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Forum 3

24, April 2012

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Colorism: the Downfall of the African-American Culture

Over the past twenty years, the African-American culture has become less of a family and more of an ongoing competition between those with light skin and those with dark skin.

Recently, colorism and self-hatred have become very popular and prominent in the African-American culture. Colorism and self-hatred are corrupting and African-American community, fostering generations of close-minded African-Americans, and lessening the value of blacks in America. Colorism, which is defined as "[...] a practice of discrimination by which those with lighter skin are treated more favorably than those with darker skin" ("Definition of Colorism"), has caused a slue of other problems in the African-American community. Such hatred and discrimination has ripped the community apart, diluted the once rich African culture, and raised a generation of colorists. Other negative affects such as harmful skin-bleaching and low self-esteem are also directly affected by colorism and other forms of discrimination in the black community.

The idea of colorism isn't new to American culture. Judging people based on pigmentation and tone of skin has been done for decades. Ever since slavery, African-Americans with lighter skin were favored over those with darker skin. The colorists mentality has been passed down from generation to generation. During slavery, if a person had light skin, they had a connection to the white man. In today's times, if a light-complected person applied for a job with an extremely over-qualified darker-skinned person, the lighter person would get the job if it were

up to colorism. In the 1950s and 60s, many restaurants "[...] advertised in the tabloids for 'light colored counter help,' an example of nth-degree discrimination." (Staples). In the past, those with lighter skin almost always got the job position, even though more qualified people applied.

"They did it to improve their chances and to reassure white employers who, even though they hired African-Americans, found dark skin unpleasant or believed that their customers would" (Staples).

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Colorism is also a wide-spread problem. There have been multiple cases of colorism in

the Dominican Republic and Brazil. "DR and Brazil are societies built on colorism, in which a person is classified based on the shade of their skin color and not their ancestry [...]" (Fuller 1).

Colorism is just as painful and destructive as racism. Colorism can affect anyone of any age and

~~it does just that.~~ It doesn't just touch the African community; colorism can be found in almost

any culture and race. "Even though both nations boast of mixed populations of European,

Indigenous, and African descent, people of obvious African ancestry, the majority of both

populations, are discriminated against based on their darker skin color" (Fuller 1). Colorism

grows stronger throughout the years. As it gets more and more popular, it gains strength.

Colorism has gone from just being in America to being a world-wide problem.

There are also instances of colorism in places such as India and even Africa. "In India, women strive to achieve the 'wheat' colour much-requested on Asian dating websites. In the Caribbean, light skin is also highly desired while in African countries even seemingly minor variations in skin tone can contribute to ethnic conflict" (Walters). Because of the strength of colorism, it can and does target the most unlikely communities. Instances of colorism can be found all throughout the world today. The lack of job opportunities, appreciation, admiration, and respect for those with dark skin has caused problems for African communities all over the world,

especially in America.

Because colorism is such a strong force, it comes with equally strong effects. One of the main problems or effects caused by colorism is hatred. According to Dictionary.com, hatred is defined as intense dislike or extreme aversion or hostility. ~~Over the years, because of colorism,~~ ^{over the years, due to} ~~millions of African-Americans are victims of self-hatred~~ ^{many fall} Because darker African-Americans are not society's image of beauty, the darker population's self-esteem has been lowered. As mentioned before, skin color could influence aspects of life such as job opportunities and salary. From studies conducted, researchers found out that "[b]lack is not always black. Subtle distinctions in skin tone translate into significant differences in outcomes" (Bodenhorn). Darker African-Americans, within the African-American community, are treated differently because of something so insignificant as skin tone. ^{Me} The root of colorism in America is slavery. From approximately 1619 to 1789, Africans were shipped to America and sold to slavery. "[...] In the African-American community, [colorism] traditionally played out via the paper bag test. Those lighter than the standard paper lunch bag were allowed entry into fraternities, sororities and other realms of black upper class life, while dark-skinned blacks were excluded" ("Definition of Colorism"). A person with darker skin could be more attractive than a person with lighter skin, but, looking through the eyes of a colorist, the person with a lighter complexion is more attractive, worthy, and valuable. Lighter skin has become less of a personal preference, and more of a stigma. With "[...] slavery and a social stigma attached to darker skin" (Kai), colorism has been able to grow and spread like an epidemic.

Although colorism is seemingly invisible to other cultures, it's very evident for those in, or close to, the black community. Dating, friends, and other social interactions are almost always based upon how the person looks. For many, it's seen as embarrassing or unacceptable to be seen

with a darker person. "The Black Community has been wrestling with our own dirty, ugly, little secret since slavery, when we were taught to rate and hate each other heavily dependent on each others skin colour" ("The Ugly Dark Skin Black Girl Compromise").

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Because African-Americans are being judged by something as simple and uncontrollable as skin color, self-esteem, especially in African-American women, has seen a drastic decrease.

This ~~is~~ is fatal to African-Americans of all ages. Self-hatred and self-esteem go hand-in-hand. If, from a very young age, a person has been taught to hate oneself, that person will never have a healthy level of self-esteem or self-worth. Low self-esteem can lead to a slue of other problems. Promiscuity, theft, and other issues are all directly caused by problems such as low self-esteem. Eating disorders are another issue that has been shown to be caused by low self-esteem. Colorism is a generational curse and so it low self-esteem. "In some cases, evidence for this relationship is so strong that it is even thought by some researchers that chronic low self-esteem is a necessary prerequisite for disordered eating (Silverstone 1992)" (Hanlon). With all these emotions and a lack of answers and empathy due to colorism and discrimination, that person with will have to find a new way to cope; his causes a whole new problem.

