

Light VS Dark

Preferences change depending on culture

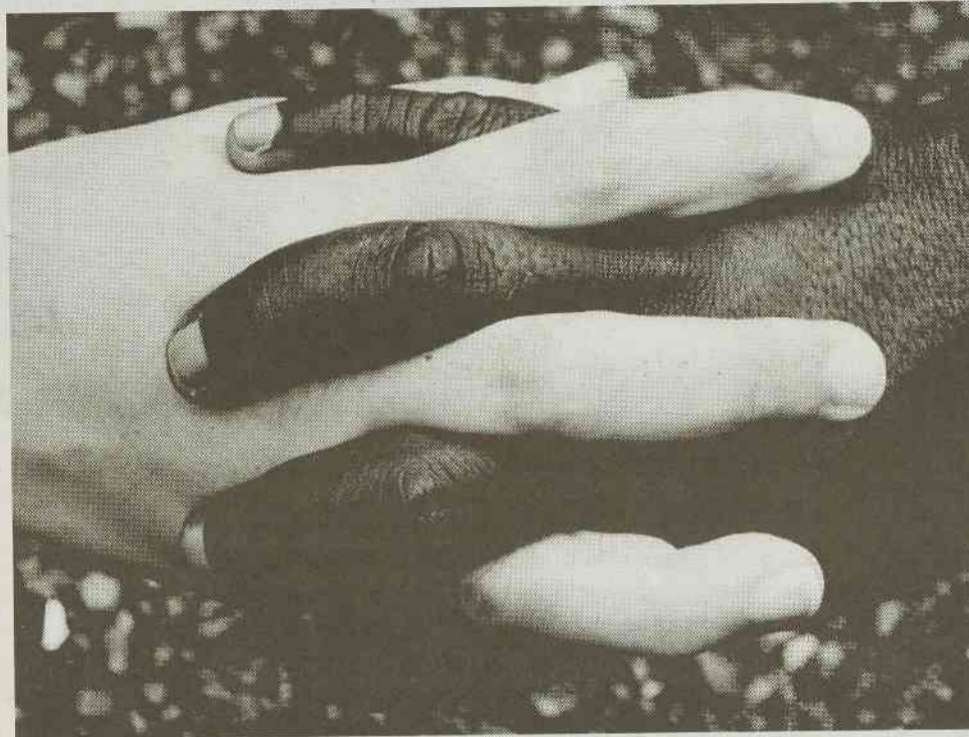
By L'Asia Brown
Features Editor

Achieving the closest thing to physical perfection is a battle fought by most adolescents at one point their lives. Hormones that rage because of puberty often have the ability to bring teen girls to tears over the tiniest, most insignificant flaws, whether it is hair that isn't long enough, thighs that aren't thin enough or feet that aren't small enough.

These events are relatively normal for the average young person, and he/she is usually expected to become happy, secure, and comfortable in their own skin by the late teens or early twenties. Unfortunately, there is an underlying standard that exists among us, that doesn't go away after we graduate from high school. This runs deeper than just wishing to be skinny, or longing to be more voluptuous. It is an issue that deals with each subculture's views on beauty and perfection. We are dealing with the issue of complexion. Unfortunately, the color of our skin is governing more than we bargained for when we involuntarily inherited the traits of those who came before us. Today, in many communities, whether you are on the light or dark side of the pond will have an impact upon who is attracted to you, how far you will get in your career, and how you are treated.

When I walk into Macy's, I am greeted by each generous young lady at each make-up counter. I quietly and intimately browse through each counter, excited at the new spring color schemes and moisturizing products. One thing I do notice, however, is the lack of products that cater to the darker skinned women of this town. I shrug it off as an economic strategy. A retail business must cater to its majority consumer, from which dark skinned women may not be at Macy's. It doesn't require a political or social analysis; I'll just go to Belk's or Target. Or maybe I should stop, take note, and wonder about the fairness of tailoring product stock to meet demographical statistics.

When I listen to horror stories of rejection and ridicule due to complexion, I believe I am lucky to have dodged this biased portion of America. I have never knowingly had to fight a battle with color. I was taught from a very young age to be proud of my complexion. Coming from a Caribbean family, my dark brown skin accompanied by my jet black, wavy hair has always been a trademark of the flavored roots that I am not able to escape. I have remained confident, happy, and mostly successful in all my endeavors, academically, socially, and career related. When I arrived to North Carolina in January of 2005, I received a major wake-up call from the south. I realized that our history is still our present in many areas, and if we don't make a cautious decision to change



our mindsets, we will do serious damage to future generations and our own opportunity for advancement.

