



(UN)RECONCILED SELVES AMERICAN BORN CHINESE THROUGH THE LENS OF DU BOISIAN THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT	RESUMO
<p>Gene Luen Yang's graphic novel, <i>American Born Chinese</i>, has entered the syllabus of several North American classrooms as a starting point for discussions on racial stereotyping and identity formation. Despite having been compared to how African American authors explore the consequences of negative stereotyping, critics of Yang's work have directed their attention mostly towards the reality of members from the Asian American community. Yet, this article aims at comprehending how the concepts of "double consciousness" and "two-ness" developed by W.E.B. Du Bois in <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> (1903) can be used in order to better understand the experience of contemporary Chinese American youths as it has been represented in <i>American Born Chinese</i>. By utilizing Du Bois's understanding of the psychological impacts of negative stereotyping on his black subjects this work argues that a parallel can be drawn between this African American author's theory of split consciousness, together with its resulting feeling of otherness, and several narrative elements of Yang's graphic novel, as well as its tripartite structure. Furthermore, it also examines how both authors present their readers with similar solutions in order for conflicting selves to achieve a state of undivided self-consciousness.</p>	<p>Desde a sua publicação, a novela gráfica, <i>American Born Chinese</i>, de Gene Luen Yang já entrou em diversas salas de aula norte-americanas como ponto de partida para discussões sobre estereótipos e formação da identidade. Apesar de ter sido comparado à forma como autores afro-americanos exploram as consequências dos estereótipos negativos, os críticos da obra de Yang têm dirigido a sua atenção maioritariamente para a realidade dos membros da comunidade sino-americana. Contudo, o presente artigo tem como objectivo compreender como os conceitos de "dupla-consciência" e de dualidade desenvolvidos por W.E.B. Du Bois em <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> (1903) podem ser usados para melhor compreender a representação em <i>American Born Chinese</i> da experiência contemporânea de jovens sino-americanos. Ao utilizar a visão de Du Bois dos impactos psicológicos dos estereótipos negativos em indivíduos negros, este trabalho defende a possibilidade de traçar um paralelo entre a teoria deste autor afro-americano da fragmentação da consciência e resultante sentimento de alteridade com diversos elementos narrativos da obra de Yang e sua estrutura tripartida. Ademais, é também desenvolvida a forma como ambos os autores apresentam soluções semelhantes para o modo como identidades em conflito podem alcançar a unificação da sua consciência.</p>

PALAVRAS-CHAVE	KEY-WORDS
<p><i>American Born Chinese</i>; Gene Luen Yang; W.E.B. Du Bois; Identidade; Dupla-consciência</p>	<p><i>American Born Chinese</i>; Gene Luen Yang; W.E.B. Du Bois; Identity; Double-consciousness</p>



INTRODUCTION

When considering the idea of an American national identity, one finds that it has been mostly connected with the notion of “whiteness”. Conversely, not to be considered “white” is to be regarded as the “Other”, permanently associated with an inferior unassimilable difference (TAKAKI, 2008). However, as Ronald Takaki (2008) has emphasized, in *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, the United States’ multiethnic character is paramount to the understanding of this country’s society, as well as its place within world history. Therefore, if one is interested in studying this nation’s cultural productions, one has to consider those created by its minorities. Throughout US history, the African American minority has occupied a central position (TAKAKI, 2008). Nonetheless, Asian Americans not only started arriving in North America earlier than many European newcomers (TAKAKI, 2008), but they have become one of the fastest growing communities in the United States (MIN et al., 2005).

Despite the differences between the historical backgrounds of the African American and Chinese American communities, these have been associated with similar stereotypes (TAKAKI, 2008). Additionally, it is possible for one to argue that the psychological impacts of the prejudice against the members of both of these ethnic groups have also been similar. Therefore, this essay aims at better understanding how the experience of contemporary Chinese American youths is represented in Gene Luen Yang’s (1973-) graphic novel *American Born Chinese* (2006), while drawing on the arguments developed by William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963) in his work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), particularly the concepts of “double consciousness” and “two-ness”. By analyzing and comparing both of these works, one can argue that not only is it possible for certain narrative elements and the structure of Yang’s novel to be considered parallel to the theory of split consciousness developed by Du Bois, but also that the solution presented by both of these authors for overcoming such rupture in the identity formation process is analogous.

