ALLEGHENY COLLEGE

Glen J Almon II

Interracial to Intraracial: Philosophical Inquiry of the Relations of Dominance in Skin Color Discrimination

Submitted to the Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies
In partial fulfillment of the Senior Comprehensive Project Requirement
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy
December 3rd, 2021


1815

Interracial to Intraracial: Philosophical Inquiry of the Relations of Dominance in Skin Color Discrimination

A Senior Comprehensive Project
By
Glen J Almon II
Allegheny College
Meadville, Pennsylvania

December 3rd, 2021

Submitted to the Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies of Allegheny College
in partial fulfillment of the Senior Comprehensive Project Requirement
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy



Interracial to Intraracial: Philosophical Inquiry of the Relations of Dominance in Skin Color Discrimination

A Senior Comprehensive Project

By
Glen J Almon II
Allegheny College
Meadville, Pennsylvania

December 3rd, 2021

Submitted to the Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies of Allegheny College
in partial fulfillment of the Senior Comprehensive Project Requirement
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy

I hereby recognize and pledge to fulfill my responsibilities as defined in the Honor Code and to maintain the integrity of both myself and the College community as a whole.

Glen J Almon II

(NAME PRINTED HERE)

(HONOR CODE SIGNATURE)

Approved by:

(First Reader's Signature)

(Second Reader's Signature)

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Precis

Introduction

Chapter 1: Historical and Incipient Stages of Colorism in the U.S

1.1- Historical Foundations

1.2- Transcending the Plantation

1.3- Literary Societies and BGLOs

Chapter 2: Intraracial Discrimination: A Theory of Colorism

2.1- What is Colorism?

2.2- Misogynfonce: Gendered Colorism

2.3- The Myth of reverse Colorism

2.4- Structural Injustice

Chapter 3: Colorism in the Classroom

3.1- Beyond Black and White

3.2- Decolonization of the Classroom

3.3- Recommendations for Educators

Conclusion

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my mother, Mavis Almon, and father, Glen Almon, for creating the opportunity for me to be here and excel. It is because of the both of you that I have the courage to be myself unapologetically and know my worth in all facets of life. To my older sister and best friend, Br'Kel, and my nephew, Desmond, thank you both for displaying a profound sense of patience with me through these years. Even with my absence and lack of contact, you both continued to love me unconditionally and support me through my highs and lows. Next, I would like to thank all of the professors that played a role in me being able to develop ideas for my comp and flourish as a student here at Allegheny. I would specifically like to thank Dr. Palmer for agreeing to be my advisor and challenging all of my ideas these past four years. Thank you for believing in me and my talents as a student and for always pushing me to do better. I would also like to thank Dr. Bywater for also playing an integral role in my development as a scholar these past four years. Your classes equipped me with the language to connect my personal experiences with my academic work, which serves as the foundation of this entire project. Thank you for always believing in me and acting as a third reader of my comp. Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank Dr. Delgado. I am so upset that I met you late in my undergraduate experience but I am forever grateful that we crossed paths. Your pedagogy and ways of connecting with students are second to none and will always inspire me. Thank you for agreeing to be my second reader and having critical conversations that always leave me thinking deeply. Finally I would like to thank my friends that made this process more enjoyable. Keith, thank you for simply being you, there is no other way to put it. Whether it be talking about ideas for my comp or basketball, you always found a way to make me approach my work with a positive

attitude. I appreciate our friendship greatly and none of this would be possible without it. To my partner Melia, thank you so much for being patient with me throughout this process and encouraging me every step of the way. Times when I did not even believe in myself you were there to remind me of my greatness and I will always be grateful for that. Finally, to my mentor Ms. Denise, thank you for finding the time to send me encouraging messages and read over my work while pursuing your PhD. You always find time to check in on me and make sure I have what I need and do the things I need to do in order to be the best version of myself. I greatly appreciate all of your efforts over the years.

Precis

In this paper, I develop a philosophical theory of colorism that highlights the dynamics that have been integral to the perpetuation of colorism, and how they have been embedded into institutions. In the first chapter, I lay out the historical foundations of colorism starting from American slavery to note its ubiquity and importance. It tells the story of how colorism began as an interracial issue and notes the different forms it took on in the late 19th and early 20th century. This sets up my discussion for how it became entrenched in the Black community and utilized by Black folks as a form of intraracial discrimination in the second chapter. I define colorism as biases that arise in relation to skin tone that negatively affect dark skin individuals and lay out two essential components: dark skin Black women are the most impacted by colorism and reverse colorism does not exist as an injustice. Finally, in the last chapter, I assert that we should decolonize the ways in which we view education and abandon the Black and white lens we often view inequities through. In order to initiate this process of decolonization, I argue that there must

be a change in the teacher-student and student-student dynamic that exist as it pertains to the presence of colorism in in-school settings.

Introduction

When I was in the fourth grade, I remember my mom telling me that I would have distinct experiences from my classmates. By this time I knew that I was Black, so I really did not understand what she was saying. Was she saying this in relation to my white classmates? Did she not know that I already knew that I was not white? As a ten year old who was upset about summer coming to an end, I did not care to look into what my mom was telling me. I just wanted to spend my last days marinating in the sun, preparing for the feast my classmates would soon have on me. This carefree attitude, however, quickly went away when I ran home crying to my mom a few weeks later. As tears slid down my cheeks, I thought about what my mom had said to me that summer day: "you may not understand me now but you will be treated differently because you are Black but also because you are dark skinned." Though I still could not grasp exactly what she meant, I realized that she was trying to make me aware of my *darkness*. Darkness and Blackness are two different things. I knew that I was Black. However, I did not know that I was dark. As tears kept falling, I was hoping, as my mom wiped them away, that my dark ugly skin would come off as well. Looking in the mirror and seeing that my wish did not come true, I came to terms with my reality: I hated my dark skin and from this day forward I would do anything to change it.

Working through this hatred for the rest of my years in school is how I arrived at this topic for my comp. Navigating through life with dark skin became a second job for me (my first

being Black). I always went inside the house when my friends started playing hide and seek at night (told I was “too good” to play and not because I was fast), I made it my goal to stay in well-lit areas so I wouldn’t hear jokes about people not being able to see me, I limited my time in the sun with hopes that I would not be as dark, and I would deliberately never wear all Black because I knew people would say that they could not see me. Hearing these types of comments over and over again and doing the small things to prevent them from being made became a daunting task.

Though race has and still does play a huge role in my life, I have always investigated how my pigmentation influences the ways I am perceived in the context of my race. From a young age I was doing this same work that I am doing now, but I was just not aware of it. My curiosities and experiences drove me to investigate why people had a vested interest in my skin color. I had conversations with other dark skin people I knew and tried to understand my experiences through their testimonies. Though it often helped, I began to notice that the dark skin experience was not a universal experience. It was germane to other aspects of one’s identity, the people they were surrounded by, and many other things. For example, the experiences my mom had growing up as a dark skin woman were very different from the experiences that I had as a dark skin young man. This prompted me to go on my own journey of understanding my experiences and figuring out exactly what it was that I was going through.

The place I began my investigation was inquiring why people always labeled me as aggressive. Anytime I was passionate about a subject or topic and spoke from that passion people thought I was being aggressive. When I was not speaking out of anger and was calmly addressing a situation, people would perceive me as being very militant. Even when people

would meet me and see how soft spoken and tranquil I was, many would say that from the first impression they thought I would be more loud and exuberant. I remember my freshman year my teacher, after school was in for a few months, said that she thought I was going to be a troubled student when I first walked in. I pondered over this statement for a while and wondered why she had assumed that I would be a troubled student. Like all my classes I came in and made sure I got a seat in the front so I can remain focused and not be distracted by what other students are doing. Though this does not mean one is going to be a model student, there was nothing I did to communicate that I was a student that was going to cause trouble. There were other Black students in my class so I questioned the role that my hue played in her having this perception of me.

When I got to college I would have conversations with my best friend about my experiences as a dark skin man and he told me that I should really explore this topic for my comp. At first I did not want to because I was not sure if I could separate my personal experiences from my academic explorations. However, once I got exposed to literature that was influenced by the author's experiences, I started to see the ways in which I could develop a comp about colorism. I was really interested in exploring the relations between individuals as it pertains to colorism. I knew colorism began as an interracial issue but I was concerned about how it became entrenched in and sustained by the Black community. What were the relations between light skin Black folks and dark skin Black folks that kept the potency of colorism very much in effect? How did children at such a young age understand themselves in relation to dark skin children and know that there was something wrong with being dark skinned? These are all avenues that interested me and what I explored throughout this paper: investigating how lighter

skinned folks maintained domination through their relation with dark skinned folks and how this has shown up in many ways over time.

