possible and happens through (and because of) one's Black Motivation, and as Wells points out, part of the greatness of *Souls* is its ability to enact in its form "not only its informing idea, but the circumstances of its composition and the constraints that shape its reading" (120). Du Bois believed that African Americans are primarily artists, and since Black Artists must conquer "life destroying forces," they gain "therefrom in some slight compensation" a sense of beauty and sensuousness ("The Negro in Literature" 299). When Black Artists transform the constraints and circumstances surrounding their production into advantageousness, through that Black Motivated ability they are also able to impart an amount of Black beauty to those who come into contact with their art. In her 1995 essay "An Aesthetic of Blackness: Strange and Oppositional," bell hooks explains, for example, that because Black Artists work from a base where difference and distinctiveness are acknowledged as "forces that intervene in western theorizing about aesthetics to reformulate and transform the discussion, [they] are empowered to break with old ways of seeing reality that suggest there is only one audience for [their] work and only one aesthetic measure of its value" (70). hooks makes very insightful points about the path of Black Artists to create and hone in themselves what she describes as a

new aesthetic through what I have been calling a “sixth sense.” In the words of hooks, “On this path one learns that an entire room is a space to be created, a space that can reflect beauty, peace, and a harmony of being, a spiritual aesthetic...Aesthetics then is more than a philosophy or theory of art and beauty; it is a way of inhabiting a space, a particular location, a way of looking and becoming” (65). She remembers growing up thinking about how art and beauty existed in the lives of Black people, and coming to terms with her capacity to see and understand and yearn for the beauty in her life. The second-sight employed by hooks is cultivated through her experience with racism, and thus she argues—as I do—that the Black voice is at current most advanced within American society because it has been developed through the harsh and distinctive experience of the Black racial caste group. She explains that wise Black people “saw artistic cultural production as crucial to the struggle against racism, but they were also cognizant of the link between creating art and pleasure. Art was necessary to bring delight, pleasure, and beauty into lives that were hard, that were materially deprived. It mediated the harsh conditions of poverty and servitude. Art was also a way to escape one’s plight” (66-67). It is worth noting that the type of sixth sense hooks explains as an ability to recognize beauty and use one’s special skill as a “force to enhance inner well-being” correlates to the idea from my psychological perspective, termed psychological disengagement; in this case it would be considered a strategic *devaluation* of harsh conditions surrounding the subject, the Black Artist.

hooks concedes, though, that her ability was not just a natural aesthetic of Blackness, but rather a potentiality. Similar to the contrast I noted before in reference to *wholistic* and *alienated* self-concept, she recalls, “One of my five sisters wants to know how it is I come to think about these things, about houses, and space. She does not remember long conversations with Baba. She remembers her house as an ugly place, crowded with objects. My memories fascinate her”

(72). It is the cultivation of this sense or “wholeness” that is emphasized, whereas a lack of the ability marks a lack of Black Motivation. This latter notion is the prominent tragedy, for instance, in Toni Morrison’s novel *The Bluest Eye*. The main character of the novel, Pecola Breedlove, is arguably presented initially as an artist. Through the struggle and ugliness of her existence she is able to find beauty. Pecola adores and respects nature, and finds the gorgeousness in dandelions when no one else can. “Why, she wonders, do people call them weeds? She thought they were pretty. But grown-ups say, ‘Miss Dunion keeps her yard so nice. Not a dandelion anywhere’...These and other inanimate things she saw and experienced. They were real to her. She knew them. They were the codes and touchstones of the world, capable of translation and possession” (47). Dandelions are designated as weeds in Pecola’s society just as African Americans are designated in this racist society as inferior, worthless, ugly and ‘dirty.’ From her marginal position in her society she is able to see the dandelions as beautiful, and as *not* in contradiction to “nice.” She *never* trips on the crack in the sidewalk: Morrison uses this creative truth to symbolically represent the advantageous distinctiveness of Pecola. The reader soon finds out that these glimpses into Pecola’s burgeoning Black Motivation, specifically her use of a sixth sense to see beauty in new ways, have been constructed by Morrison to emphasize the tragedy of that motivation eventually being crushed. When the downfall proper commences for Pecola, Morrison quickly strips her of every trace of a true sixth sense. After a sour exchange with the candy grocer, Pecola is disgusted with her new ways of seeing “beauty” and her Blackness. “Dandelions. A dart of affection leaps out from her to them. But they do not look at her and do not send love back. She thinks, ‘They *are* ugly. They *are* weeds.’ Preoccupied with that revelation, she trips on the sidewalk crack. Anger stirs and wakes in her; it opens its mouth, and like a hot-mouthed puppy, laps up the dredges of her shame” (50). So, Morrison’s vision of

the “white is right” phenomenon as exists in American society is what guided the creation of this tragic character. She uses her intimate ability to comprehend such phenomena in literary protest of their existence. The following passage conveys Morrison’s character’s equation of Whiteness with perfection as the reader is clued into Pecola’s desire to “bleach” her eyes blue: “It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different...If she looked different, beautiful, maybe [her father] would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they’d say, ‘Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes’” (46). The title of the novel represents Pecola’s desire to be perfect according to the racist society’s definitions, while the novel itself is a commentary on the ridiculousness and destructiveness of the “acting White” phenomenon. Dramatically, Morrison sentences her delusional character to a 12-page conversation with her imaginary friend about how wonderfully blue are her imagined pair of blue eyes (193-204). Pecola took the logic of a hierarchical, racist society to the extreme, and in the end is a social and psychological disaster. Morrison exposes the damage done to individuals affected by circumstances similar to those to which Pecola was subject, and emphatically stresses the lost potential of Pecola’s Black Motivation and ability to use her sixth sense to redefine beauty.