This work is, then, divided in three central moments: firstly, the ways in which each of the characters in *American Born Chinese* respond to developing a double consciousness and consequential feeling of otherness will be addressed; secondly, in addition to examining Jin’s literal split into Danny and Chin-Kee through the lens of Du Bois’s theory, both the use, in this graphic novel, of the sitcom format and of the *Bildungsroman* genre will be analyzed; and, finally, a parallel will be drawn between the solutions to the condition of double consciousness presented by Yang and Du Bois in both of their works. As a starting point for the development of this study’s argumentation, we will begin by briefly delineating the history of the Chinese immigrants’ presence in the

United States, as well as trace the origin of the main stereotypical traits that became associated with this minority. Furthermore, W.E.B. Du Bois's concepts of "double consciousness" and "two-ness" will be analyzed, as they are presented in *The Souls of Black Folk*, as well as compared with and further developed through similar notions in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952).

1 TWO MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

1.1 THE CHINESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Fleeing from the conflicts resulting from the British Opium Wars and seeking better economic conditions, Chinese migrant men began arriving in the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century, joining the "Forty-Niners" in California (TAKAKI, 2008). These men were free laborers who, already in 1852, felt nativist legislature being imposed upon them, forcing them to pay higher taxes. Leaving the goldfields, they went to work on the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad line, ending up constituting the majority of the workforce employed by the railroad companies (TAKAKI, 2008). During the second half of the nineteenth century, many Chinese workers went to San Francisco and became involved in the manufacturing industry, others went on to develop California's agriculture in rural regions, and it was during especially harsh economic times that Congress passed the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the first law prohibiting immigrants from entering the United States on the basis of nationality (TAKAKI, 2008). Due to such hostility regarding Chinese laborers, these were driven towards self-employment and laundry work, an occupation mostly associated with women: "Racial discrimination drove Chinese into work they disdained as degrading to them as men" (TAKAKI, 2008, p. 185).

Thus, not only were Chinese immigrants the first to suffer the consequences of racially discriminatory immigration legislature, but they started being associated with emasculating characteristics as early as the nineteenth century. Additionally, the conception of this very diverse ethnic group as a model minority for the African American community started when Chinese workers were employed during the Reconstruction period in order to replace black workers in the South (TAKAKI, 2008). According to Takaki, at the time, the Chinese were considered a permanently foreign labor force as a result of "the dominant ideology that defined America as a racially homogeneous society and Americans as white" (2008, p. 187-188). As a result, together with being assigned vampiric characteristics and being regarded as a danger to the racial purity of white Americans, the Chinese became associated with racial qualities previously allotted to black workers such as "heathen, morally inferior, savage, childlike, and lustful" (TAKAKI, 2008,

p. 188).

More recently, at the end of the twentieth century, together with the journalist Mike Wallace, President Ronald Reagan congratulated Asian Americans for their values and economic success, while criticizing African Americans for their reliance on the welfare state (TAKAKI, 2008). Such praise reinforced the problematic term of “model minority”, playing a significant role in the formation of the general perception of Asian Americans in the United States, both within and outside of the community (LAN, 2015). Yet, despite the contrast established between the Chinese American and the African American minorities, they have both experienced the negative social impacts of very similar prejudiced narratives, which, as it will be argued, have also caused analogous psychological responses in their members.

1.2 DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS AND TWO-NESS IN W.E.B. DU BOIS'S *THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK*

Throughout his career as a sociologist, W.E.B. Du Bois sought to comprehend the social and historical conditions in which the black population of the United States lived, as well as the impact these factors had on the psyche of its members (PITTMAN, 2016). With the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*, in 1903, Du Bois set out to address what was termed as the ‘Negro Problem’ (EDWARDS, 2007). In its first chapter – “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” –, the author presents the concept of “double consciousness”, which was first introduced in Du Bois’s work in the magazine article “Strivings of the Negro People” (1897) and was never employed in any of his other writings again (PITTMAN, 2016). Thus, for the purpose of this essay, together with the analysis of Du Bois’s conception of this central notion, the complementary concept of “two-ness” will also be studied, as they are both presented in the following key passage of *The Souls of Black Folk*:

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. (2007, p. 8)

Author Dickson Bruce Jr. (1992) has identified three main sources for Du Bois’s conception of “double consciousness”: European Romanticism – with its echoes of *Strum*

un Drang and the anguish and yearning for a unified self –; American Transcendentalism – with the term being used by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) in his essay “The Transcendentalist” (1843), connecting it to a spiritual dimension of the self –; and the work of William James (1842-1910), whose conception of double consciousness highlighted the integrity and equality between the different states assumed by the individual’s mind. Consequently, one can recognize how all of these elements are present in Du Bois’s conception of double consciousness with its emphasis on the significance of the singular spiritual aspects of the African American experience, the suffering derived from the fragmentation of the self imposed upon the discriminated individual and, finally, the nonhierarchical nature of the different selves – “an American, a Negro” (DU BOIS, 2007, p. 8) – that inhabit their consciousness.

Despite of all of these varied influences, Du Bois’s use of the term in question has its own specificities. The author describes it as a “peculiar sensation” resulting from a socio-cultural construct that impedes a human being, in this case a black individual living in the United States, from obtaining an absolute direct consciousness of his or her own self (PITTMAN, 2016). It can be seen as an answer to the question presented at the beginning of *The Souls of Black Folk*, “How does it feel to be a problem?” (GOODING-WILLIAMS, 2009), since, from the moment they are made aware of their own difference – “it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others” (DU BOIS, 2007, p. 8) –, members of the black community can no longer define their own identity independently from the negative stereotypes created by the dominant gaze of the white faction of society.

As a result, the sense of self of those constituted as the “Other” is reduced to a set of ambivalent characteristics, whose purpose is to fix the African American individual in a position of psychological and social degradation:

In essence, double consciousness is the false self-consciousness that obtains among African Americans when they observe and judge themselves from the perspective of a white, Jim Crow American world that betrays the ideal of reciprocal recognition due to a contemptuous, falsifying prejudice that inaccurately represents Negro life. (GOODING-WILLIAMS, 2009, p. 80)

Therefore, as Pittman (2016) points out, when analyzing Du Bois’s conception of double consciousness, one needs to take into account the fact that it is both a state of individual consciousness, in addition to being a way of recognizing the social situation of segregation and unequal opportunities in which African Americans, as a discriminated group, found themselves in.

Secondly, pertaining to Du Bois’s concept of “two-ness”, it can be seen as a direct result of the condition of double consciousness. Such a state of mental being is responsible

for an identity crisis that splits a person's sense of self into two by establishing a conflicting relationship between the several elements that constitute one's character. In the case of Du Bois's theory, the consciousness of African Americans is then divided into "an American" and "a Negro", whose defining elements, due to the stereotyping white gaze, are seen as being incompatible. That is, whenever African Americans use American standards in order to judge themselves, it creates a misrepresentation of their own life whose incompatibility with their actual ideals results in a feeling of two-ness (GOODING-WILLIAMS, 2009). Thus, together with the condition of double consciousness, this feeling also constitutes an answer to the previously stated question, demonstrating the main impacts of racial prejudice on the psyche of the black community in the United States (GOODING-WILLIAMS, 2009).

Finally, as several authors have pointed out, one can establish a relationship between both of these key concepts and the later and in-depth analysis Martinican psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon does of the psychological impacts of colonialism on colonized peoples (BLACK, 2007; HENRY, 2006). In his work *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon also theorizes the concept of the split consciousness of the black man who, reified by the white gaze – "I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am *fixed*" (2008, p. 87; original emphasis) –, develops his own double consciousness – "Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has to place himself. (...) Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third person consciousness." (2008, p. 83). In other words, the colonized individual becomes unable to reach a state of "true self-consciousness" (DU BOIS, 2007, p. 8), since the identity he creates for himself is deeply limited by the stereotypes imposed upon him by a white dominant world. Consequently, just like in Du Bois's writings, Fanon identifies a moment of conflict between two ways of being that are not allowed to reach a state of wholeness, that of simply being a man – "All I wanted was to be a man among other men" (FANON, 2008, p. 85) – and that of the erroneously constructed character of the colonized black subject – "Negros are savages, brutes, illiterates. But in my own case I knew that these statements were false" (FANON, 2008, p. 88).