Chapter 1: Historical and Incipient Stages of Colorism in the US

For the purpose of this paper, my discussion of the history of colorism will be tailored to relations that have been integral to the maintenance of it. I will note the differences between acts of colorism that occurred on the plantation (interracial) and within the Black community (intraracial). This is important because there are two different dynamics at play here. With interracial forms of colorism, white folks were seeking ways in which they could divide the Black community. With intraracial forms of colorism, lighter skinned Black folks had a vested interest in acquiring forms of social capital and power at the expense of their darker skinned brothers and sisters. While there were conscious efforts made within both dynamics, it is also important to note that unconscious bias played a huge role as well. Even though slave masters were always looking for ways to acquire power, they were often unaware of the impact that many of their decisions were influenced by colorist notions.

Historical Foundations

To understand colorism and its impact, it is important to examine its origins, review the historical context of slavery, and the individuals who upheld this structure, particularly within institutions such as education, Black Greek Letter Organizations, and much more. In this chapter, I will lay out the ways in which colorism operated both interracially and intraracially. Highlighting that colorism began as an interracial issue is important because it prompts one to

ask how it became embedded in the Black community. This chapter is about laying out that history and showing the differences between colorism interracially and intraracially. Significant points made in this chapter include the way in which colorism operated on the plantation, the forms it took post emancipation, how it became entrenched in the Black community, and how dark skinned Black folk were sectioned off from educational and economic opportunities, enabling the Black middle class to be defined by skin color.

American slavery was driven by exploitation, and slave owners were always looking for ways to exploit differences amongst the enslaved population and create division. It was important for slave owners to create division because they were able to have more control over enslaved folks if there was no unity. We have seen this in relation to religion, spirituality, language, and any other aspect of enslaved folks' identity that slave owners could use to enforce a sense of division. In addition to these, there was also a system of color stratification that can arguably be linked to the practices during chattel slavery (Reece, “Genesis of US Colorism and Skin Tone Stratification,” 3). Skin color stratification, as defined by Margaret Hunter, is a system that grants privileges and opportunities to those who possess lighter complexions within the African American community (Hunter, “The Persistent Problem of Colorism: Skin Tone, Status, and Inequality,” 241).

It was important for slave owners to treat dark skin as unfavorable because it communicated the imperious stance of whiteness and Eurocentric features. One way this was executed by slave owners is through miscegenation, which is the interbreeding of people who are considered to be members of different races. Margaret Hunter asserts that one of the key phenomena to understanding skin color stratification among African Americans is “the history of

sexual violence against African American women by white men" (Hunter, *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone,* 17). Sexual violence, including rape, according to Hunter, was the beginning of skin color stratification itself. It produced two important effects: racially mixed children by white fathers and Black mothers and the creation of a color hierarchy through systematic privileging of light skinned African Americans over dark skin African Americans (18). Though the primary effect of sexual violence and rape inflicted upon enslaved Black women by white slave men was to extinguish forms of resistance out of Black men and women, Hunter argues that a second primary effect was to "systematically privilege lighter skinned blacks" via their connection with the white slave owner and thus their connection with whiteness (19). To showcase the superiority of whiteness, overseers and white slave owners would grant racially mixed enslaved folks with certain privileges. They were often given opportunities for manumission, received less violent treatment by overseers, less stressful work tasks, access to education, and opportunities for skilled labor (19). The creation of racially mixed children by way of sexual violence and rape, in many ways, serves as the beginning stages of color stratification on the plantation.

Since lighter skin enslaved folks had proximity to whiteness, both phenotypically and socially, they had more opportunities to gain forms of social capital. Walter Johnson notes that throughout slavery there was a belief that lighter skinned Black enslaved folks were best suited for "intellectual and skilled tasks" (Jonson, *Soul by Soul: Life in the Antebellum Slave Market,* 140). Dark skinned enslaved Black folks were seen as the epitome of labor, both men and women. Johnson asserts that their dark skin symbolized work and became intertwined with concepts of physicality, heavy lifting, and intellectual degradation. He extends this analysis and

says that there are a litany of statements to the effect that the “blackest” slaves were the healthiest (139). From the published writings of Samuel Cartwright (“All Negroes are not equally Black- the blacker the stronger”), to the slave-market wish list sent by John Knight to his father-in-law, he requested a “jet black” Negro because they stand that climate the best (139). There was an apparent dichotomy between dark skinned enslaved folks and light skin enslaved folks and it was sustained by slave owners. Johnson says that white men in the antebellum South talked to one another as if they could see “slaves' constitution” by looking at their complexion (140). Lighter skin enslaved folks were viewed as more intelligent while dark skin enslaved folks were viewed as only capable of completing hard labor.

This color hierarchy that was apparent in slave owners’ dialect also became a source for lighter skinned enslaved folks' social capital. Hunter asserts that a small, but elite class of freedmen was established (Hunter, “The Persistent Problem of Colorism,” 239). These disproportionately light skin men and women were early business leaders, clergy, teachers, and artisans who became economic and community leaders in the early African American community (239). This access to education and skilled tasks that lighter skinned Black folks had during enslavement gave them an advantage over dark skin Black folks. Certain opportunities that required formal education or knowledge of a particular skill were not available to many dark skinned Black folks because most of their time on the plantation was spent doing hard labor. Whether intentional or not, this color hierarchy gave lighter skinned Black folks the ability to climb up the social ladder more easily than darker skinned Black folks.

Transcending the Plantation

After the Civil War, Black folks were determined to achieve a level of social status and establish some form of stability for themselves and their families. Lighter skinned Black folks, with the education and training they had access to while enslaved, had many opportunities to elevate their social status. Consequently, skin color became indicative of social status within the Black community and the Black elite was undergirded by skin color (Gasman, Marybeth and Ufuoma Abiola, "Colorism Within Historically Black Colleges and Universities," 42). As E. Franklin Frazier notes, a class structure slowly emerged which was based upon social distinctions such as "education and conventional behavior," rather than upon "occupation and income" (20). At the top of the social pyramid there was a small upper class, which he asserts was due chiefly to its "differentiation from the great mass of the Negro population" because of a family heritage which resulted partly from its mixed ancestry (20). The members' light skin color was not just indicative of their white ancestry, but of their descent from the Negroes who were "free before the Civil War," or those who had "enjoyed the advantages of having served in the house of their masters" (20). As Frazier lays out this history, we get to see an early glimpse of the ways in which the color hierarchy that was established on the plantation translated into economic opportunities for light skin Black folks.

Alongside access to economic opportunities, light skin Black folks post Emancipation also had more access to education. In their discussion of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Taylor asserts that they were either a barricade or conduit to success, and that depended on one's "skin color, family status, and the education level of the family" (Taylor,

Color and Class: The Promulgation of Elitist Attitudes at Black Colleges, 197). Taylor admits that education and HBCUs played a major role in the creation of the Black bourgeoisie (198). Frazier echoes this same sentiment when discussing the creation of the Black bourgeoisie, stating that this upper class constantly incorporated those Negroes who were able to acquire an education in the schools supported by northern philanthropy (20). Frazier also notes a European's observation of schools founded by missionaries. The first thing that struck this observer was the fact that about 98 percent of the students were mulattoes and not "pure" Negroes as he had expected to find (73). A mulatto is a person of mixed white and Black ancestry, which is why this European observer does not classify them as pure Negroes. This observation from the European observer is interesting because it highlights the interconnectedness of education and class. Light skin Black folks post Emancipation, as a result of their access to schools and educational opportunities, were able to be the trailblazers for the creation of the Black bourgeoisie.

This Black middle class began to seek compensation by way of education. Frazier states that they were not merely proud of their white complexion, but they boasted of their kinship with the aristocratic whites of the South (147). Though their racial heritage and conventional standards of morality only gave them a privileged position in the Negro community, education gave them "access to a world of ideas that provided an intellectual escape from their physical and social segregation in American life" (147). They placed an exaggerated importance upon academic degrees because they knew a lot of lower class Black folks did not have them and because they understood the importance of education. According to Frazier, they would even assert their educational or cultural superiority to the majority of the whites whose education was

inferior to theirs (148). These light skin Black folks of the middle class knew the value of their education, but more importantly, the value of their skin color. They were able to set themselves apart from the masses of the Negro by appealing to their racial heritage and/or light skin.