In music, the sixth sense of the Black Artist is similar to its nature in literature. Like Du Bois and Morrison, Black musicians are able to inform their art with a peculiarity worthy of inspection. Following are several such inspections: Vincent Sheean in his novel *Between the Thunder and the Sun* gave an account of his experience observing Marian Anderson perform: “At the end of the spiritual, there was no applause at all—a silence instinctive, natural, and intense, so that you were afraid to breathe. What Anderson had done was something outside the

limits of classical or romantic music: she frightened us with the conception, in musical terms, of course, but outside the normal limits, of a mighty suffering” (158). This expression of extraordinariness of Anderson’s performance is paralleled by many other accounts of Black musicians, and I suggest that it is linked to the Blackness and the sixth sense ability I described earlier. The music historian Marva Carter made a similar statement of the African American singer Roland Hayes: “When he sang, art became more than polished excellence. It appealed to something universal, something beyond the emotions, and something beyond the intellect, something one could call the soul” (qtd. in Jones, “Roland Hayes” 2). It seems that when one attributes a special or distinctive quality of a piece of music or performance to ‘soul,’ one comments upon both the ability of the musical performer and also the unique culture or experience out of which the art was produced. This experience for Black Artists is rooted within Black Motivation. The musicologist Eileen Southern said of the mysterious distinctiveness of Black composer and band conductor Francis Johnson’s music: “Johnson’s style was attuned to the musical climate in which he lived, and his scores do not differ substantially from those of his white American contemporaries—for example, John Hill Hewitt (1801-1890). Since Johnson competed successfully for public patronage against the overwhelming odds of race discrimination, his music must have gained something in performance that is not evident in the scores. Based on the admittedly scanty evidence available, that ‘something’ must have been his ability to ‘distort’ commonplace music into stimulating and distinctive music” (112-113). And also let us consider the historian Mordecai’s observation of city slaves working in tobacco factories in Richmond, VA: “Many of the negroes, male and female, employed in the factories, have acquired such skill in psalmody and have generally such fine voices, that it is a pleasure to listen to the sacred music with which they beguile the hours of labor...[There is a] naturally fine

voice and ear for music which seems to have been given to the black race” (qtd. in Southern 147). Regardless of whether we interpret Mordecai’s comment to mean that Blacks are *innately* given this “voice and ear” or that the skills are naturally acquired through African Americans’ experience and response to their social experience, he still speaks of the same extraordinariness. This is what I highlight, and that although it is impossible to say for certain why exactly an extraordinary ‘soul’ quality is often attached to Black music it is linked to my conception and analysis.

All these accounts point to a special sense or ability of the Black musician, and I naturally contend that this is that same sixth sense we have examined rooted in the Black Artist’s Black Motivation. I make the same argument about Black music I made about the literature, that there is music which is correctly termed as “Black Art” even if there is not a clear use of folk melodies and motives. In Paul Burgett’s essay, “Vindication as a Thematic Principle in the Writings of Alain Locke on the Music of Black Americans,” he summarizes Alain Locke’s conception of Black music. Several categories of “folk creation” are outlined. Of interest to me is the fourth type of music outlined by Locke, which he describes as being the “universal mode without a trace of folk idiom or influence.” He continues, “Music of this sort, composed by Negro musicians, in no sense can be called ‘Negro music’” (qtd. in Burgett 30). Eileen Southern makes essentially the same case for types of Black music in her text (185). This line of thinking is where my conception of Black Motivation as a means of producing Black Art intervenes. I argue, against Locke and Southern, that Black Artists within America share a sixth sense which makes their music “Black”—regardless of whether or not they have consciously infused the art with folk colorings. Perhaps before its time, the former Society of Black Composers reported a similar sentiment in their May 1969 newsletter: “And while a common vocabulary or grammar is

not even desirable among black composers, a new and highly desirable consensus of positive and assertive attitudes is clearly emerging. The questions of a year ago—most often concerning which specific musical sounds and materials would be necessary to make black music—are no longer necessary. We know that because we are black, we are making black music. And we hear it, too!” (qtd. in Southern 555). I suggest that what is heard as “Black” in these compositions is something aside from the folk melodies and motives, and is rather rooted in the “beauty” and journey—historical and contemporary—of African Americans.

Just as is the case with Black writers, Black musicians have used their art as a primary form of communication since slavery. Southern explains that the medium of song was used to comment on the problems of their lives and savor the few pleasures allowed to the slaves; “they could voice their despair and hopes, and assert their humanity in an environment that constantly denied their humanness. As in the African tradition, the songs of the slaves could tell their history and reveal their everyday concerns” (156). The power of Black musical art is grounded in the Black experience, and generates in the “betwixt-and-between spaces” of society. Jon Michaels Spencer portrays the power as breaking in “through the cracks of structure in liminality, in at the edges of structure in marginality, from beneath structure in inferiority [and] from above structure in spirituality” (20). No matter whether the Black musician is singing Negro spirituals or Italian opera, this “betwixt-and-between” position within society leads to new forms of beauty, and something distinctive in the music.

James Reese Europe, the former director of the Clef Club Symphony Orchestra, is an example of how a Black Artist’s sixth sense can be used to identify and thereby aid in the resolution of the Black American musician’s struggle. As I have outlined, it is often the case that Black artists are accused of not being Black enough or of “acting White.” There is also often a

critique, though, when Blacks are thought to emphasize their Blackness too much. This next quote from Europe, in response to a critic who argued that the orchestra's repertoire should be rooted in the European classics, exemplifies Europe's use of a sixth sense to respond in defense of his artistic choice as a conductor: "You see, we colored people have our own music that is part of us. It's the product of our souls; it's been created by the sufferings and miseries of our race...We have developed a kind of symphony music that, no matter what else you think, is different and distinctive, and that lends itself to the playing of the peculiar compositions of our race" (qtd. in Southern 293). This sentiment from Europe marks his knowledge as a Black Artist of his ability to comment on race issues in society; he is not offended by the critic but responds in a way that shares his informed wisdom that no matter *what* the orchestra plays, the art itself it produces will be distinct. Marian Anderson makes a similar case for the Black composer Hall Johnson. She said, "For although he invented no new harmonies, designed no new forms, originated no new melodic styles, discovered no new rhythmic principles, he was yet able to fashion a whole new world of music in his own image" (qtd. in R. Jones, "Hall Johnson" 1). This is interesting and significant in that it is Anderson's sixth sense which identifies Johnson's use of his own. Black musicians perceive the "beauty" in Black Art, because—similar to Morrison's point about the Black writer—they are witnesses to and participants in their own music. They hear this distinction and gorgeousness because of their sixth sense and double-consciousness. This ability develops in their art the power to comment upon the Black musician's journey, and in a larger realm the Black experience in American society. Anderson's distinctive consciousness lent itself to a special understanding of her position as a Black Artist. Another conductor James De Priest spoke of this aspect of Anderson's character: "She knew what she wanted to do, she knew that no one should be in her way preventing her from doing it