2 (UN)RECONCILED SELVES: AMERICAN BORN CHINESE THROUGH THE LENS OF DU BOISIAN THOUGHT

2.1. OTHERNESS: AMPUTATED IDENTITIES, SHAME, ANGER AND REJECTION

In both Du Bois's and Fanon's work a key moment for the development of the psychological state of double consciousness and resulting feeling of two-ness is the instant

of recognition by the black subject of his otherness. Both authors describe similar experiences during which the white gaze reduced them to a stereotype, fixing and simplifying their identities, and reducing them to a subordinate social position. As Fanon simply states: “*It is the racist who creates his inferior*” (2008, p. 69; original emphasis). Likewise, in Gene Yang’s *American Born Chinese* the moment in which several characters experience this process is also shown as being paramount to their psychological development. At the beginning of the narrative, the Monkey King is first confronted with his difference when he is barred from entering a dinner party (YANG, 2006). Secondly, both Jin and Wei-Chen are made aware of their otherness from the moment they start school at Mayflower Elementary, where they are instantly confronted with stereotypes associated with the Asian American community (YANG, 2006). Finally, Danny detests Chin-Kee’s visits, since, afterwards, his identity becomes reduced to his relationship with his cousin – “By the time he leaves, no one thinks of me as **Danny** anymore. I’m **Chin-Kee’s cousin**” (YANG, 2006, p. 127; original emphasis).

Conversely, Chin-Kee’s sense of self is never negatively impacted by the way others see him, because his whole existence is defined as an amalgamation and reproduction of the racist iconology associated with the Chinese American community (WANG, 2017). Physically, he is represented as having yellow skin, slanted eyes, buckteeth, a queue and wearing traditional Chinese clothing. Additionally, he is also shown as having a thick accent, eating peculiar meals– like the ones Jin and Wei-Chen’s classmates expect them to eat–, being an excellent student– as an embodiment of the model minority stereotype –, and, finally, as being sexually ambivalent, represented not only in an emasculating way, but also as a vampiric menace to American women (YANG, 2006). Therefore, this character is a personification of stereotypes created to violently confront the reader with the harmful and racially prejudiced representations that have been made of Chinese Americans, which, in turn, they internalize (DAVIS, 2013) and shape their identities with – “He’s [Chin-Kee] meant to come off the page and slap you in the face” (YANG, 2007).

Nevertheless, for the characters of Monkey King, Jin and Wei-Chen, as a result of being made aware of their difference, their identities become amputated and their sense of self-worth degraded, generating feelings of embarrassment and alienation. This notion of truncated identity is very much present in Fanon’s work – “A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man – or at least a nigger” (FANON, 2008, p. 86) – and in Du Bois’s notion of being seen only through “the tape of a world” (2007, p. 8) that reduces the racialized subject into a limited set of negative stereotypical traits. Moreover, this amputation results in a feeling of shame towards one’s own being that can develop into a strong resentment: “But the facing of so vast a prejudice could not

but bring the inevitable self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideals which ever accompany repression and breed in an atmosphere of contempt and hate.” (DU BOIS, 2007, p. 12). Such hatred, as it can be seen in *American Born Chinese*, can be directed towards different subjects.

In *Monkey King's* case, when he is first made to feel inferior to the other guests at the dinner party, he starts by getting embarrassed (YANG, 2006). However, despite rapidly and violently projecting his anger towards others, he soon directs it towards himself in moments of alienation and self-hatred. These are expressed through the textual dimension of the novel – “He stayed awake for the rest of the night thinking of ways to get rid of it [the smell of monkey fur]” (YANG, 2006, p. 20) –, together with the visual darkness present in the final panels of the first chapter (fig. 1). Later, in his attempt to be regarded as an equal, *Monkey King* becomes engaged in an anthropomorphizing process, seen as an improvement from the image of the monkey he utterly rejects. Thus, as a result of the disdain he is made to feel towards himself – “Shame. Shame and self-contempt. Nausea” (FANON, 2008, p. 88) – he becomes literally trapped (YANG, 2006) by his own feeling of two-ness, unable to conciliate being both a deity, equal to all others, and a monkey, rejected by the other gods.