This relates to a phenomena that has roots in the discussion of colorism in the early 20th century- passing. Post Emancipation, light skin Black folks, aside from the skin color hierarchy constructed during slavery, were able to climb the social ladder so effectively because many would "pass" as white. Passing was an act practiced by lighter skinned Black folks where they would utilize the fairness of their skin to pass as white and gain access to all white spaces. Many authors in the Black community explore and incorporate passing in their texts, such as Nella Larsen (*Passing),* James Weldon Johnson (*The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man),* and Jessie Redmon Fauset (*There is Confusion).* These spaces, whether educational opportunities, economic opportunities, social or political organizations, had the ability to manifest into some sort of social power for light skin Black folks.

An example of this is when Anita Florence Hemmings, a light skin Black woman, applied to Vassar College in 1893. In 1897, more than 40 years before the college opened up its doors to African Americans, she became the first Black graduate (Olivia Mancini, "Passing as White: Anita Hemmings 1897). Though HBCUs were being created around this time, as one can assume, they were heavily underfunded and did not compare to schools like Vassar, a school that has catered almost exclusively to the nation's elite (Mancini). In order to get this opportunity to be surrounded by the elite, Hemmings, as the Boston Newspaper characterized it, had to use the strength of her white blood, despite the suspicions some of her classmates had. Though it seems extreme and very dangerous that Hemmings would have attempted to pass through Vassar's gate

as a white woman, this was not unusual for the time period, Joyce Bickerstaff asserts (Macini). There was a large number of African Americans during this period who viewed passing as a means to gain opportunities in education (Macini). Through laws of segregation, Black folks were not permitted to attend many white elite institutions, so passing was one of the only ways one could meet their educational aspirations. Though education was one of the main reasons why one passed as white, they also received benefits economically and professionally and financially in terms of housing, jobs, and all those things denied to African Americans during this time (Macini). Even if these light skinned Black folks did not pass as white in their private lives, they did so in order to gain access to opportunities, which played a huge role in them being able to advance socially and economically.

Passing serves as one of the first instances in which Black folks internally created a sense of divide amongst themselves post Emancipation. When light skin Black folks would pass as white, many of them would have to leave behind their ties to their Black heritage (Macini). Even in the case of Anita Hemmings, though this was not universal, she made the decision to raise her children white and never speak of her Black family. Wanting her daughter to attend Vassar like she did, she made her daughter lie about her racial heritage on her application so she could pass as white as well. As Irene, the protagonist in *Passing,* discusses the act of passing with her friend, she says it is something light skin folks ``disapprove of" and at the same time "condone" (Macini). It excites their contempt and yet they rather admire it. The relationship that light skin Black folks have had with passing really captures the essence of intraracial discrimination by way of color. Though they knew it was wrong and disapproved of the action, many were willing to sacrifice their ties to the Black community to experience various forms of social uplift. My

goal is not to make a comment about the morality of their decision. However, it is important to note that through passing many became aware of the social power of their skin color and what could be attained at the expense of their dark skin brothers and sisters.

Literary Societies and BGLOs

Alongside this emergence of the new Black middle class came the emergence of a multitude of literary societies, organizations, and many other clubs that signaled middle class values. Willard B. Gatewood in his discussion of these clubs argues that the number of these organizations multiplied rapidly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920*, 216). With this emergence of new Black organizations, there was an apparent correlation between them and social class. Black folks who belonged to the upper class were more inclined to have membership in organizations than those of the lower class, despite which organization it was (216). Understanding that the Black middle and upper class was undergirded by skin color and why that was, we can understand how these societies and organizations naturally became undergirded by skin color as well.

An example of this is the Prince Hall Freemasonry, which is the oldest and most respected secret fraternity in the Black community (218). By the end of the Civil War, Prince Hall Masonic Lodges existed in 16 states, and by 1880, there had been more established in 14 other states. At the turn of the century, Prince Hall Freemasonry existed as a "solid highly prestigious and relatively small fraternity" that emphasized "secrecy, ritualism, and social intercourse" (218). It was composed primarily of men of "education, prosperity, and culture" and had a "strong mulatto caste" according to Gatewood (218). It provided these individuals that

belonged to the middle and upper class a close knit environment and national network that supported the values and lifestyle which they represented (219).

Like Prince Hall Freemasonry, there were many other Black organizations that were tethered to middle and upper class values. Having laid out the interconnectedness between class and color during this time, we can see how this also had an impact on dark skin individuals. Many of these organizations and societies were places where people could gain access to opportunities just by being surrounded by certain kinds of people. Even within Prince Hall Freemasonry, some joined for the family tradition but others joined solely for "political or economic reasons" or "enhancing one's social standing" (219). There were certain benefits that came with the membership of organizations and being that many of them prevented the inclusion of lower class individuals, there were only a select few who could enjoy those benefits. Prince Hall Freemasonry viewed the Black lower class as a "negative reference group" and asserted that they represented what the Black bourgeoisie was not (219). Since many dark skin individuals belonged to the lower class as a result of the color hierarchy that took place on the plantation and practices within the Black community, they had very few chances to advance socially through membership in organizations.

Other organizations that embraced colorist tendencies, thus keeping dark skinned Black folks from joining were fraternities and sororities at HBCUs, or also known as Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs). BGLOs did not appear at a HBCU until 1907, the first being Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Beta chapter at Howard University. (Monroe Little, The Extra-Curricular Activities of Black College Students 1868-1940, 141). Similar to exclusive Black literary societies in the late 19th and early 20th century, BGLOs operated as a way to

exclude Black folks who did not possess the attributes of the Black elite (skin color, social status, family background, etc). Some HBCUs and BGLOs even relied on skin color and class as admission into the school or organization (142). According to Little, a student who attended Howard in the 1920s noted that in order for one to be a member in one of the BGLOs, they had to be from a wealthy family, a famous athlete, a brilliant scholar, or very light-skinned (Little, 142). Sororities, he adds, were more restrictive in their selection process for membership than fraternities. “High yallers” or light skin women, were rarely faced with any dilemmas when applying to sororities, whereas a dark skin co-ed had to come from a well to do family, have a better than average scholastic record, be considered beautiful, and possess a pleasant and vivacious personality before she could join a sorority (Little, 142). The darkness of one’s skin served as a barrier between brother and sisterhood and due to its assumed inferiority, even within the Black community, dark skinned individuals had to possess other traits or values to overshadow it.

The presence of BGLOs played a huge role in the decline of many literary societies that once overwhelmed HBCUs (142). Though their goals were similar- the encouragement of scholarship, good character, and service to society- BGLOs were much more invested in the “fulfillment of Black undergraduates’ social and emotional needs” (142). The introduction, as Little asserts, politicized every aspect of student life on Black campuses (142). They subverted campus governmental processes and used almost every election to “further their own interests” (143). Since BGLOs were self centered and also employed a lot of tactics to prevent dark skin and low income students from joining, we can assume that their uplift came at the expense of these students. This may have resulted in many dark skin and low income students not being

exposed to many opportunities that came with the membership of these BGLOs because they were perceived as not worthy enough to be a part of the organization.

Later on in the 20th century, HBCUs themselves began embracing colorist and classist notions as well. In 1945, *Ebony* referred to the top HBCUs as the "Big Four" which hinted towards the creation of Negro Ivy Leagues. Some of these institutions were Dillard University in Louisiana; Spelman College and Morehouse College in Georgia; Howard University in Washington, DC; Hampton University in Virginia; Tuskegee University in Alabama; and Fisk University in Tennessee. Though there was never an official set of institutions that were classified as Negro Ivy Leagues, certain HBCUs were deemed as superior to others due to the socioeconomic status of the students that attended (Taylor, Color and Class: The Promulgation of Elitist Attitudes at Black Colleges, 196). For example, Howard University was often referred to by Black elites as the Black Harvard and Spelman College competed with the Seven Sisters colleges for talented Black female students. When this is put in conversation with the fact that no dark-skinned woman was crowned Miss Howard until 1977, we can clearly see the link between issues of color and class and how that was being carried out (201). In all of the previous years, lighter skinned women have been crowned Miss Howard, and it became so habitual that the dark-skinned woman who won was booed and "met with extreme disappointment" (201).