because of her race. And I think she probably felt that she was going to be clearing a path, not just for herself, but for others to follow” (qtd. in R. Jones, “Marian Anderson” 3). Furthermore, Robeson’s sixth sense gave him an ability to—through his singing and acting—share with his audiences the journey of the Black Artist; there was a quality or aesthetic about his art that calmly exclaimed of a distinctive experience and a distinctive *purpose*. Alexander Woollcott said the following about Robeson’s ability in *Voodoo* magazine: “He might do something with his voice. I think I felt at the time that I had just crossed the path of someone touched by destiny. He was a young man on his way. He did not know where he was going, but I never in my life saw anyone so quietly sure, by some inner knowledge, that he was going somewhere” (70). Woollcott also recognizes the root of Robeson’s sixth sense and ability to inject “beauty” into his art: that grand inner knowledge of a glorious tomorrow, Black Motivation.

The Black Artist’s sense of a greater purpose is its great distinction, and it is what activates most intimately his or her Black Motivation. We witnessed this sentiment in Hughes’s poem, “I, Too, Sing America.” It was an assurance that tomorrow would be better, because then the beauty of the race would be recognized. Black Motivation, the sixth sense, and their applications by Black Artists are reflexively reinforced. They all speak one narrative of Black power. The composer Margaret Bonds described an example of the Black Artist’s knowledge of this common narrative here: “I was in this prejudiced university, this terribly prejudiced place—I was looking in the basement of the Evanston Public Library where they had the poetry. I came in contact with this wonderful poem, ‘The Negro Speaks of Rivers,’ and I’m sure it helped my feelings of security. Because in that poem [Langston Hughes] tells how great the black man is: And if I had any misgivings, which I would have to have—here you are in a setup where the restaurants won’t serve you and you’re going to college, you’re sacrificing,

trying to get through school—and I know that poem helped save me” (qtd. in R. Jones, “Margaret Bonds” 1). The greatness Bonds describes of Hughes’s “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” surely is his message that the historical and current experience of Black people gives them a deepness of soul; and it is that depth from

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

which the Black Artist’s sixth sense is derived.

‘MAKING IT’

The figure of speech ‘making it’—as used in the phrase “making it on the White man’s terms”—refers to the notion of one pulling through despite unfavorable circumstances. It was seemingly developed from a resolution that one would essentially *make* things work. Underlying the belief of ‘making it,’ then, is a confidence in one’s power to control or manipulate the variables affecting one’s life in ways that advantageously benefit one’s personhood. With this considered, the phraseology employed in this paper of “making it on the White man’s terms” does not speak of helplessness or uncertainty, but rather of a deep belief in one’s ability to perceive and conquer obstacles and succeed in spite of them. As we inspected Black Motivation I maintained that this potentiality to ‘make it’ is only realized by a particular group of African

Americans. I describe the skill as artistic and helpful toward bettering the Black race; in Black Art, the artistic uses of double-consciousness and one's 'sixth sense' produce this distinctive group's ability to thrive within American society.

The Black Artist I have discussed most prominently, W. E. B. Du Bois, has described this group as the leadership of the Black race. His concept of a "talented tenth" has been discussed as problematic and elitist in some sources of scholarship, but hopefully I have clarified my position that Du Bois's concept on the whole is instructive in any conversation about the Black struggle in America. For, as Du Bois avowed, this group remains of the utmost importance to the enlightenment of the world. "I never for a moment dreamed that such leadership could ever be for the sake of the educated group itself, but always for the mass. Nor did I pause to enquire in just what ways and with what technique we would work—first, broad, exhaustive knowledge of the world; all other wisdom, all method and application would be added unto us. In essence I combined a social program for a depressed group with the natural demand of youth for 'Light, more Light'" ("My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom" 37). Throughout all of my research, the Black Artist's position in America and relationship with Black Motivation have not been better articulated than this just quoted from Du Bois. He understood better than any during his time that although—as Schuyler said—it is possible for the Black Artist to be subject to the same forces of motivation as the White artist, there is something about the experience of just being Black that, in effect, boosts or enhances one's motivation; and that denotes my conception of Black Motivation. In this section of my paper I will outline some of the specific terms on which the Black Artist must 'make it,' in an effort to further convey the distinctiveness and nature of the Black artistic journey and use of Black Motivation.

Although Ralph Ellison is the most problematic Black Artist I can identify, he remains mightily useful toward any look into how the Black Artist must ‘make it.’ Since Ellison did not acknowledge that his experience as a Black person explicitly colored his work, he was often accused basically of “acting White.” He was often attacked in scholarship as not being helpful enough toward the bettering of the race and, as Watts notes, these assaults on his ethnic legitimacy were generated within and outside of the Black community and were often extremely harsh and debilitating (23). Although the attacks probably seemed to have the effect Watts described, according to the writing of Ellison (as I will discuss) they were, in fact, not debilitating. Ellison adds complexity to an understanding of Black Motivation, because he does not fit neatly into all of the aspects of the concept that I have explored and explained. The correlates I so truthfully outlined in the conception are sometimes contradicted by his actions. For example, Ellison possessed a very strong internal motivation, but it did not correspond to the expected form of response to stereotype-threatened domains. Again, I believe American society is a stereotype-relevant domain for Blacks, and yet Ellison adamantly asserted the utter unimportance—and sometimes nonexistence—of stereotypes. Displaying the problematic ability I discussed in the psychological perspective to psychologically disengage—*discounting*—Ellison led his artistic life as if stereotypes did not exist at all—and even if they did, definitely did not affect him or his work. So I get to the point: my presentation of Ellison as both important and problematic is to exemplify that ‘making it’ is a creative process in itself for the Black Artist; the way in which one does this and the nature in which one’s art is affected by it give the art personality, originality, and complexity. This next quote from Watts about Ellison illustrates my point that Ellison’s insistence to act within an assumption—or delusion—of complete equality with the dominant culture of America instilled in his art an intriguing neutrality—especially

relating to racial stereotypes. “Ellison’s ability to impart intrigue and complexity into the most commonplace occurrences in his life is rendered even more powerful by the fact that his tales simultaneously appeal to and negate the hidden but deep-seated stereotypical racist imagery of the Negro lurking in the back of the reader’s imagination” (29). Since Ellison insisted that stereotypes did not affect his work, he made no special effort to critique or avoid them. Thus, as Watts notes, his work sometimes appealed to stereotypes about Blacks and sometimes negated them.

