

The skin we're in: Light-complexion blacks can't avoid prejudice, either

By Hazel Trice Edney
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Second of two parts.

WASHINGTON — Akiya Dickson, a student at Howard University, was headed home from work on a Washington, D.C. subway last month when a 25-year-old brown-skinned black man slid into the seat beside her.

"This guy was trying to talk to me. And he was saying, 'Oh, I bet you have a boyfriend.' And I was like, 'Yeah.' And he was like, 'All the pretty light-skinned girls do. All I need in my life is a pretty light-skinned girl,'" recounts Dickson, 23.

"And I said, 'Are those your only requirements? You need to look a little deeper than this.' I was very nice and I explained to him, 'This just can't be it.'"

But the interloper was not deterred.

"He said, 'I try to date brown skin girls and it just doesn't work out. And I brought one home one time and my grandfather said I'd better not do that again.'"

Dickson was dumbfounded.

"I was like, 'Are you serious? They still make you?'"

Yes, even in 2004, African-Americans still have a color complex, explains

Julia Hare, a psychologist and executive director of the Black Think Tank in San Francisco.

"It's alive and thriving," says Hare. "Black men, when they went to professional schools like Meharry or

Howard, the thing that assured that they would be successful to themselves was a Cadillac and a light-skinned woman on his arm. She was an ornament on his arm. It was to be sure that his children would be socially acceptable and that his children would not look like him, to suffer the same punishment that his dark-skinned sisters and his mother suffered."

That suffering has its roots in slavery, when the white slave master showed preference to light-skin slaves, giving them jobs as "House Negroes" while their dark skin counterparts labored in the fields. And more often than many people would like to admit, slave owners and their sons would take sexual liberties with defenseless black women, producing near-white offspring that were neither acknowledged nor accepted by the slave owner's family.

"You would have thought that this thing would have ended after the so-called free movement and slavery supposedly was over," Hare explains. "But black people have taken on the same patterns as the slave master. Wherever you go, I don't care if it's in the church, I don't care if it's in the bar, I don't care if it's in the corporate rooms, I don't care if it's on a cruise, color still comes up among black people."

Dickson a Chicago native with natural blond hair and gray eyes argues that being light-skin does not make her immune from insults.

"In Chicago, they'd say stuff like 'light skinned', 'blondie', 'goldie locks' and all that stuff. They think it's like a compliment almost. But it's not a compliment. It does not flatter me at all. I think it's so

ignorant."

And some members of the unofficial color club bring some things on themselves, according to Dickson.

"I know girls who've tried to be my friend because we're all light-skin. And I'm like, 'I don't vibe with you like that. I don't get along with you like that, so that's not going to be our sole connecting factor.' I have friends who are like every shade of the rainbow and we vibe off of personality and who we are."

Dickson says her complexion has sometimes caused her to alter her personality.

"I would kind of play myself down and be nicer or friendlier or more outgoing than I already was," she explains. "So, it kind of compromised my self-confidence because I was kind of feeling like there was something wrong with me and I had to change it in order to be liked by my peers. I guess that was my thing, my little problem."

The problem is no easier for people who identify themselves as bi-racial.

According to the 2000 Census, there were 36.4 million black or African people in the U.S. who said they were mixed with another race (13 percent of the total U.S. population of 281.5 million). Marriages between blacks and whites, contrary to popular opinion, totaled only 784,764, less than 1 percent.

Tiffany Reynolds, 21, born to an African-American mother who reared her and a white father whom she has never met, knows how it feels to be judged for something over which she has no control.

"Some people question my identity with black. They'll say, 'Oh, you're not really black. You're this, that or the other.' But, me, I'm black. If

they question how black I am, I just wonder if they're comfortable with themselves."

Regina Romero, a Washington, D.C. psychologist, says the black community has a responsibility to end these kinds of superficial judgments and hostility.

"It is painful and it is ugly," she explains. "I don't think we do enough to protect, in particular, our girls, but also our boys from that kind of hostile assault. And the truth of the matter is that it hurts more when it comes from your own."

Romero, who is light skin and has green eyes, recalls her college experience at Howard University, arriving from the Germantown section of Philadelphia in the early 1970s. She said she was reluctant to tell fellow students that she was from West Mount Airy — a section of Germantown known for its light-skin, middle class population — for fear of being stereotyped. And even today, she is aware that some people try to judge her by her outward appearance.

"I don't want to be known for green eyes. I'd like to be known for having some brains or for having something to contribute to the universe or something else," she says. "I don't want 'green eyes' on my tombstone."