As we can see, colorism from the late 19th century up to the mid-20th century has taken on two forms: interracial and intraracial. Interracial (between races) colorism was mainly present on the plantation and some years after the Civil War. As I noted earlier, the motivating factor of interracial colorism was to create division amongst the enslaved population. Enslaved folks were easier to control and maintain when there was no sense of unity present amongst them.

Miscegenation played just as much of a role, if not more, in the advent of interracial colorism on the plantation than facilitating a process of division. Dark skin women, due to their Afrocentric features, had their femininity stripped away from them and were believed by slave masters as having no beauty. So, as a result, white slave masters demanded that light skin enslaved women have children with them, in which many came out light or fair skinned and possessed Eurocentric features, thus establishing a color hierarchy.

Intraracial colorism (within a race) became relevant in the Black community at the turn of the century, alongside the inception and growth of HBCUs. In many ways, light skin Black folks had a vested interest in gatekeeping the social mobility they were experiencing in the creation of the Black elite. Though they did not operate and function in the same way, one can not deny the disquieting influence interracial colorism had on the development of intraracial colorism. Light skin Black folks were able to act as trailblazers of the Black elite due to the intellectual skills they were exposed to during slavery. The skills they were taught manifested into educational and economic opportunities Post Emancipation. HBCUs also played into the colorist agenda in order to boost their status and compete with other colleges and universities. HBCUs and BGLOs employed certain colorist tactics that ostracized dark skin Black folks from many Black spaces due to their Afrocentric features. Both interracial and intraracial colorism, though carried out in different ways, sprouted the same outcome- the othering and blackballing of dark skin Black folks.

Chapter 2: Intraracial Discrimination: A Theory of Colorism

In this chapter, I will develop my philosophical theory of colorism. I will begin by constructing an instrumental definition of colorism, which for this project is biases that arise in relation to skin tone that negatively affect dark skin individuals. I will then apply this definition of colorism to other theoretical concepts and examine the many ways in which colorism manifests. Two essential claims that I will be supporting throughout this chapter are dark skin Black women are the most impacted by colorism and the notion of reverse colorism exists as a phantom but not as an injustice. The former will be illuminated through the discussion of my concept misogyfonce. Misogyfonce refers to the ways in which anti Black notions, misogyny, and colorism amalgamate and dictate the ways in which dark skin Black women are viewed, treated, and represented. The latter is supported through examining where the reverse colorism narrative stems from and exploring *Walker v. Secretary of Treasury, IRS.* Finally, in my last section, I reference the ways in which colorism is produced within institutions, specifically, the film industry, and analyze the ways in which Tyler Perry portrays Black men in his plays and movies.

Though colorism was rampant in the Black community throughout the late 19th and 20th century, the term was not coined until 1983 by Alice Walker. In her book, *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden: Womanist Prose*, Walker defines colorism as the "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their skin color" (Lori Tharps, "The Difference Between Racism and Colorism," 3). Walker defines colorism as a form of discrimination, and whether intentionally or not, operates from a cosmopolitan framework. Though my discussions of colorism will be germane to the Black community in America, it is imperative that we

understand that colorism is a global issue. Colorism has the ability to manifest in a multitude of ways and this is illuminated when we look at the ways it shows up in other countries. For example, in India, there is a strong color-class hierarchy that is typically only undermined by the caste system. When the British invaded India, they ignored Indian practices and values and instead followed their own cultural values (Utley and Darity, India's Color Complex: One Day's Worth of Matrimonials, 132). This resulted in them empowering high-status and lighter skinned Indians as regent leaders (132). Similar to what transpired in the Black American community in the early 20th century, lighter-toned skin increasingly became associated with upper classes, and light-skinned individuals began to become more upwardly mobile, while the darkest-skinned Indians fell to the bottom of the economic ladder (132). India promotes the hierarchy of skin color, since lighter skin is more likely to be seen in higher caste members, while dark skin is viewed as being of a lower caste. Even though social status in India may be primarily associated with caste, it is also very much related to skin color (133). India and its color caste system is just one of many international forms of colorism.

What is Colorism?

Although constructing a singular totalizing definition of colorism remains challenging, here colorism can be defined as biases that arise in relation to skin tone that negatively affect dark skin individuals. By extending Walker's definition, we can better understand the effects of colorism on dark skin individuals, such as the existence of a color hierarchy. In a hierarchy, there is a system in which people or groups have a higher status than other people or groups of people due to societal beliefs and values. As a result, those who belong to the lower status are deemed

inferior and defined in contrast to the positive attributes of those who belong to the higher status. So the color hierarchy, with white being at the top, communicates that anyone phenotypically in proximity with whiteness naturally has more value, is more intelligent, and much more than those who are the furthest from white.

Working from my instrumental definition of colorism, we can investigate the ways in which biases about skin color negatively affect dark skin individuals. There is a peculiar and distinct sense of othering that takes place in the manifestation of colorism. Othering is a tactic used by oppressors where they view or treat folks that they are oppressing as different due to a physical trait or cultural values, to justify putting them below others, making them less valuable and expendable. This process of othering has been one of the salient tactics utilized by colonizers to suggest the inferiority of colonized subjects and their cultural values. While Black skin is already othered in America, dark skin individuals undergo this double oppression as a consequence of the color hierarchy.

Dark skin has been associated with peculiar notions of inferiority that transcends a Black and white racial lense. One way this has shown up is through the association of dark skin with unintelligence and ignorance. As mentioned in the previous chapter, dark skin enslaved folks were given tasks that required hard labor because they were perceived as having no or lower intelligence, and inherently stronger. Since they did not have the same intellectual opportunities that lighter skin enslaved folks did, darker skinned Black folks did not have access to prove themselves useful for educational and economic advancement post Emancipation. Historically, this has played a significant role in the social and economic gap between dark skin and light skin Black folks during the 20th century.

In light of this instrumental definition, we can now discuss the nuances of colorism and highlight the multitude of ways in which it shows up. Colorism, like all other isms, can be viewed as people recognizing an opportunity to acquire power. Slave owners knew that any division amongst the enslaved population would potentially work in their favor. Though slave owners did not praise one group over the other, they granted certain privileges that made it more desirable to have light skin. This idea of a color hierarchy became entrenched in the Black community and then weaponized by light skin folks to suggest a sense of superiority. Light skin folks gatekeeping access to certain organizations and literature societies within the Black community by virtue of skin color is colorism operating by way of recognizing an opportunity to acquire power. Due to their light skin, they had access to social capital and opportunities that dark skin folks did not have access to. Instead of deconstructing this narrative and uplifting the Black community as a whole, they sought to ostracize Black folks from the social uplift they were able to enjoy.

Beyond acting as an intraracial tool of oppression to bar dark skin folks from certain organizations and social groups, colorism also operates structurally. On a structural level, colorism is often operationalized through the politics of respectability. Respectability politics refers to the values one must adopt in order to acclimate into broader society. When Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham coined the term, she discussed its application in relation to Black Baptist women in the early 20th century (*Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920)*. By investigating Black women in the Baptist Church throughout history, Higginbotham asserts that the church's "racial mission" and "class dimension" becomes very clear (14). With the rise of the educated female elite, Black women were looked at to be

educators or wives of ministers associated with educational institutions (14). As educators, these Black women promoted “middle class ideals among the masses of blacks” in the belief that such ideals “ensured the dual goals of racial self-help and respect from white America” (14). Higginbotham argues that the women of the Black Baptist church adhered to politics of respectability that equated “public behavior” with “individual self-respect” and with the advancement of African Americans as a group (15). Women of the Black Baptist Church had to communicate particular values and ideals in order to gain respect from the hegemonic forces that were at play in the early 20th century. Respectability politics manifest in a multitude of ways, whether it be the way one dresses, the language one uses, or how they carry themselves in public. Whatever is the dominant cultural ideal, which is typically influenced by Eurocentric middle-upper class values, is what is deemed resectable.

To assess its meaning in a contemporary context, the politics of respectability can be understood as the reason a lot of Black women can not wear their natural hair when applying for a job or some professional opportunity. Overtime, the notion that straight hair is respectable and should be the only hair style worn in the workplace has been entrenched in America’s psyche. As a result, Black women have to be wary of how their curly hair may be perceived and understood in the workplace. Many are viewed as unfit for the opportunity at hand or told that their natural look is antithetical to the environment of the workplace and will drive away customers.