Conversely, *Wei-Chen's* reaction towards being forced to develop a double consciousness and a feeling of two-ness is quite distinct. Although he feels embarrassed, just like *Jin* and *Suzy*, when he hears racist jokes directed at him (YANG, 2006), he responds by making his immigrant status and his Asian cultural inheritance visible throughout the entire narrative. Yet, born in the United States, *Jin* develops a completely different psychological response. As a result from the bullying and alienation from his fellow classmates (YANG, 2006), *Jin* internalizes the prejudiced views with which others see him, similarly to what happens to *Wei-Chen* and *Suzy* – “Today, when Timmy called me a... a **chink**, I realized... deep down inside... I kind of feel like that **all the time**” (YANG, 2006, p. 187; original emphasis). However, in *Jin's* case, this internalization leads to a rejection of his Chinese cultural background and, consequently, of himself. Nonetheless, initially, because he is not fully aware of these self-destructive sentiments of rejection, he redirects them towards *Wei-Chen* – “Something made me want to beat him up” (YANG, 2006, p. 36). Through the lens of *Du Bois's* writing, one can understand how *Jin* is forced to develop a double consciousness by constantly being fixed into the stereotype of a Chinese American and how, in turn, this condition makes *Jin* feel his two-ness – an American, a Chinese. Unable to conciliate these two identities, he attempts to completely repress the subordinate one.

Fig. 1. **Monkey King's alienation and self-hatred**; from page 20, *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang. New York: First Second, 2006.



Furthermore, when discussing the impact of stereotypes on these characters' self-perception, it is also important to analyze the title chosen for this graphic novel. Since Jin is the main character of this narrative, one can interpret the term "American Born Chinese" to be in direct reference to his predicament. By being born in the United States, Jin is legally an American. Nevertheless, as a victim of racial prejudice and discrimination, he is denied this part of his identity and becomes excluded from his classmate's social group, by whom he is reduced to a demeaning idea of Chineseness. Therefore, the term "American Born Chinese" not only provides the reader with the main theme of the work, but also critiques the label itself, emphasizing the tension and incompatibility between the two ideals that it separates – an American, a Chinese. Once again, making it possible for us to establish a connection between the issues addressed in this graphic novel and Du Bois's work.

2.2 RESPONDING TO A DOUBLE SELF: A SPLIT IN NARRATIVE AND FORM

Halfway through the narrative, Jin's renunciation of his Chinese cultural

background reaches a dramatic turning point when he sees it as being responsible for the impossibility of dating Amelia. Initially, Jin feels jealous of Amelia's other friend, Greg. However, the origins of his jealousy are quickly directed solely towards Greg's physical appearance (fig. 2), showing how Jin's sense of inferiority is closely linked to what connects him to his Chinese heritage. Later, when Greg asks Jin to stop dating Amelia, though no comments regarding his cultural background are ever made, the latter automatically assumes it is because he is Chinese American. Thus, Jin's assumption can be interpreted as a result of the shame he feels concerning his internal state of two-ness. He continues to reject part of his identity, redirecting this repudiation towards Wei-Chen – "Maybe I think she can do **better** than an **F.O.B.** like **you**" (YANG, 2006, p. 191; original emphasis). Ultimately, this process of renunciation results in Jin losing his only two friends, exacerbating his racial melancholia (SARIGIANIDES, 2017) and culminating in his literal split into Danny and Chin-Kee, also expressed through the novel's fragmentation into three seemingly separate narratives.

Fig. 2. **Jin's focus on Greg's physical appearance**; from page 97, *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang. New York: First Second, 2006.



