

# COLOR CODED

By Courtney McSwain

**Q**uestion: What is the most visible, influential and highly publicized industry in America today? Without a doubt, people in the entertainment industry are looked upon as successful, glamorous, and often times they serve as role models for others, whether they accept the responsibility graciously or not. But in the African-American community it has, for a long time, been difficult to find members of the entertainment industry that represent the many shades and colors that are found in the Black race. This leads me to ask the question, is the entertainment industry color coded?

Historically speaking, African-Americans have been faced with one internal conflict that still affects us today. The question of whether or not light skin is better than dark skin has been a disturbing conflict that many people are still battling. The effects of slavery and the intermingling of white slave owners with Black slaves created a race of people with a diverse range of skin tones. This also created a race of people that is still plagued with insecurities about what being a beautiful African-American means. Because mainstream society, filled with a common white point-of-view, accepted light skin and sharp features as the ideal beauty over dark skin and typical African features, many people within the African-American community were conditioned to believe lighter skin tones were better. There are always exceptions. For instance, some families may have taught their children that dark skin was more beautiful because of resentment towards the white race. However, when trying to

fit into a society where the rules were set predominately by white Americans, people with lighter skin tones often experienced better results.

This leads us to examine the entertainment industry and the trend of African-Americans who find success in it. Take for example, actors in

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Hollywood. Now, it might seem trivial to compare Black actors to see who is lighter and who is darker. But when thinking back to the time when mostly light-skinned actors were the only ones who could get lead roles, it becomes worthwhile to think about it. Why is it that so much emphasis has been put on skin color and why do we as Blacks still feel insecure in our own beauty? For the most part, I think it is the mentality of the entire country. When a race is considered to be inferior, insulted because of their outside appearance, and constantly thought of as ugly compared to a race that oppresses them, the entire community

is conditioned to the idea that one appearance is more beautiful than the other. Without a question, this is the reason that for so long light-skinned Blacks found it easier to succeed in the entertainment industry. Because they were closer in shade to their white counterparts, they were more easily accepted.

So, the answer to the question of whether or not the entertainment industry is color coded is yes. It has been and continues to be. Now a more important question: what can we do to change that? Today, as I look at entertainment magazines, television shows, and movies, I find a wider, more diverse group of African-Americans who represent the true beauty of Black people. Some might say that this is naivety clouding my interpretations of the world. However, as more Blacks gain positions of power in entertainment such as producers, directors, and presidents of production companies, I think that the trend of African-Americans in the limelight will become a more realistic view of Blacks in the country. Hopefully, this is true and we will all have entertainers who reflect us, allowing us to better relate to them. However, hoping is not going to change the situation very much. We must begin to love ourselves no matter what our skin tone may be. Through accepting, loving and celebrating the African-American race as a spectrum of many different shades that all exemplify beauty, we can break the color code of any industry and begin to heal the wounds society has given us. ☀