So, when thinking of the politics of respectability in the workplace in relation to colorism, I argue that dark skin, inherently, is unprofessional. An important idea to keep in mind is that while colorism is a phenomena of its own, its foundation is anti-Afrocentrism. Issues of hair texture, eye color, facial features, and much more are integral components in the discussion

of colorism. I understand that being Black suffices for being antithetical to the politics of respectability. However, we must acknowledge that there is nuance to Blackness. This means that if there are two Black people going out for a job, one light skin and one dark skin, according to colorism, vis-a-vis, politics of respectability, the light skin one will have the advantage. Though both are Black, lighter skin is closer to whiteness phenotypically, and due to the color hierarchy, folks with it are given more benefits than those with dark skin.

In many ways, this nuance of colorism can be related to George Yancy's concept of ethics of no edges. Yancy in his book *Backlash: What Happens When We Talk Honestly About Racism in America,* challenges his white readers to consider the possibility that their body is "relationally entangled" with his Black body (Yancy, 78). He gives the example of a Black person and white person shopping in a store. The Black shopper is immediately rendered suspect and thought of as a criminal, causing the security guard to follow them around. As this happens, the white person gets to move freely from one aisle to the next without ever thinking that they will be stopped or followed. In that instance, the Black shopper is *touched* by the innocence of the white shopper. The white body, as the privileged body, is already contiguous with the Black body, as the disadvantaged body. So, his ethics of no edges communicates the idea that whiteness as a systemic structure has "negative implications" for his Blackness as white folks traverse the world obliviously (Yancy, 79). This same concept can be applied through a colorist lens. The light skin body and dark skin body are relationally entangled, and since white supremacists notions convey that lighter skin is preferred and therefore advantaged, dark skins will be touched by their innocence.

Colorism, though often expressed externally, causes tumult and impacts the psychology of dark skin folks. Most people who have experienced colorism in one way or another can more than likely tell you of a time when they wished their skin was lighter and that they hated their dark skin. This internalized hate is just one of the many ramifications of colorism. One way this can be understood is by way of W.E.B DuBois notion of double consciousness. DuBois in his book *The Souls of Black Folks,* speaks to the two-ness that exists within Black Americans. He says that Black folks in America are born and gifted with a "second sight," one that yields no self-consciousness. This second sight acts as a veil and it only allows Black folks to see themselves through the "revelation of the other world" (5). This other world constantly tells Black folks that they are subhuman, unintelligent, unworthy, savages, innately immoral, and many other dehumanizing things. Since Black folks are seeing themselves through a world that projects negativity upon them, they struggle to balance these two warring ideals and sometimes end up internalizing those messages.

Frantz Fanon echoes the same sentiment about a sense of divide in Black subjects throughout his discussion of cultural imposition. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon discusses cultural imposition as a moral consciousness that causes a split within Black Martincians. He states: "Moral consciousness implies a kind of split, a fracture of consciousness between a dark and a light side. Moral standards require the black, the dark, and the black man to be eliminated from this consciousness. A black man, therefore, is constantly struggling against his own image" (170). Fanon says that a Black man realizes that the black men are the "symbol of sin" (174). As a result they start hating black men but then they come to the realization that they are the black man that they hate (174). For Fanon, the Black problem is more than just Black folks living

amongst whites. It is more about the Black man "exploited, enslaved, and despised by a colonialist and capitalist society that happens to be white" (178). Here, Fanon is highlighting that the cultural values imposed on Black folks in France is what constitutes this split that Black Martinicans undergo. There are moral values associated with being Black and white, and consequently, Black Martinicans end up hating themselves because their Blackness is immoral.

Dark skin folks go through their own peculiar sense of double consciousness or split consciousness as well. In addition to the racism they face living in white America, they are constantly harassed by members of the Black community and reminded of their dark skin. They constantly hear that their skin is too dark and that it makes them ugly. They hear that they would be attractive if their skin was lighter, or that they are attractive *for a dark skin person.* In relation to Fanon's idea of cultural imposition, their dark skin is antithetical to the Eurocentric ideals that America is centered around. Therefore, like the Black Martincian, many dark skin individuals begin hating their skin and themselves.

To rectify this sense of internalized hate dark skin folks experience, people try to celebrate dark skin and Afrocentric features which, in turn, yields a process of hypersexualization. This celebration, as I speak of it, is usually in terms of beauty standards. So, people will try to uplift dark skin individuals by praising their dark skin but they end up instead fetishizing them. Ibram X. Kendi speaks to this in his book *How to be an Antiracist.* While attending Florida A&M University, Kendi realized that skin color influences perceptions of attractiveness most often for Black women (111). He was dating a light skin girl with "caramel-colored skin" and her "straight hair" fell down her "petite" body (112). Although he liked her, he did not like how his friends fawned over her and other light skin women on campus

but overlooked and denigrated dark skin women. After this realization, Kendi says that he felt ashamed for dating a light skin girl and pledged to only date dark skin women. Though he felt like he was doing the right thing by only dating dark skin women and challenging the color hierarchy and Eurocentric notions of beauty, he soon realized that that was not the right approach. Being antiracist is not about reversing the beauty standard. Instead, being an antiracist means eliminating any beauty standard based on skin or eye color, hair texture, facial and bodily features, and any other physical attributes.

Misogynfonce: Gendered Colorism

It is imperative that we understand colorism not as an isolated phenomenon, but instead contingent upon race and gender. Colorism permeates the lives of dark skin women differently and more severely than it does Black men. Black women were ostracized from many feminist communities when white women would not comprehend sexism in a racial context. They were also ostracized from Black organizations devoted to achieving racial justice because Black men would not acknowledge the patriarchy within the movement. In both of these instances, a particular phenomenon was viewed in isolation, which does the harm of ignoring the multifaceted nature of identity, and how injustices work to create interlocking forms of oppression.

In 1983, Moya Bailey coined the term misogynoir to describe the specific hatred, dislike, distrust, and prejudice directed towards Black women. She defines it as “the ways anti-Black and misogynistic representation shape broader ideas about Black women, particularly in visual culture and digital spaces” (The Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America, “Moya

Bailey, “Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women’s Digital Resistance,”” 1). Misogynoir embodies the intersectional approach that must be taken when analyzing social injustices. Identities are complex, so we must be sure to understand how one’s identity permits the interconnecting of oppressions. Being a white man in America comes with more benefits than being a white woman because America is dominated by both white supremacy and patriarchy. So, Black women not only have to deal with racism but also misogyny and sexism, which often comes from Black men themselves.

The concept misogynoir assists us in understanding why Harriet Jacobs in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* fears giving birth to a daughter but not a son. Jacobs, a slave herself, knew the conditions of slavery was too much to bear for anyone. She knew becoming a mother would be filled with hardships, however, when she gives birth to her daughter she is distraught. Jacobs states that when they told her that her newborn was a girl, her heart was “heavier” than it had ever been before (Jacobs, 119). Slavery is terrible for men, she asserts, but it is “far more terrible” for women (Jacobs, 119). Though misogynoir was not coined when Jacobs wrote this, we can use it to frame our understanding of why she had these feelings when giving birth to her daughter and not her son. The dynamic Black men had with white men, though they were still enslaved, was drastically different than the one Black women had with white men. By virtue of their womanness, enslaved Black women were labeled as “good breeders" and “bad breeders,” and had to care for the slave master's children while still performing the same amount of labor as Black men. Black women were always subject to double oppression due to their race and gender.

Working from the foundation Bailey has laid, I will extend this concept of misogynoir and consider the workings of colorism and the impact it has on Black women. When taking an intersectional approach, we find out dark skin Black women in America are the most impacted by colorism. This idea is what I will refer to as misogynfonce: the ways in which anti Black notions, misogyny, and colorism amalgamate and dictate the ways in which dark skin Black women are viewed, treated, and represented.

The core idea of misogynfonce is directly related to the popular notion that this is a man's world. With patriarchy being one of the dominant ideologies in America, women are subject to a status of inferiority in relation to men. When issues of race come into the picture, though white women are still negatively impacted by patriarchy due to their womanness, their whiteness grants them privilege. Once we take it a step further and recognize that Blackness is multifaceted and not all Black women have the same experiences, we can begin to understand misogynfonce. Misogynfonce takes into consideration how the darkness of one's skin informs the misogynistic attitudes that are expressed towards Black women. Misogyny, as a form of sexism, already relegates Black women to a devalued position in society. Similarly, colorism relegates those with dark skin to a devalued position in society. So, when these two ideas are conjoined, they inform each other in a way that then relegates dark skin Black women to a devalued status in relation to other non-dark skin Black women.