Once again, this split not only of Jin, but also of the actual structure of American Born Chinese, can be clarified through Du Bois's ideas in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Since, it is first through the development of a double consciousness – by seeing himself through the racially prejudiced gaze of his classmates – that Jin enters in an internal state of irreconcilable two-ness. As a result, the rejection of the identity traits connected to his Chinese inheritance produces such an unappeasable internal conflict that it becomes expressed through a literal external split between his American self (Danny) and his Chinese self (Chin-Kee). Still, Jin's "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals" (DU BOIS, 2007, p. 8) continue at war with each other. This never-ending struggle is, then, expressed in cousin Chin-Kee's yearly visits to Danny, who – just like the African Americans Du Bois writes about – cannot escape the two-ness imposed upon him.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, the fragmentation of the self experienced by those who are denied a true self-consciousness is also present in *American Born Chinese's* structure. Hence, Yang's graphic novel is divided into three apparently distinct narratives, a sitcom, a *Bildungsroman* and a myth, all of them adding meaning to Yang's work. By using the sitcom format – with canned laughter and applause – to convey Danny and Chin-Kee's section of the narrative, the author is not only emphasizing the notion of performance in the Chinese cousin's behavior, but also that of viewership (DAVIS, 2013). In other words, Yang draws attention to how the mainstream media utilize stereotypes in order to perpetuate a certain image of the ethnic minorities being represented (SARIGIANIDES, 2017) and how these prejudiced views influence the identity formation process of its audience. Additionally, Chin-Kee and the laughter he evokes, are ways in which Yang addresses the issue of racial stereotyping and marginalization, because by presenting such hyperbolic character and instances of clearly scripted laughter, the author is able to make his readers feel uncomfortable, disturbing the cultural productions responsible for such stereotyping and highlighting how those who are different tend to be laughed at, reified and distanced from (OH, 2017).

Similarly, by using the *Bildungsroman* genre to tell Jin's story, Yang accentuates the importance of addressing issues concerning the marginalization of the Chinese American community. Commonly, as Viet Thanh Nguyen (2000) states, coming-of-age novels exclude from representation those who do not correspond to the profile of its preferred subjects, usually white heterosexual males. By using the *Bildungsroman* and narrating Jin's desire and attempts at full assimilation of American culture, Yang perpetuates the sense of double consciousness and the condition of two-ness experienced by racially stereotyped individuals throughout most of *American Born Chinese*. Yet, the author also presents the reader with a solution to such psychological troubles, proclaiming an identity in mainstream culture for Chinese Americans (NGUYEN, 2000). Therefore, Yang manages to subvert a genre representative of a significant strand of American literature (NGUYEN, 2000) by introducing into it subjects who are usually marginalized, reinforcing the need for nuanced representations of Chinese Americans in mainstream culture.

3 MERGING, CONSILIATING AND TRANSFORMING: A SOLUTION

The solution to the identity issues experienced by the characters in *American Born Chinese* is presented in several ways, one of which is through the introduction of the myth as a narrative structure in the novel. By using the character of Monkey King as one of the central figures in his work, Yang manages to incorporate elements from Chinese literary tradition – specifically, from one of the four great Chinese classical novels, *Journey to the*

West (c. 1592) – into an American literary production with elements from Western culture. For instance, Monkey King's journey to the West accompanying Wong Lai-Tsao does not end in India, as in the original, but in a nativity scene (YANG, 2006), combining Buddhist and Christian elements. Moreover, in spite of, initially, alternating between three distinct forms of narrative, by the end of the graphic novel, these are merged together and elements from each of them are combined to establish a dialogue between them. For example, by having Danny knock the head out of Chin-Kee, revealing his true identity, not only does Jin enact a final act of violence towards the hurtful representations of Chinese Americans, but he also manages to directly confront his identity issues and merge his narrative with that of Monkey King, who, acting as a "signpost" to Jin's soul, sets him on the path towards self-acceptance. Thus, such conciliation between his two selves – Danny and Chin-Kee – is only possible when they are allowed to naturally come together.

Then, in order to accept his hybrid identity as an American Chinese, Jin has to make peace with Wei-Chen, whose character is representative not only of the opposite way of dealing with a perpetual state of two-ness – by constantly reaffirming elements related to his Asian background–, but also of the Chinese cultural heritage Jin spent most of the narrative rejecting. Thusly, the reconciliation between these two friends, whose disparate ways of dealing with their sensations of double consciousness and condition of two-ness did not lead them to a state of true self-consciousness, serves as a solution to these issues. Ultimately, their friendship becomes symbolic of the conciliation between the attitude of reaffirmation and that of rejection of their Asian ancestry. Hence, it becomes relevant that Yang chose to present Monkey King's story as a frame through which to read the entire book, since, as Rocío Davies (2013) points out, the myth section of the narrative emphasizes the themes of transformation and ethnic self-acceptance central to Jin and Wei-Chen's journey towards the conciliation of their Asian and American identities.