For decades, races have been stuck on color. Being "light-skin" in the African-American community is the definitive. Being "tanned" in the white society is preferred. Being "fair-skin" in the Hispanic culture is superior. Being "stark white" in the Asian locality is distinguished. Since when did complexion begin to have such an effect on the affairs of the 21st century? Each individual history differs, but the most profound yesteryears lie in the pasts of blacks and Hispanics. During the period before the Civil War, when the majority of blacks in the Americas were enslaved, color became a tool of notable advantage. Men and women who were employed inside the residences of slave masters, farmers, and frontiersmen were treated fairer, less violent, and possessed higher privileges.

They eventually earned more freedom and respect. These workers were able to avoid the scorching sun of the southern region. Their complexions were able to remain soft and glowing, which produced a lighter undertone. The males and females with "soft skin" that worked inside the slave-owner's house, were envied by the darker, brazened workers of the fields. This was the beginning of a separated people. Many enslaved women were raped and voluntarily impregnated by white slave masters, producing mixed race children who can be identified by caramel to peachy complexions and curly, sometimes sandy hued hair.

Mixed race children became the norm in southern communities, but they divulged and multiplied with other African Americans of various tones, and began the development of our beautiful color wheel.

When blacks finally were finally freed as a whole after the collapse of the Confederacy, lighter skin African-Americans found themselves less susceptible to the harsh punishments of Jim Crow law violations or victims of unnecessary, retaliation violence. Lighter skin men and women were given small jobs and property quicker than that of blacks who resembled their African forefathers. Society knew when they looked at a black individual of a lighter tone, that they had some type of biological connection to a member of European descent. They were still treated with the same discern and threatened with identical discrimination, but were given leeway in their opportunity.

Fast-forward about 75 years. Slavery is long gone. And the color issue is worse than ever. Lil Wayne will only speak of "Bad Yella Broads" (yellow referring the resemblance of a light skin woman's skin undertone to the sun). Women are telling their precious little girls to "stay out of the sun" or marry a light skin man for the sake of their own children, who dare not face the world armed with a brown complexion. Casting directors of music videos are instructed by rappers to seek out the lighter models, who seem to capture the audiences with a deeper sex appeal and affection than that of a dark skinned woman. Yeah, right.

African-Americans have overcome barriers of oppression, discrimination and a variety of glass ceilings. It's about time we got over the tone of our skin, and began focusing on the quality of the soul. There are beautiful, high achieving, respectable citizens who range from light tawny hues to deep cocoa shades. There is nobody upon this earth who specifically requested during his or her tenure in the womb, to

be birthed with a deep brown or light caramel complexion. We have no control over the genes passed through us, we can only govern the type of people we wish to be. Light skin citizens are not always the enemies. Dark skin citizens are not always the victims. We need to begin an era of judgment solely upon the content of character, instead of the amount of melanin (bringing up biology terms) a man or woman may or may not have embedded in the cells.

Talent, creativity, ability, intellectuality, and will are just a handful of the vast array of attributes that can make somebody appealing far beyond their physical offering. We are a great, accomplished people, perhaps much too wonderful to allow the presence of complexion discrimination segregate us further. The suppressive culprit employers, educators, and corrupt leaders will only take advantage of this complexion segregation as long as we allow our own selves to be consumed by it.

If we can ban together as a population undivided by no force, we can make higher progress. Our colorful diversity gives us a strong advantage, and our differing histories give us flare and spice. Let's use this array of complexions among our race to our advantage, and quit engaging in a war that was lost a long time ago to the rise of the freedom, liberty, and justice for all.

FACTS ON COLORISM

- The "brown paper bag test" was a ritual once practiced by certain African-American and Creole fraternities and sororities who discriminated against people who were "too dark." That is, these groups would not let anyone into the sorority or fraternity whose skin tone was darker than a paper lunch bag, in order to maintain a perception of standards.

Spike Lee's film *School Daze* satirized this practice at historically black colleges and universities.