

Colorism: black people and skin color

People



Growing up as a youth being in an interracial family, I always experienced prejudice whether it was inside my home or out on the street. My father was an African-American, his family was accepting but all could see that they praised the fact that my skin was 5-6 shades lighter than that of my other cousins.

This of course caused unresolved issues, issues that couldn't and wouldn't be talked about among us as children, but later on became deep conversation filled with tears and understanding because we were finally able to get from under the stigma that our parents were engulfed in because their parents had subjected them to the same treatment. While on the other hand, my mother's side of the family is Irish, German, and Indian. They despised the fact that my father was an African-American man.

I would hear my mother's mother talk badly of my father. She even went as far as not to allow my father in her home. She was the hardest on me out of all the grand children when it came to disciplining us, because my father's skin tone was that of a black man. They also tended to favor my mother's eldest daughter because her father wasn't an African-American. As a child growing up I experienced both positive and negative feedback for my skin color. But I must say that it was about 85% positive when not in the presence of my mother's mother.

Note I don't say grandmother because she was hardly ever a grandmother toward s me, just because my skin color was that of a black girl, while my cousins were mostly fair skinned. Colorism in the United States is a stigma that won't get lifted because of what slavery has embedded in the minds of

African-Americans. According to wikipedia. com, Colorism is defined as a " Black-on-Blackracism, based on skin-tone. " Thediscriminationis based on the idea that a person's worth is directly related to the color of his or her skin, valuing lighter tones over darker tones.

It's commonly known that Colorism plagued the Black community after slavery and through the early to mid-twentieth century. In the early 1900's, many black organizations, including colleges, practiced the " brown paper bag test" when accepting new members. If a person's skin was not lighter than a brown paper bag, they would be denied admittance. Though the brown paper bag test is out of date and frowned upon as a shameful moment in African-American history, the ideals behind the practice still lingers in the African-American community.

Modern-day Colorism rears its ugly head in the day to day lives of African-Americans every day. This issue has affected every hue or shade of blackness within the African-American community. In " The Color Complex" by Midge Wilson, Wilson addresses the issue by tracing the origin of Colorism, " To trace the origins of the color complex, we must return to the year 1607 when three ships sailed in Chesapeake Bay, stopping at Jamestown, Virginia, to establish the first English colony in the New World.....

It was a new land and a new era filled with possibilities. What might have been unthinkable in Europe and Africa was an everyday occurrence in the wilderness. Miscegenation, or race mixing, became widespread as Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans mixed their seed and substance to produce a kaleidoscope of skin tones and features. But these primary race

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groupings differed sharply in their civil liberties and political freedoms. Subtle variations in appearance took on enormous consequence in meaning, especially among Negroes," (Wilson, pg. 9).

With the emphasis of color being placed in the forefront of the black community, blacks have let this issue set the stage for ignorance for over four hundred years. The effects of these actions have trickled down into some of the most prominent black organizations that define our community and our blackness, such as the NAACP, Jack and Jill, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, and etc. It is no secret that these types of organizations were created in order to create a faux safe haven for the wealth of the light-skinned mulattos.

In the early years these organizations were called Blue Vein societies, because in order to quote "belong," the test of how light you were was could you see your blue veins through your skin? And if they could, you were in.

Works Cited "Colorism." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. 1 Nov 2009, 22:52 UTC. 2 Nov 2009. Wilson, Midge, Russell Kathy. The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans. New York: Harcourt Publishers, 1992.