Likewise, the solution presented by Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* for the state of "contradiction of double aims" (2007, p. 9) in which African Americans found themselves in, unable to be both "an American" and "a Negro", was also one of cultivating "the ideal of fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro, not in opposition to or contempt for other races, but rather in large conformity to the greater ideals of the American Republic" (DU BOIS, 2007, p. 13). That is, Du Bois recognized an inherent and equal value in both of the halves constituting the double self, defending a merging between them in order to form "a better and truer self" (2007, p. 9) and put an end to the erroneous image of African Americans' lives that resulted from double consciousness (GOODLING-WILLIAMS, 2009). As a result, both of these souls, thoughts, strivings and ideals would be able to enter into a productive dialogue without having either perspective occupy a subordinate position in relation to the other (GOODLING-

WILLIAMS, 2009). So, it is possible to state that the resolution presented in *American Born Chinese* to the condition of double consciousness developed by Monkey King, Jin and Wei-Chen is analogous to Du Bois's ideas. Since, it is only through the recognition of both halves of their identities as equally valuable that these characters are able to overcome the false image created by the stereotypes they have been reduced to in the past and are able to create a third placated self.

Finally, one can also argue that Du Bois's solution to feeling like a problem is also present in Yang's work through the transformation motif. Since the beginning of the graphic novel, together with Monkey King's recurrent metamorphosis, Jin exhibits a fascination with the ability to transform himself into something else, claiming he wanted to be a transformer when he grew up (YANG, 2006). Conversely, as it has been stated, it is precisely the lack of need to become someone else and the ability to conciliate their different selves that allows these characters to gain a unified consciousness, just like the herbalist's wife points out to Jin at the beginning of the narrative, **"It's easy to become anything you wish (...) so long as you're willing to forfeit your soul"** (YANG, 2006, p. 29; original emphasis). Additionally, it is through playing with a transformer toy that Jin and Wei-Chen first bond in school and, when getting ready to start his mission, Monkey King's son is gifted with a monkey toy that adopts a humanoid form, so that he does not forget who he is. Hence, the transformer, with its ability to be two different things at once, becomes an ambivalent symbolic element of the narrative by being representative not only of the split condition of the self, but also, at the same time, of the possibility of conciliation between those fragments.

4 FINAL REMARKS

Both Gene Yang's *American Born Chinese* as well as W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* explore the psychological impacts of racial discrimination on Asian American and African American individuals living in the United States, respectively. By using Du Bois's conception of the terms "double consciousness" and "two-ness" to read Yang's graphic novel, it is possible to gain a better understanding not only of the experience of its characters with being stereotyped, but also of this work's internal structure. Monkey King's, Jin's and Wei-Chen's confrontation with their otherness leads them to develop a double consciousness and, consequently, a feeling of two-ness. This condition, in Jin's case, culminates in this character's literal fragmentation into the two irreconcilable halves that compose his identity.

Mirroring Jin's split, this novel's tripartite structure and the subversion of both the sitcom format and the *Bildungsroman* genre become a critique on the marginalization of



culturally invisible minorities and the stereotypes created of their members. Furthermore, the merging of the three seemingly separate narratives and of elements from Chinese and Western culture point to a solution to the issues faced by this tale's characters. Together with the reconciliation between Jin and Wei-Chen and the transformation motif, all of these elements represent a step towards a final moment of rapprochement between two previously conflicting ideals.

In conclusion, after reading *American Born Chinese* through the lens of Du Bois's work, it seems possible to put forward the idea that the psychological conflicts experienced by Yang's characters are parallel to those described by Du Bois. Therefore, the point can be made that not only Monkey King, Jin and Wei-Chen suffer through a state of double consciousness and feeling of two-ness at certain moments in the narrative, but that the actual tripartite structure of Yang's work is also akin to the fragmentation of the self experienced by Du Bois's black subjects. Moreover, one can also argue that the solution presented in *American Born Chinese* for its characters' issues is analogous to Du Bois's ambition of obtaining a unified self-consciousness out of formerly irreconcilable selves.



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