Take for example Rosa Parks. During the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Rosa Parks was the face of that particular protest movement. Rosa Parks, as the story is told, was the first Black woman to not give up her seat on the front of the bus. While she is portrayed as this older light skin Black woman who was tired after a long day of work who refused to move to the back of

the bus, this was really a calculated act of civil disobedience. Though Park's refusal was spontaneous, civil rights leaders had been planning a challenge to Montogomery's racist bus laws for several months, and Parks' name always came up in the discussion (History, "Rosa Parks Ignites Bus Boycott"). Immediately after Park's arrest, Martin Luther King Jr. and many other activists called for a bus boycott to be held by Black citizens in Montgomery, which exemplifies the connections she had that made her sacrifice worthwhile.

In addition to these important components of the story being left out, it is also not told that Rosa Parks was not the first Black woman to do this. Nine months before Parks, Claudette Colvin was riding on the bus and refused to give up her seat to a white man, very similar to the story we are told about Rosa Parks. Civil Rights activists decided not to use Colvin's story to undergird the bus boycott movement for many reasons. At the time, Colvin was only 15, she was pregnant, she was dark skinned, and she did not have connections to powerful organizations and Black activists that would galvanize around her story like Parks did. Civil Rights activists knew that all these facets of Colvin's identity would have thwarted their progress because she would have just been portrayed as aggressive and angry, unlike a light skin woman like Rosa Parks.

Though there were a multitude of factors that played in Colvin not being used for the face of the boycott, investigating the morality of her identity as a young dark skin Black woman frames our understanding of misogynfonce. When Martin Luther King Jr. spoke out about Colvin's story, he asserted that her being a teen would not have been a good image for the face of the boycott. Though there is some validity to his statement, there still lies at the core a discussion about the erasure of dark skin Black women from history. I understand that Rosa Parks not giving up her seat was a calculated act of civil disobedience. I also understand that she had

access to resources and people in power due to her being an activist that Claudette Colvin did not have. This does not, however, address the role that politics of respectability played in the decision to use Rosa Parks as the face of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Both Parks and Colvin were representatives of what light skin and dark skin stood for. Colvin, when asked about why her story was not used as a catalyst for social change, said that she was a teen and also Park's skin texture was the kind people associated with middle class and that she fit that profile (NPR, "Before Rosa Parks, There Was Claudette Colvin). Though it was necessary to appeal to the hegemonic forces at hand, not getting behind a dark skin woman, despite her being a teen, and then utilizing a light skin woman, perpetuates this notion of the inherent wrongness of dark skin. Much like Higginbotham's discussion of Black Baptist women in the early 20th century, Civil Rights activists were concerned about the politics of respectability. Appealing to certain middle class values was key and this meant being careful about which narratives were brought to light. The fact that Parks' name continuously came up in the discussion of who should be used as the face of the boycott in tandem with King's comments about Colvin illuminates the fact that Parks, disregarding her status as an activist, was perceived as respectable. The politics of respectability were very much at play here and Civil Rights activists did the job of sustaining notions of anti-dark colorism. There was an immorality attached to Colvin's identity, and though there were many factors at play that contributed to that, there still exists the dynamic between a light skin woman and a dark skin woman being abandoned.

In addition to the erasure of dark skin women, misogynfonce also shows up in relation to beauty standards. As I've stated before, colorism at its core is anti-Afrocentric features. So, dark

skin women do not only have to deal with issues of skin color, but they must also be wary of how their hair texture will inform the ways in which they experience colorism. A common folktale in the Black community is that different social groups and organizations would conduct tests to ensure that dark skin Black folks would not get in. Two of the most common are the brown paper bag test and the comb test. The brown paper bag test, which can be applied to both dark skin men and women, assessed whether or not one was darker than a brown paper bag. If they were then they would most likely not be selected for these organizations, and if they were not then they had a better chance. The comb test, on the other hand, seems as if it is germane solely to dark skin women. They would put a comb through their hair and if it went straight through, then they met that particular criteria of being in said organization. If it did not go straight through, however, then they were deemed as unworthy to be a part of that organization. Even if one can not figure out the veracity to such assessments, we can not disregard their significance in the development of belief systems. Dark skin women were and still are viewed as less attractive due to their dark skin but also other features such as their hair texture and eye color.

These beauty standards were also important when it came to Black women finding partners and getting married in the 20th century. Robert L. Reece in "Color Crit: Critical Race Theory and the History and Future of Colorism in the United States" suggests that light skin Black Americans maintained their economic advantage dating back to the late 19th century. He developed a strategy to test his two hypotheses that in 1880: 1) mulatto women were more likely to marry than Black women and 2) mulatto women married partners with higher occupational scores than Black women. After collecting the data, he found that his first hypothesis was refuted while his second hypothesis was supported. Reece then asserts that as it pertains to marriage,

color homogamy was employed in order to ensure that mulatto women had more access to social capital than Black women, and this was maintained throughout Reconstruction, the one-drop rule, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement (10). Though rooted in history, this a great example of how misogynfonce manifests in dark skin Black women's lives, giving light skin women an advantage. Since women did not have access to many economic opportunities, marriage was often viewed as a negotiation of some sort. Even though light skin women did not marry more, men who were most likely a part of the Black elite viewed them as more worthy.

Misogynfonce is also important to consider when discussing the racialization of Black women. Over the years, Black folks with dark skin have been considered as more aggressive and belligerent. One was already considered a savage by virtue of their Blackness, so the darker one was, the more savagery they were assumed to possess. As a result, how the actions of a Black person is received has a lot to do with the color of their skin and other physical features. Let's consider this fact: it is about 3.4 times as likely for a young African American woman with the darkest skin tone to be suspended compared to one with the lightest skin, and 2.5 times as likely for a young African American male (Hannon, Lance, Robert DeFina, and Sarah Bruch). The fact that there is such a huge disparity between people within the same race exemplifies the importance of taking into account the ways in which color exacerbates racial injustices. This fact also illuminates the ways in which misogynfonce makes itself relevant. Black women as a whole are already viewed as problem children to many educators so they are often not extended the same gratitude as their white classmates. Consequently, dark skin women are given the least gratitude (hence, the suspension disparity) due to the fact that they are dark skinned Black women (misogynfonce).

Wallace Thurman, an African American writer during the Harlem Renaissance, gives us another glimpse of one of the ways in which misogynfonce shows up in dark skin women's lives. In his novel *The Blacker the Berry*, Emma Morgan, the protagonist, speaks to the emotional pain of being a dark skinned woman and how it is more damaging for them than it is for dark skin men. This connects to the idea of self esteem that has been explored by scholars in relation to skin color. Verna Keith and Maxine Thompson conducted a study in which they examined the ways in which gender socially constructs the importance of skin tone for evaluations of self-worth and self-competence (The Blacker the Berry: Gender, Skin Tone, Self-Esteem, and Self-Efficacy, 336). Keith and Thompson's findings reveal that light skin women have higher levels of self-esteem. Though skin tone in general affects attitudes about the self for dark skin men and women, they conclude that these effects are stronger for women than men (338).

These findings are important as it pertains to the understanding of misogynfonce. Self-esteem has to do with the way in which an individual views themselves and their worth. The fact that dark skin women have lower self-esteem than light skin women and to a higher degree than dark skin men illustrates the unique discrimination dark skin women face. According to Margaret Hunter, the relationship between skin color and beauty is very important for women because beauty is a form of "social capital" (If You're Light You're Alright, 178). Women, specifically Black women, have always negotiated their skin color in order to make up for inaccessibility to economic opportunities. So, not only are dark skin women suffering from low self-esteem for not being deemed as conventionally attractive, but that also limits the social capital they have access to.

The same reason Moya Bailey developed the term misogynoir is the same reason I extended it to misogynfonce: to note the ability for oppressions to intersect and impact individuals simultaneously. Though colorism impacts dark skin men as well, it is important that we recognize who is the most impacted by it and why that is. Misogynfonce gives us the language to approach studying colorism through a gendered lens just as misogynoir gave us the language of studying racism through a gendered lens. Not taking an intersectional approach would be ignoring the unique discrimination dark skin Black women face. The first thing that comes to most people's mind when they think of colorism affecting dark skin women is beauty standards. Most dark skin women grow up hearing the insulting backhanded compliment that they are attractive for a dark skinned person. Though this is very harmful and needs to be unpacked within the Black community, it is crucial that we acknowledge the ways in which misogyfonce permeates the lives of dark skin women outside of beauty standards.