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Dickson

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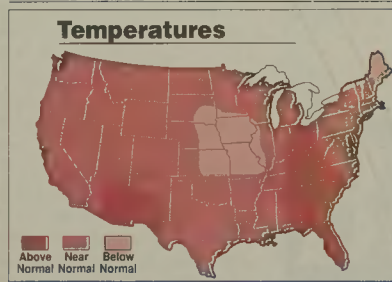
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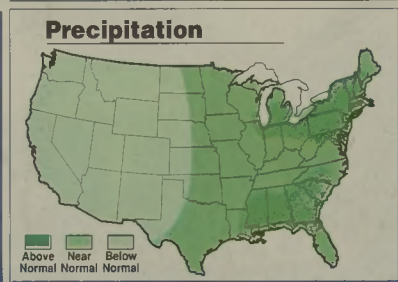
LOCAL 7-DAY FORECAST

Thursday	Thu. night	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
84	56	82/56	82/56	80/54	74/48	69/45	68/44

THE WEEK AHEAD



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U.S. TRAVELER'S CITIES

City	Today		Friday		Saturday		Sunday		Monday	
	Hi	Lo	Hi	Lo	Hi	Lo	Hi	Lo	Hi	Lo
Atlanta	82	58	82	60	80	58	76	56	72	48
Boston	68	46	58	42	58	44	58	44	55	46
Chicago	58	40	56	40	58	42	60	42	64	40
Cleveland	60	44	58	42	60	44	62	46	59	42
Denver	52	34	48	34	62	36	66	38	68	45
Des Moines	63	43	60	42	61	44	64	47	68	46
Detroit	60	40	58	38	60	42	60	43	60	40
Houston	84	70	82	68	78	66	76	64	80	62
Indianapolis	65	46	62	48	63	47	65	44	66	42
Kansas City	63	47	60	44	62	43	67	48	68	48
Los Angeles	75	54	80	56	77	56	75	56	75	58
Miami	84	74	84	74	84	72	84	75	85	72
Minn.-St. Paul	60	40	61	41	62	43	64	44	65	45
New Orleans	82	67	83	66	82	65	81	64	78	58
New York City	72	52	70	48	62	46	57	45	61	48
Omaha	61	44	60	41	61	40	61	45	68	47
Phoenix	90	64	87	63	92	64	91	65	91	66
San Francisco	70	50	69	51	69	51	69	51	66	59
Seattle	64	45	65	43	66	44	66	45	61	51
Washington	80	54	78	52	80	50	82	50	87	48

THE NATIONAL SUMMARY

A storm system will trek through the Southeast and mid-Atlantic states, providing plenty of rainfall. Meanwhile, an area of high pressure building over the Rockies will keep much of the region rain-free. Chilly air will spill into the east-central Plains from Canada, but the rest of the country will be near or slightly above normal.

WORLD TRAVELER'S CITIES

City	Today		Friday		Saturday		Sunday		Monday	
	Hi	Lo	Hi	Lo	Hi	Lo	Hi	Lo	Hi	Lo
Amsterdam	56	48	57	49	58	50	54	46	52	42
Berlin	72	56	69	48	59	40	54	37	52	34
Buenos Aires	71	54	69	49	65	47	68	52	63	41
Cairo	80	45	79	49	79	48	83	54	85	53
Jerusalem	70	41	70	41	66	40	66	41	72	46
Johannesburg	79	57	78	57	76	57	76	51	72	52
London	59	45	61	49	64	50	62	46	58	44
Madrid	63	44	69	48	71	52	74	50	67	43
Mexico City	76	52	76	53	79	51	72	45	74	48
Moscow	50	26	46	24	42	23	42	22	41	25
Paris	61	41	59	41	61	47	62	45	59	40
Rio de Janeiro	79	66	79	70	80	66	75	63	72	62
Rome	71	52	65	47	63	52	71	53	59	39
San Juan	87	75	87	75	86	75	87	74	86	73
Seoul	70	44	69	36	58	40	63	44	64	46
Sydney	76	56	79	54	64	42	66	46	68	47
Tokyo	79	65	74	51	64	54	58	51	64	49
Toronto	58	36	52	36	56	40	56	38	56	37
Winnipeg	52	35	55	38	58	40	56	40	55	40
Zurich	68	41	52	42	68	50	58	42	55	35

SUN & MOON

	Sunrise	Sunset
Thu., Apr. 22	6:42 a.m.	8:02 p.m.
Fri., Apr. 23	6:41 a.m.	8:03 p.m.
Sat., Apr. 24	6:40 a.m.	8:04 p.m.
Sun., Apr. 25	6:39 a.m.	8:04 p.m.
Mon., Apr. 26	6:37 a.m.	8:05 p.m.
Tue., Apr. 27	6:36 a.m.	8:06 p.m.
Wed., Apr. 28	6:35 a.m.	8:07 p.m.

	Moonrise	Moonset
Thu., Apr. 22	8:22 a.m.	11:19 p.m.
Fri., Apr. 23	9:01 a.m.	none
Sat., Apr. 24	9:46 a.m.	12:16 a.m.

	First	Full	Last	New
Apr. 27				
May 4				
May 11				
May 19				

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