

The Quest for Identity: The Dialectic of Double Consciousness and the Black Athlete in American Sport, 1865-1968

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The notion of double-consciousness as expressed by W.E.B. Dubois in his classic 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk* came into focus for black athletes involved in American sport between 1865 and 1968. Outstanding black athletes in this country were similar to other members of their race in that American discriminatory practices compelled them to live in a bicultural fashion. Circumstances dictated that they live in both the dominant culture and black society, follow two parallel paths in managing their black identity, and adhere to certain values and behaviors to overcome the dilemma of effectively functioning in two different worlds. On the one hand, black athletes were proud of their race for its forbearance and ability to survive, and engaged in life-long rebellions against the negative images of black inferiority and institutional racism. At the same time, black athletes were forced to pragmatically support the values upheld in the white world and adapt, if not adopt, the proclivities of the dominant society. This duality was intertwined with cultural distinctiveness, especial behavioral practices, and social patterns that were distinctively developed to cope with the racial inequities of American society. More specifically, black athletes devised multi-faceted responses to their stigmatized condition in American society, responses that served more as a palliative than as a force of liberation.