The Myth of Reverse Colorism

When the term colorism was coined by Alice Walker, assigned to it was a broad definition. Though it is great that she shed light on a long ignored phenomena in the Black community, there is danger in the way in which this definition can be understood and applied. It does not address the fact that colorism negatively affects dark skin individuals. Not centering the conversation on how dark skin individuals are negatively affected leaves room for people to argue that reverse colorism exists. This is why I made it my mission to center dark skin individuals in my definition of colorism. In this section, I argue that reverse colorism does not

exist and what people claim as reverse colorism is really just prejudice against light skinned individuals.

Colorism is a direct offshoot of racism, so in order to prove that reverse colorism exists, one would also have to posit that reverse racism exists. Although superiority is one facet of racism, to say that reverse racism exists is to ignore the systemic and institutional power white supremacy grants white folks vis a vis Black oppression. The same goes with colorism. White slave owners constructed a color hierarchy that influenced the ways in which Black enslaved folks were treated and treated each other. A hierarchy suggests a system in which groups of people are ranked amongst each other due to particular traits they possess. Since whiteness is the dominant normative ontology in America, those of European descent with white skin are ranked the highest and those of African descent with dark skin are ranked the lowest. Being that this is a color hierarchy and not a racial hierarchy, we must take into consideration skin color variances. So, Black folks with skin color that resembles whiteness (light skin) are above Black folks with dark skin on this color hierarchy. In fact, dark skin folks are at the bottom of the hierarchy since they are the furthest from white. With this being said, dark skin folks have access to no institutional power within this hierarchy, making it impossible for them to be colorist towards light skin individuals.

When I say that reverse colorism does not exist, I am asserting that it exists as a phantom, but not as an injustice. Therefore, it is not equivalent to colorism in its dynamic, and in its relation to justice. This false sense of injustice comes from the fact that light skin individuals experience a loss of privilege, power, and their sense of community, leaving them to feel unhomed. During the Black Power Movement in the 1960s and 70s, Afrocentric features were

being celebrated and there was a push to change the narrative around beauty within the Black community. As a result, the Eurocentric features that many light skin Black individuals possess had a more complicated relation to privilege in different segments of the Black community. In fact, there were even some folks who would try to tear down those who possessed these Eurocentric features because they were seen as inimical to what Blackness was and represented. This resulted in many light skin individuals being ostracized from the Black community, causing many of them to feel as if they were experiencing an injustice. They felt betrayed from the people that they were in community with on the basis of how they looked.

I do understand how this sense of unhoming can feel like an injustice and why the reverse colorism narrative became prominent. Many light skin Black folks talk about this sense of belonging that they struggle with throughout their lifetime. They are too Black for the white kids and too white for the Black kids. They constantly hear from white folks that they are not worthy enough to be considered white because of their Blackness then turn around and hear from the Black community that they are not Black. This causes confusion and disorder that many biracial authors, such as Nella Larsen and James Weldon Johnson, have embodied in their literature. While I agree that having light skin causes one to struggle to find a sense of belonging, I do not agree that this constitutes colorism.

This cannot be considered as colorism because colorism has a history that this reverse colorism narrative does not align with. Colorism began as an interracial issue and started out on the plantation. Slave owners constructed a color hierarchy which granted those with lighter skin certain privileges, such as access to education and skilled jobs. Dark skin folks, on the other hand, were often given jobs that required no intellectual capabilities and rarely got the chance to

learn to read and write. This resulted in lighter skin Black folks post Emancipation having the opportunity to utilize their skills and intellectual capabilities to land good paying jobs and receive an education. Dark skin Black folks, since many of them were only viewed as sources of labor that could carry out physical tasks, did not have access to the same educational and economic opportunities that their lighter skinned counterparts did. This eventually led to the Black middle class being made up of mostly lighter skinned folks and a disparity within the income of them and darker skinned Black folks throughout the 20th century.

This history shows that colorism is more than beauty standards and being ridiculed for how you look. Lighter skin Black folks claiming that they experience colorism by virtue of being talked about because of their physical features is comparable to white people claiming they understand the Black experience by virtue of growing up in an impoverished, crime ridden neighborhood. On top of it being insensitive, it does not address the larger picture of what is at play. That white person who comes from a lower class family still has more privilege than a Black person who comes from a lower class family due to the ways in which race relations have been shaped in America. Similarly, even if a light skin individual is ridiculed for their Eurocentric features, there still exists an inherent immorality of dark skin that grants light skin individuals privilege in society. Afrocentric features being celebrated does not affect the color hierarchy that is still at play and that grants lighter skinned individuals privileges. This is not to dismiss the harmful effects of being talked about and ridiculed because of one's physical features. However, I am shedding light on the fact that colorism is that, in addition to the ways in which dark skin individuals have been discriminated against from educational and economic institutions and how that was maintained throughout the 20th century.

To rectify or sublimate this feeling of being unhomed, it is important that Black folks recognize there is no one specific way of being Black. Henry Louis Gates Jr once said if there are 40 million Black Americans, then there are 40 million ways to be Black. This quote captures the fact that the ways in which one expresses their Blackness is germane to them and can not be questioned. Understanding this notion would allow for Black folks to exist as they are. Lighter skin Black folks would no longer be criticized for not being Black enough because they possess certain Eurocentric features.

We must also acknowledge that the same way there is a difference between racism and racial prejudice, there is also a difference between colorism and color prejudice. To build this argument, I will reference the case *Walker v. Secretary of Treasury, IRS.* The Civil Rights Act of 1964 signed by President Lyndon B Johnson outlawed discrimination in the workplace based on race, color, sex, religion, and national origin. While the distinction between race and color was nebulous, Tracy Lynn Walker, a light skin woman filed a lawsuit against her former employer, Ruby Waters, a dark skin woman, in 1989. Although the judge ruled in favor of the defense and stated that Walker's termination was linked to her unsatisfactory work performance rather than her skin tone, JenniferAnne Wilder explores how this case still serves as a pioneer for the discussion of colorism in the legal community (African Americans: Colorism in *Morrow v. IRS Litigation*).

Waters would make rude comments about Walker, saying that she needs to sit in the sun so she can get darker. Though this is highly offensive, it is not the same as colorism; it is not an injustice. Walker stated that she received two promotions prior to Waters becoming her supervisor. When Waters did not give her a promotion, she assumed it was because she was light

skin (Wilder, 4). Within this accusation, there is a sense of entitlement. As a light skinned woman, did Walker feel entitled to a promotion? Did she feel threatened by a dark skin woman being her supervisor? Even if these are not true, this still should not be classified as colorism. Colorism rests upon an aversion to dark skin and therefore advantages individuals of a particular racial group with the lightest skin color. We can assume that as a dark skinned woman in white supremacist America, Ruby Waters garnered no institutional power because of the color of her skin. Colorism is not just rude comments made about one's appearance. Though Waters acts were discriminatory, there is no institutional power correlated with dark skinned individuals that would classify it as colorism.

Structural Injustice

Now that I have developed my theory of colorism, I will survey the ways in which it shows up within institutions and produces unjust outcomes for dark skin individuals. The institution I will focus on in this section is the film industry, focusing specifically on Tyler Perry and his portrayal of dark skin men. It is critical that I discuss this because the portrayal of people in the media reinforces biases that already exist in the minds of people. When it is shown over and over again, people begin to believe it as true and therefore treat them according to the biases that are constructed. Tyler Perry is a household name in America, especially within the Black community. Perry, throughout his career, has taken an Afrocentric approach to his work, meaning folks of African descent are centered in his plays and films. Of the 48 plays and movies Tyler Perry has written and directed, each one is geared towards capturing the essence of Black experiences in the US. Though it is important that he is utilizing his platform to illuminate Black

voices and Black experiences, he reinforces stereotypes that are germane and harmful to dark skin Black men.