What I want to highlight about Ellison is that his creative endeavors—though arguably different in ideology than some of the other Black Artists I have presented—still include an inherent fight with such phenomena as “acting White” and “White is right.” In short, Ellison, even with his potential delusion and hypocrisy, is still a Black artistic rebel because of his rejection of these aforementioned phenomena and successful navigation through American society to produce art; and, in that way, he acts through a Black Motivation and produces after all what is best described as Black Art. Du Bois conceivably defends the nature of Ellison’s artistic rebellion with these next thoughts about the importance of *anti*-mediocrity. “The doctrine of the divine right of majorities leads to almost humorous insistence on a dead level of mediocrity. It demands that all people be alike or that they be ostracized. At the same time its greatest accusation against rebels is this same desire to be alike: the suffragette is accused of wanting to be a man, the socialist is accused of envy of the rich, and the black man is accused of wanting to be white” (*Darkwater* 74). And, of course, this is not the first time a Black Artist’s rebellion has been erroneously associated with Whiteness; this unfortunate happening is just another facet of ‘making it.’ There is a subtly different example of this association with Whiteness in the autobiography written for Sojourner Truth. Truth ‘makes it on the White man’s

terms' through her work to gain the respect of those capable of ultimately helping her people, who during her time of slavery were her White masters. The text explains, "Her ambition and desire to please were so great, that she often worked several nights in succession, sleeping only short snatches, as she sat in her chair; and some nights she would not allow herself to take any sleep, save what she could get resting herself against the wall, fearing that if she sat down, she would sleep too long. These extra exertions to please, and the praises consequent upon them, brought upon her head the envy of her fellow-slaves, and they taunted her with being the '*white folks' nigger*'" (14).

There is definitely a trajectory of this nasty association of Black success with Whiteness impeding the journey of the Black Artist. About 65 years after Truth's narrative Du Bois makes a similar move of pointing out the difficulty and irony of producing good art in rebellion against the very structure which the Black Artist is accused of imitating. He accounts that "we daily hear that an education that encourages aspiration, that sets the loftiest of ideals and seeks as an end culture and character rather than bread-winning, is the privilege of white men and the danger and delusion of black" (*Souls* 65). And about another 65 years after that, we get Morrison's novel. As White and Parham attest, "As a child looks into the mirror image of society reflected in TV, movies, newspaper, and stories about the heroes of American history, he or she sees images of Euro-Americans projected with power, courage, competence, beauty, and goodness" (46). This inability to 'make it' was portrayed in *The Bluest Eye*, of course, with the character Pecola. The self-hate resulting from societal holdings of "White is right" is reflected in many works by Black Artists. One of the Black Artists I mentioned in the double-consciousness portion of "Black Art," Zora Neale Hurston, wrote a character in her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* who, like Pecola, completely equated all the negativity and badness in the world

with (her own) Blackness. This character is Mrs. Turner: “Ah jus’ couldn’t see mahself married to no black man. It’s too many black folks already. We oughta lighten up de race...Who wants to be mixed up wid uh rusty black man, and uh black woman goin’ down de street in all dem loud colors, and whoopin’ and hollerin’ and laughin’ over nothin’?...Colored folks don’t know nothin’ ‘bout no business. Deliver me!” (Hurston 140-42). Mrs. Turner, like Pecola, epitomizes an unsuccessful negotiation with the concept of “making it on the White man’s terms.” I employ these characters to contrast the Black Artist’s successful negotiation of the concept with the problematic conflation of ‘making it’ with becoming more White and hating one’s own Blackness.

Producing art against such obstacles is only part of the “terms” which the Black Artist has to assuage. Another slope on the ‘racial mountain’ (as it was termed earlier by Hughes) is the annoying difficulty of being treated differently than the majority group in society. This is especially hard because one’s artistic success is associated with Whiteness and yet it is not in the least bit the same experience. Although some Black Artists have notable success in terms of personal freedom, security, and recognition, there is a deep sense of frustration because they have not received the deserved respect and acceptance from the larger American society. They are denied the ordinary rewards that motivate White Americans (Thompson 38). Washington elaborates a bit in *Up From Slavery*: “The Negro boy has obstacles, discouragements, and temptations to battle with that are little known to those not situated as he is. When a white boy undertakes a task, it is taken for granted that he will succeed. On the other hand, people are usually surprised if the Negro boy does not fail. In a word, the Negro youth starts out with the presumption against him” (24-25). Accordingly, the Black Artist is not able to achieve artistically simply based on ability, rather this ability must be united to an unconquerable will to

achieve. This is important to state because it means that, at present, the Black Art in the country is “an imperfect indication of what the Negro race is capable of in America and in the world” (Du Bois, “The Negro in Literature” 302). And even though Du Bois published his essay in 1913, it certainly still applies today. Thus, although I agree with Washington’s sentiment in this next passage that Black Art is of a superior quality because of the experience through which it is produced, I declare that he is terribly mistaken in his belief that the unpopularity of Blackness in American culture holistically profits the race. “I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed. Looked at it from this standpoint, I almost reach the conclusion that often the Negro boy’s birth and connection with an unpopular race is an advantage, so far as real life is concerned” (27). Necessarily said to distinguish my arguments for the advantageousness of Black Motivation from Washington’s notion, the success Washington claims to have measured has obviously not included the majority of the race that does *not* succeed because of the obstacles and struggles coupled with their Black skin.