What is done with these emotions is different for everyone, but, for younger people, it's vital that something productive is done with these emotions. There are numerous African-American youth groups all throughout America. One, The African American Youth Leadership Program (AAYLP), is just for high school juniors and seniors. This program gives teens the skills needed to excel; "Students [...] strive to make a positive impact on the African American Community" ("African American Youth.."). Also, the committee of AAYLP makes it a point to fully prepare their participants for the "real world" experience. Topics such as racism, colorism, and emotional issues are discussed during the conference. Some more personal subjects such as

self-esteem, self-hatred, and self-worth are also mentioned.

Self-esteem is very important for everyone. Confidence is the first, and most important, step to success. Unfortunately, generational low self-esteem is real and prominent. Low self-esteem is just one of the many problems that colorism has caused in the African-American community. In generational low self-esteem, if a mother is born into a colorist society, it's very likely that that woman's children will have the same self-esteem issues. Even if the child is not born into a society that practices colorism, they will most likely have the self-esteem issues of their mother. The beliefs and ideas of a parent are passed down to the children. Through colorism and other forms of discrimination, the African-American community is supporting a generation of dark children with low self-esteem and light-complected children with over-sized egos and colorist views. "In one way, the low self-esteem might be so ingrained in our subconscious mind that we rarely know its existence" ("The Low self-esteem.."). Colorism, like low self-esteem, is an invisible enemy. Without being detected, they can make their way into the hearts and minds of African-Americans.

Having low self-esteem is very dangerous for any person. When it comes to colorism, there have been numerous cases of people resorting to skin-bleaching procedures to lighten their skin. "Bleaching is a huge industry in developing countries. This legacy of slavery or colonization, where lighter-skinned or white people were given visible privileges over hundreds of years has resulted in societies where the lighter you are, the higher your status socially and economically" (Walters). Bleaching ones skin is not just an issue of morals; skin-bleaching can be extremely harmful. "Containing the active ingredients hydroquinone and/or mercury, bleaching creams have been linked with the disfiguring condition ochronosis, marked by the darkening and thickening of the skin, as well as the appearance of tiny dome-shaped bumps and

greyish-brown spots, according to the US FDA [...]” (Walters). People aren't just “bleaching for beauty”, real-world success has been linked to lighter skin. “Sociological studies have shown among African-Americans [...], there's a clear connection between skin color and socioeconomic status. [...] There is prejudice against dark-skinned people, especially women in the so-called marriage market” (Catherine).” Success, in all aspects of life, has been linked to lighter skin due to colorism.

There are more than just physical and emotional effects to colorism. Colorism causes psychological effects, also. Skin-bleaching causes the most psychological problems, according to Vanessa Walters. She says that women can then become psychologically addicted to [skin-bleaching] creams and, over years, destroy not just their complexions, but also their health and self-esteem (“Mighty White”). With addiction, there are hundreds of possible forms of psychological damage that could affect a person. Moderate to severe depression and anxiety disorders are very common with obsessive and addictive personalities.

Without colorism, there wouldn't be a troubled generation of Africans all over the world. If it weren't for colorism, there wouldn't be millions of harmful skin-lightening remedies sold everyday. Colorism has many other psychological, mental, emotional, and physical effects on African-Americans of all ages. “Researchers tell us that [colorism] affects how people vote; who appears in Hollywood movies and television news shows; who gets hired and promoted in corporate America; and even who gets executed for murder”(Staples). Colorism has made its way into every aspect of the African-American life. Colorism, like any other form of discrimination, has triggered negative behavioral, mental, cognitive, emotional, and physical responses.

One of the behavioral responses has caused the black community of America to ruin its

own reputation. ^{It's} It's beginning to seem that the white community has more love for the black community than the black community has for itself. "A flurry of legal and cultural disputes over the past decade has revealed a new race-related controversy gaining traction: an emerging belief in anti-white prejudice. Whites believe...the pendulum has now swung beyond equality in the direction of anti-white discrimination" (Nittle). Now, whites are feeling discriminated against.

Why does the African-American community have so much hate for their own people and the other communities of America? There have been many studies conducted on this subject and they all say the same thing: blacks are resentful of whites for racism, that's the basis for black on white racism. But, in a way, blacks are doing exactly what whites did to them. African-

Americans are picking out the people with light skin and "good hair", the people who are more closely related to the white man, and calling them superior. Whilst doing so, those with obvious

African features such as coarser hair and darker skin are made to feel less than because they aren't as close to the white man. Why are blacks striving so hard to become a mirror image of the race that oppressed the African-American people? The African-American culture is suffering

from mental slavery. The black community has been hit like never before. African-Americans are no longer oppressed by whites, blacks are oppressing themselves. "Within the last decade, racism has become colorism. Black vs. black racism is what we're left with. A lot of whites believe that they're discriminated against more so than blacks, now-a-days [...]" (Nittle). The African-American community has managed to raise a generation of colorists and resentful racists.

Colorism has become a shameful and prominent aspects of the African-American community. Colorism is seen world-wide, but its seen mostly in America. Colorism has the power to cause hatred and discrimination in a community who was once considered a family. The African-American community has fallen apart. The once rich culture has been diluted by

hatred and resentment. Many psychological, mental, physical, behavioral, and cognitive problems are also caused by such hatred. Colorism has made its way into the minds of today's youth. Colorism, and all forms of inner-race discrimination, have the power to ruin a community and colorism has done just that. From harmful skin-bleaching procedures to one genuinely hating themselves for something they have no power over; the black community has been destroyed.

④ Those who are on the fortunate side of colorism are raised to feel better than those who are less fortunate. Not only is colorism causing low self-esteem, but its also causing inflated egos and feeble etiquette in the entire African-American population.