Throughout my paper I have used Du Bois as a sort of through-example of Black Motivation and its effect on the Black soul. Aside from the fact that I think Du Bois articulates some of the ideas I have discussed better than any other scholar I have discovered, I have also done this to familiarize the reader with a vast variety of Du Boisian theory and experiences. With that knowledge in place, I am now able to give an extended example of someone who within his life ‘made it,’ in hopes that this specificity of character might aid the reader in further understanding the concept of “making it on the White man’s terms” and its position within this paper. I hope the reader might indulge me, as I piece together a creative exemplative narrative in (mostly) the words of the great historian, sociologist, and Black Artist, W. E. B. Du Bois:

[There is] one thing I shall never forget [about my interaction with a White college student on a train] and that was his rather regretful admission (that slipped out as we gossiped) that he had no idea as to what his life would be, because, as he added, ‘There’s nothing which I am particularly interested in!’ [Because of my own extreme internal motivation and exceptional *Nach (Need for achievement)*,] I was more than astonished—I was almost outraged to meet any human being of the mature age of twenty-two who did not have his life all planned before him, at least in general outline; and who was not supremely, if not desperately, interested in what he planned to do. (“My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom” 31) I suddenly [had a realization and] came to a region where the world was split into white and black halves, and where the darker half was held back by race prejudice and legal bonds, as well as by deep ignorance and dire poverty. (35) Even I was a little startled to realize [through my sixth sense] how much that I had regarded as white American [and ‘right,’] was white European and not American at all: America’s music is German, the Germans said; the Americans have no art, said the Italians; and their literature, remarked the English, is English; all agreed that Americans could make money but did not care how they made it. And the like. [My double-consciousness dictated that] sometimes their criticism got under even my anti-American skin, but it was refreshing on the whole to hear voiced my own attitude toward so much that America had meant to me. (38) [I began to organize my artistic voice and] replaced my hitherto egocentric world by a world centering and whirling about my race in America. To this group I transferred my plan of study and accomplishment. (36) [Then,] I felt not so much disowned and rejected [by Black people and White people, respectively,] as rather drawn up into higher spaces and made part of a mightier mission. At times I almost pitied my pale companions [for not having the same superior strength of motivation as me]. (*Darkwater* 6) All this I [realized] and [felt] up in my tower [of Black Motivation], above the thunder of the seven seas [of American racial prejudice, stereotyping, ill-fitting domains, and all other such problematic phenomena]. From my narrowed windows I stare[d] into the night that loom[ed] beneath the cloud-swept stars. [I understand perfectly that] eastward and westward storms are breaking,—great, ugly whirlwinds of hatred and blood and cruelty. I will not believe them inevitable. I will not believe that all that was must be, that all the shameful drama of the past must be done again today before the sunlight sweeps the silver sea. (25) Suppose and suppose! As I sat down calmly on flat earth and looked at my life a certain great feat seized me. Was I the masterful captain of the pawn of laughing sprites? Who was I to fight a world of color prejudice? I raise my hat to myself when I remember that, even with these thoughts, I did not hesitate or waver; but just went doggedly to work [on my Black Art], and therein lay whatever salvation I have achieved. (8)

Just as I urged earlier in accordance with Shawn Michelle Smith’s belief about *Souls*, meaning is gauged from the way in which I have handled Du Bois’s aforementioned passages. This creative

act on my part to assemble these thoughts from his works conveys the Black Artist's need to 'make it' in American society in a way that I feel is not possible through mere explication; meaning is hopefully also formed through and because of the creative act itself.

Like Du Bois, Black Artists possess a perhaps formally inexplicable sense of purpose which produces their Black Motivation. They begin their artistic endeavors with the idea of success and a determination to conquer the situation as is (Washington 46). Washington continued, "As I now look back over my life I do not recall that I ever became discouraged over anything that I set out to accomplish." This is also the case with the Black Artist in music. Paul Robeson, Jr. proclaimed the following about his father's Black Motivation: "This vital source of personal strength compelled Paul to sustain himself emotionally through times of personal and professional hardship. He had been grievously hurt on several occasions. He had coped with fear, uncertainty, and disappointment with varying degrees of success. But his abiding faith and unshakable sense of purpose had always kept him emotionally whole. He could be bent, but he could not be broken" (163). As my creative storyline above suggests, Black Motivation entails a willingness to 'make it' by any means necessary.

Not surprisingly, there are countless examples of Black Artists doing whatever they deemed helpful toward their ultimate purpose and artistic success. Anne Key Simpson, in her novel *Hard Trials: The Life and Music of Harry T. Burleigh*, notes that on one occasion the Black composer "heard that Rafael Joseffy [(a famous Hungarian composer and pianist)] was coming to give a concert [at the home of Burleigh's mother's employer, Mrs. Elizabeth Russell]. He would hear it at any cost: so he stood in the snow up to his knees outside the window of the drawing-room of the Russell house...The lad was taken ill, pneumonia threatened, and in answer to his mother's inquiries, he told of the hours in the deep snow" (153). Another example of

Burleigh's "dogged" will to be a composer is his refusal to withdraw from the National Conservatory of Music in New York, even though he was very poor and his scholarship only covered his tuition. In Burleigh's words, "I used to stand hungry in front of one of Dennett's downtown restaurants and watch the man in the window cook cakes. Then I would take a toothpick from my pocket, use it as if I had eaten, draw on my imagination and walk down the street singing to myself. That happened more than once or twice" (qtd. in R. Jones, "H. T. Burleigh" 1).

Unfortunately, despite the amazing sense of purpose and will—and success—of the Black Artist he or she is often still problematically held against a standard of Whiteness. This point regarding the way in which the Black musician 'makes it' in American society concludes an earlier argument I made about the fact that even when Blacks engage in the same social activities, tasks, etc., there is specificity about their performances. Part of this distinction is the fact that Black performers are constantly compared to the European and European American 'greats,' as if the performances of Whites are *the* performances to which to aspire. Let us first take into account this quote from *The Washington Post* about the "emotional force" of the Black concert artist Roland Hayes: "The applause was prolonged after each number and he responded with many encores...The spirituals were sung with the deepest feeling of the evening. As sung by this master singer of his race, each spiritual is made a masterpiece of vocal art without losing any of the primitive appeal of the original compositions" (qtd. in Jones, "Roland Hayes" 2). The facts that Hayes is referred to as the "master singer of his race" and that the spirituals are described as having a "primitive appeal" mark this aspect of 'making it' artistically. In line with Thompson's case that Blacks occupy sub-statuses within all major categories of American society, in sectors of music associated with Europeanism there is still a tendency to refer to the

Black musicians as *other*; i.e., with the qualifier “black.” This usage of “black” implies that when Black people produce within traditionally White art forms such as classical composition and performance, they can only achieve to be the “black” (read lesser) version of their White counterparts. The nation’s first Black concert singer, for instance, Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield was called “the Black Swan” for her “remarkably sweet tones and wide vocal compass” (Southern 103). The Black tenor Thomas Bowers “acquired his title, ‘the Colored Mario,’ because of the similarity of his voice to that of the Italian opera tenor Giovanni Mario.” Bowers’s sister, Sarah Sedgewick, also a professional singer, was called “the Colored Nightingale” (104). Other examples include: Lucie Lenoir as the “Creole Nightingale” (246); Madame M. Sissieretta Jones as the “Black Patti,” after the reigning prima donna of her time, Adelina Patti (246); Annie Pindell as the “Black Nightingale” (247); and Walter Craig as the “Prince of Negro Violinists” (252). There is a struggle of the Black musician to “make it on the White man’s terms” implied in all these titles.

This then brings a nice conclusion to yet another contention I made earlier, regarding the importance that I deal specifically with those portions of Black Art which are not traditionally termed as such. There is a contrast between these above mentioned artists who led classical musical lives and those who engage in music that is originated in African American communities associated with Blacks, such as the blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, hip hop and soul. Although all Black Art is distinctive, the omission of “black” in the common titles of Blacks producing within traditionally African American art forms is instructive in relation to the “terms” on which a given Black Artist has ‘made it.’ I will end this section with some of the titles owned by those artists in traditionally Black art forms. Though the reader may find several of these titles humorous, what the reader will not find is that problematic qualifier “black” included above: William C.

Handy is termed the “Father of the Blues” and Gertrude “Ma” Rainey the “Mother of the Blues” (372). Bessie Smith was called the “Empress of the Blues,” while Edith Wilson was called the “Queen of the Blues” (373). Other examples include: Alberta Hunter as the “Prima Donna of *Blues Singers*” (373); Aretha Franklin as the “Queen of the Soul” (517); Nina Simone as the “High Priestess of Soul” (518); in pop culture, Sean “Puffy” Combs refers to Mary J. Blige as the “Queen of Hip Hop Soul”; and, perhaps most humorously, Whitney Houston claims her ex-husband, Bobby Brown, is the “King of R&B and popular music.” The addition my conception of Black Motivation makes to Black Art is decidedly apparent here, because my last argument that Whiteness is put on a pedestal in traditionally European art forms is an added “term” on which Black musicians must ‘make it.’

“besting others”

The final application I make of Black Motivation to Black Art deals with an earlier concept from the educational perspective. It is the duality of ego- and task-orientation. In the educational perspective, I argued that Blacks are mismatched educationally because they are forced to act within ego-dominant domains even though the majority of them have been proven to fare best within task dominant environments. Ego goals emphasize “besting others” while task goals emphasize improvement (Kaplan and Maehr 25). Perhaps the reader has pondered the question: for which type of goal do Black Artists strive? Throughout my work with this material I have found a trend that Black Artists often show signs that they experience both types of orientation. “Making it on the White man’s terms,” for example, would imply that persons are succeeding even within ego-oriented environments. And yet there is also evidence of Blacks who reject the ideals of the larger environment, and rather act completely on their own terms. In this latter case I would assume that the Black Artist who acts on his or her own terms will value

task goals—given that Blacks have been proven to achieve better with that type of an orientation. Although I do not feel it is necessary to pin down Black Artists to any one type of orientation, I do believe that when Blacks are forced to ‘make it’ problematic issues ensue. For example, there is often so much of an effort to “best” or “beat” and “win” that it leads to potentially negative effects on the artist. This section will attempt to at least briefly tackle this aspect of how Black Motivation relates to Black Art in terms of ego- and task-orientation.

To begin, I turn to hooks’s following notion of why it is imperative for the Black Artist to “make it on the White man’s terms” if his or her art is to have the best effect on society. She says, “Black artists concerned with producing work that embodies and reflects a liberatory politic know that an important part of any decolonization process is critical intervention and interrogation of existing repressive and dominating structures. African-American critics and/or artists who speak about our need to engage in ongoing dialogue with dominant discourses always risk being dismissed as assimilationist. There is a grave difference between that engagement with white culture which seeks to deconstruct, demystify, challenge, and transform and gestures of collaboration and complicity. We cannot participate in dialogue that is the mark of freedom and critical agency if we dismiss all work emerging from white western traditions” (70). I began with this quote from hooks because it may begin to resolve the uncertainty I described. hooks suggests that Black artists *must* act within predominantly White discourses in order to challenge and transform them. This veritably follows my previous notion that ‘making it’ includes more than an acceptance of the “terms,” but rather it (as described in relation to Black Motivation) presumes a successful negotiation of those terms. This also relates to Thompson’s belief that the Black student must attend White colleges in order to fully “make it on the White man’s terms.” I

hope it also further elucidates my concern with traditionally European art forms—including literature, composition and classical music performance—within the current paper.

As I insinuated early in the paper and most recently with Ellison, Black Motivation is not holistically advantageous. Although I feel that it is the best tool African Americans have currently toward the end of bettering the race, I also think that it eventually must be reconciled if true race equality and integration are to ever come to fruition. Meaning, the existence of Black Motivation as I have conceived it presupposes that the American educational and social environments are ill-fitting to the normal Black person. Black Motivation thrives only as long as being successful *and* Black in America is an extraordinary feat. Since Blacks have such a strong desire to achieve and ‘make it,’ when they do so within ego-dominant domains it can lead to negative outcomes. If we remember Du Bois’s quote from *Souls*, he describes that he was happiest when he could “beat” his White counterparts in academics, sports or even with physical violence. This marks the potentiality of danger, and may lend some explanation to the crime, violence and self-hate issues which are so often characteristic of Black communities in America.

Another danger of ‘besting others’ is that it can take the form of “acting White” in the process of reaching a goal defined in White terms. Morrison alludes to this in her novel *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola Breedlove wants to be White and have the bluest eyes. Morrison begins her novel by deconstructing the traditional “Fun with Dick and Jane” story (3-4). She tells the story regularly, and then slowly—and throughout the novel—she removes punctuation, capitalization, and spacing until it is no longer a functioning narrative of the children’s story. Her artistic move suggests a critique of the story, and is in line with hooks’s thoughts about demystifying and deconstructing from the inside out. Morrison believes that the narrative is not ideal for White children and damages Black children, and thus uses her own frustration to artistically speak upon

the issues. Also within the novel Morrison shows anger through her narrator character, Claudia. Disgusted with the Whiteness all around her and in contrast with her sister who idolizes and identifies with Shirley Temple, Claudia detests Shirley Temple. She is angry: “I hated Shirley. Not because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles, who was *my* friend, *my* uncle, *my* daddy, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me. Instead he was enjoying, sharing, giving a lovely dance thing with one of those little white girls whose socks never slid down under their heels” (19). Claudia thought her Blackness was enough, and she did not want to be “bleached” or convinced that Whiteness was better.

I believe that this is the same anger at the root of nationalist and revolutionary groups within Black society, such as the Black Panthers, Garveyites, and the followers of the late Malcolm X. These groups reject Whiteness as ideal, and are the results of Blacks who are fed up with the constancy of the same racism and inequality issues. Although the poet Gwendolyn Parker ultimately transferred her anger into art production, she expresses a similar sentiment of deeply loathing it all: “This anger was different. It crashed about the room, free floating, huge, with a target that I couldn’t see. And it didn’t dissipate, but seemed to gather momentum...It felt to me like an anger that was decades, maybe a lifetime old” (qtd. in Perry 34). Even Black Artists known for their composure and calm have expressed annoyance with the common holding that White is best. Paul Robeson: “Young colored people have always in the past been urged to be as good as the white lawyer. That’s ridiculous. To be as good as anyone else is no high ideal, especially when the models held up to the colored youth are just the white people in general. The art form is the one in which I am myself” (qtd. in Robeson 88).

Another way in which Black Artists’ need to ‘best others’ is problematic is best termed, I think, as Ellisonian delusion. Although Ellison of course possessed some aspects of Black

Motivation, he was problematically ambitious. As Watts noted, although the author was a fast writer he would not release a book until he believed that it was the best American novel ever written (32). Needless to say, it was impossible for Ellison to ever be able to measure any novel he wrote against every other novel written in America, so his desire to “best” others created a dilemma for him. In the end Ellison was never able to write another novel. His main goal was to make America aware of the centrality of Black culture in the country (44), and yet his delusions prevented him from using the best artistic tool he had available. This delusion is also exemplified with his extreme internal motivation, and his strict belief that freedom could not be denied by external forces. He held that freedom was “ultimately in the mind, a function of the will and the imagination” (90). This gets at the psychological disengagement I discussed earlier, and how Ellison’s belief that he could conquer the world without facing—and properly reconciling—the consequences of his inequality as an African American was ultimately traumatic. He had a defense of equality that deemed any conceit of racial prejudice or racism as threatening to the validation of Negro humanity (81). Whereas most Black Artists use their Black Motivation to navigate successfully through such truths of inequality and racism, Ellison simply convinced himself that they did not exist. This is exemplified, too, in his novel: “I saw no limits...even if it meant climbing a mountain of words. For now I had begun to believe, despite all the talk of science around me, that there was a magic in spoken words” (Ellison 380-81). There indeed *is* a magic in spoken words, and I argue that Ellison was never able to fully utilize it because of the delusional aspects of his own character.

Many Black Artists had similar beliefs in their abilities to ‘conquer the world’ but many of them still acknowledged racist obstacles that they would have to overcome. Booker T. Washington, for instance, portrayed in his work how intense the desire was of African

Americans for an education (20). And so when Washington finally got the chance to learn he resolved himself to a conviction that nothing else would ever stop him from doing what he could to ‘save the world’: “The sight of [Hampton University] seemed to give me new life. I felt that a new kind of existence had now begun—that life would now have a new meaning. I felt that I had reached the promised land, and I resolved to let no obstacle prevent me from putting forth the highest effort to fit myself to accomplish the most good in the world” (35). Indeed, many made such grandiose statements, but the difference with Ellison I emphasize is his misunderstanding of how to use that extreme desire. When other Black Artists would use the “distorting ramifications of a history of racial and economic oppression” to their advantage to create superior mental patterns and motivation, Ellison instead created delusion. “Ellison viewed the political-social order as a relatively insignificant shaper of life. Why protest against a society that lacks the power to devastate black life?” (Watts 85).

In contrast to Ellison, artists such as Paul Robeson simultaneously acknowledge racist barriers and realize their importance as Black Artists to bring about the removal of these barriers. “No one can hear these songs as our people sang them and not understand the Negro a little better,” Robeson said, adding that: “I found that on the stage, whether singing or acting, race and color prejudices are forgotten. Art is the one form against which such barriers do not stand. And I think it is through art we are going to come into our own” (qtd. in Robeson 88). Such an artist was portrayed also in Johnson’s book, with the character ‘Shiny.’ ‘Shiny’ epitomized a healthy Black Motivation with the combination of his superior mental abilities and strong motivation and need to achieve (9), while he also had an acute awareness of his position and how he could best use it for the betterment of his race. He is depicted as an orator with an ability to move his audiences—Blacks and Whites alike. Even so, ‘Shiny’ does not take it to mean that he has

achieved equality, but rather understands his task to use that art to bear the weight and responsibility of the Black race (31). The narrator in the novel notes, “I have since known of colored men who have been chosen as class orators in our leading universities, of others who have played on the varsity football and baseball teams, of colored speakers who have addressed great white audiences. In each of these instances I believe the men were stirred by the same emotions which actuated ‘Shiny’ on the day of his graduation” (31). These emotions are real, and are rooted in Black Motivation. This is the *best* kind of “besting” because it entails an acknowledgement of racist barriers and a commitment to using art to critique and undermine them, not through delusion or by “acting White” but by profoundly trusting in—and depending on and utilizing—one’s Black Motivation, and the power of Black Art.

Yet the American Negroes stand today as the greatest strategic group in the world. Their services are indispensable, their temper and character are fine, and their souls have seen a vision more beautiful than any other mass of workers. They may win back culture to the world if their strength can be used with the forces of the world that make for justice and not against the hidden hates that fight for barbarism. For fight they must and fight they will! (Du Bois, Darkwater 47).

IV. Conclusion

In the previous quote from *Darkwater* Du Bois describes the “fight” I mentioned at the end of my “Black Motivation” section. As an artist, here is my weapon in the enduring fight for racial equality and societal progression: my Black Art. This paper and the recital I will perform in conjunction with it are examples of my artistic effort to better my race and ‘save the world.’ As Du Bois insisted, the progression I mentioned does not stop in America; cultivating the power of Black Art will “reveal the possibilities of genius, gift and miracle [of the Black race], in

mountainous treasure-trove, which hitherto civilization has scarcely touched...In world-wide equality of human development is the answer to every meticulous taste and each rare personality” (Du Bois, “My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom” 56). Du Bois believed that developing the cultural and artistic power of African Americans—a historically oppressed group—would play a very important role in developing similar unknown *beauty* worldwide. He continues, “It is the duty of the black race to maintain its cultural advance, not for itself alone, but for the emancipation of mankind, the realization of democracy and the progress of civilization” (56). I argue that Black people are able to answer this calling through strategic vehicles rooted in Black Motivation—such as Black Art. I have perhaps alluded to the grandest distinction of the Black Artistic voice, but will say it plainly here: its distinction is its responsible and exceptional ability to speak for and of those who cannot. Ellison had it right in his deep belief that his order as a Black Artist was not only to excel in literature but to do so in such a way that expressed the voice of his people (Watts 100). Ellison’s voice, like the voice of all Black Artists, is produced through that deciding sixth sense I have discussed. The uniqueness gained through the specific educational, sociological and psychological experiences produces an *advantage*. I have presented this advantage throughout all sections of my paper, and conclude that at present it is the greatest and most important *American* gift to civilization. The Black Artist’s voice inevitably emphasizes this weight, and thus however the Black Artist chooses to speak, his or her motivation, necessity and judgment are always “heard or *over*-heard” (Wright 272). Black Art always—whether explicitly or implicitly—displays a yearning for that world-wide human development.

In the midst of all the worldly suffering and evil, the Black Artist is indeed a necessity. I now speak as dramatically as some I have mentioned, because I too believe that African

Americans—with their history in slavery, oppression and racism—are in a strategic position of wisdom. The individuals with Black Motivation within this race have proven to be fearless. I urge that when that motivation is used to produce art, Black Art, it sparks an absolutely critical potentiality for racial and societal betterment. As the great Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. exclaimed, “During these days of human travail we must encourage creative dissenters. We need them because the thunder of their fearless voices will be the only sound stronger than the blasts of bombs and the clamor of war hysteria” (qtd. in C. King 75). I make the case that when the thunder of Black Artists’ voices becomes in fact louder than the social inequality, oppression, and suffering in American society, we will see that ‘new tomorrow’ described and desired by so many (including myself!). It starts, though, with the voice’s ability to *artistically* bang and hammer this American social landscape into shape, as I put it earlier. The Black Artist does this through his or her own, and ability to sense and redefine, beauty.

And first and before all, we cannot forget that this world is beautiful. Grant all its ugliness and sin—the petty, horrible snarl of its putrid threads, which few have seen more near or more often than I—notwithstanding all this, the beauty of this world is not to be denied (Du Bois, Darkwater 110).

Let us remember from my earlier discussion how double-consciousness psychologically entails an ability to explore the limits of one’s identity; this may be the ultimate ‘gift of Black folk’ to the world, if we can give it. So much of the hate and hurt in the world is a result of stubbornness to *acknowledge* and *know* each other; we currently lack adequate human sympathy despite what I believe to be an innate human desire to love each other. “Our fate is to become one, and yet many—This in not prophecy, but description” (Ellison 577). We have created artificial barriers through racism and social classism, but I sense a day when they will be broken.

In that new day inequities will be addressed and we will be given an opportunity to love fully. As Du Bois agreed in *Darkwater*, this will be the day when glorious and grand cultural multiplicity is no longer the problem, but the final solution—“a solution to the confines of identity itself” (xv).

I have argued that the experience of Black Artists is what makes their art so marvelous, and so the reader may wonder what will happen when “tomorrow” actually comes. Have I created a paradox? Actually, I do not think so. The history of African Americans will not disappear, and even when we one day reach a world of grand cultural multiplicity Black Art will still be marvelous—it will just be instead “Black art” (lower-case “a”). This beautiful art form will no longer be an art form of the exceptions. In fact, all those Blacks who have formerly been “crushed” because they are not internally motivated enough *or* do not strike the correct balance between Blackness and Americanness *or* cannot realize that “dogged strength” within these short lives which we are granted, will be saved. In that new day *all* art will flourish. Black people will produce art more than ever; they will be able to draw upon the history of Black Art without that historical necessity to surmount such challenging obstacles. “Which way is the future? It is difficult to tell. It is unlikely, however, that black musical styles and genres will disappear...The enduring feature of black music is neither protest nor self-expression; it is *communication*, and one cannot imagine a time when black musicians will have nothing to say” (Southern 609). I must agree with Southern here that the feature of Black Art that will endure into that new day is the “Black” part, while the “Art” (capital “a”) which has formerly denoted a tragic constancy of struggle will be then a part of our history and not our present. May tomorrow I sit at the table as a Black “artist.”

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