In the majority of Perry's plays and films, the antagonist, who is more likely than not an abusive, aggressive, and toxic male, is typically dark skinned; he casts dark skin men as evil and, in contrast, light skin men as good and benevolent. Though Perry is often criticized for painting a negative picture of the Black community in general, dark skin men seem to be his main target. For example, in his movie "Diary of a Mad Black Woman" the main character, Helen (Kimberly Elise) leaves her toxic and abusive relationship with Charles (Steve Harris), and then falls in love with Orlando (Shemar Moore). As one can assume, Charles is played by a dark skin man and Orlando is played by a light skin man. Charles, an attorney, and Helen, have been married for 18 years. Though on the surface things seem to be going well, he is verbally and emotionally abusive, and has been having multiple affairs throughout their marriage. On their 18th year anniversary, Charles kicks Helen out of the house and tells her that he wants a divorce. Later on in the movie, we also find out that Charles gets a lot of his money from doing deals with drug dealers. As a consequence, Charles gets shot, becomes paralyzed, and tries to get back with Helen who declines and instead, gets engaged with Orlando.

Charles being played by a dark skin man and Orlando being played by a light skin man captures the intraracial discrimination that happens in the Black community as it pertains to colorism. There is already this myth that dark skin men are aggressive and abusive, so choosing a dark skin man to play this role just builds upon this damaging stereotype. What exacerbates this is the fact that Helen ends up falling in love with a man who adores her, treats her well, loves her unconditionally, and he happens to be light skinned. There is this very apparent dichotomy at

play here between the evil dark skin and good light skin man. Tyler Perry, a Black man himself, deciding to employ this dichotomy and reinforce notions about dark skin men being wicked and evil and light skin men as benevolent, is intraracial colorism to its highest extent.

As I have stated, Tyler Perry has a history of casting dark skin men as evil, so this is not the only movie he does this in. Following its predecessor *Diary of a Mad Black Woman,* Tyler Perry casts dark skin men as evil and light skin men as benevolent in *Madea's Family Reunion* as well. In this film, Lisa Breaux (Rochelle Aytes) is engaged to Carlos Armstrong (Blair Underwood), who is an abusive and controlling investment banker. Of course, Carlos is played by a dark skinned man. Though it is not as blatant, the light skin, dark skin dichotomy is also at play in this movie. Lisa has an older sister, Vanessa (Lisa Anderson), who has two children by two different men but relations with neither of them. Due to past trauma, Vanessa is closed off from men but ends up developing a relationship with the local bus driver Frankie (Boris Kodjoe) who is very patient with her and treats her well. Though it is not Lisa leaving Carlos and ending up with Frankie, Perry is still painting dark skin men in a negative light and light skin men in a positive one.

Aside from Tyler Perry, there is a conversation to be had about the ways in which dark skin actors are treated within the film industry in general. Just recently, Netflix has been called out for casting a light skin woman, Zazie Beetz, to play Mary Fields, or otherwise known as Stagecoach Mary. Stagecoach Mary was the first Black woman star route mail carrier in the US. She was a dark skinned woman, however, the actor that is playing her is light skinned. Another recent movie that has sparked this colorism debate is the one about Venus and Serena Williams. Will Smith, a light skinned man, is playing Richard Williams, Venus and Serena's father, who is

a dark skin man. For years we have seen the casting of light skinned actors to play dark skinned folks and we are still seeing it today. This not only shows the insouciant stance people have towards colorism, but also how dark skin people continue to be erased from history. The same way media and historians whitewash Black political figures, such as Martin Luther King Jr, is how the film industry is saturating being dark. They are subconsciously feeding us acts of colorism and it adds to this idea that folks with Afrocentric features cannot be presented in a positive light.

Media plays a huge role in shaping how different groups of people are perceived. Dating back to 1915, in the film *The Birth of a Nation*, Black men were portrayed as stupid, ignorant, and sexually aggressive towards white women, which worked to reinforce the myth of the Black rapist. Other films and television shows have been criticized for not allowing dark skin women to exist and function as regular people. In most films, they are usually portrayed as the undesirable friend of a popular light skin woman or in a way that doesn't allow them to be centered in a positive light. Though some people argue that films and television shows will always fall victim to reinforcing stereotypes, this does not absolve creators and directors of being cognizant of what they are presenting and how it may harm a particular demographic.

Other institutions that are relevant in this discussion are colleges, jobs/businesses, and even sports. Some scholars have conducted research and studies on the ways in which dark skin student athletes are talked about in comparison to light skin student athletes (Fisher and Ray, "Skin in the Game"). They also investigate the role unconscious biases about skin color play in how referees officiate the game (if they are to call more fouls or penalties on dark skin athletes).

All of this goes to show the pernicious effects that colorism has across different institutions and how it produces unjust outcomes for dark skin folks.

Chapter 3: Colorism in the Classroom

In this chapter, I will develop a theory of decolonization as it pertains to education. The focus of this chapter will be elementary and middle school classrooms, and I will be highlighting the ways in which colorism shows up in in-school settings, then create strategies to address and combat them. Throughout this chapter I will be reflecting on the experiences I had as a dark skinned student, and those experiences will act as a framework for the discussion of the policies I wish to implement in schools. Relevant dynamics in this chapter will be student-student and teacher/administrator-student. In the student-student dynamic, I focus on how children internalize notions of colorism and as a result ostracize dark skinned students from different social groups. In the teacher/administrator-student dynamic, I focus on how teachers/administrators allow colorism to go unaddressed in the classroom, and how their own subconscious acts of colorism harm dark skinned students. Though this chapter will be a case study of myself, existing research and other testimonies will inform my theory of justice and the policies I wish to implement in schools.

Beyond Black and White

Scholars and researchers have been proactive in identifying the ways in which racist ideologies and attitudes shape the ways in which Black students are treated in the classroom. The disparities that exist between Black students and white students as it pertains to standardized test

scores, limited educational attainment, and underrepresentation in gifted education, just to note a few, have been clearly linked to issues of race, class, and gender. As Carla Monroe notes, the devoted efforts towards centering race in the school-to-prison pipeline have led scholars to conclude that racial inequities are not merely produced but are "progressively intensified and hardened" (Race and Color: Revisiting Perspectives in Black Education, 47). These findings are integral components in understanding the ways in which race informs the treatment of students and how that produces inequities within educational success. However, it is also limited in scope. Very little attention has been paid to how color may exacerbate this injustice and lead to intraracial disparities within the Black community. Understanding racial disparities within education also means understanding that Blackness is not a monolith. Blackness varies and this must be taken into consideration when addressing the unfair outcomes Black students face in comparison to white students.

The same way race plays a role in the way students of color are perceived and treated in schools is how color affects the treatment of dark skinned students. Monroe urges professionals in the field of education to elaborate on the topic of racial stereotype threat. The stereotype threat examines how perceptions of a particular group produce expectations about what they are like and how they are likely to behave (Aronson, "Stereotype Threat," 281). So, a teacher develops expectations of a student that are contingent upon their race, in tandem with the preconceived notions about that race, and then treats the student in a way that makes that expectation a reality. As Monroe suggests, when this idea is paired with findings on colorism, it may allow theorists to conclude that stereotype threats are colorized just as much as they are racialized, gendered, and classed (49). Considering the stereotypes that have been assigned to dark skin individuals over

time and witnessing the ways in which colorism showed up in other facets of life are more than enough reasons as to why we should investigate the unfair treatment of dark skin individuals within in-school settings.

Implicit biases do not stop at the classroom door and wait for teachers and administrators until the end of the school day. Instead, teachers and administrators employ these biases in the classroom and they influence how students are being treated, educated, and nurtured. In *Race and Colorism in Education*, Janie Victoria Ward and Tracy L. Robinson-Wood examine how colorism manifests in classrooms by way of favoritism. Though educators profess that they treat all their students with equal care and attention, they assert that research has proven that children who are perceived as conventionally attractive by adults are expected to achieve more than children who are not viewed as conventionally attractive (12). So, they talk about the ways in which teachers consistently choose to showcase light skin girls, awarding them special opportunities to act as the teachers' helper, and play leads in school theatrical productions while dark skinned girls are overlooked and assumed to be less intelligent. Like the stereotype threat, this favoritism employed by educators may influence students to rise or fall to meet racialized expectations of themselves. However, even if they do not, Ward and Wood argue that being a target of skin color exclusion may cause a child to silence themselves and suffer alone, damaging the relationship they had or could have had with their educator (12).

Recent studies have supported the claim that skin tone plays a role in the suspension rates of African American students. The odds of suspension are about three times greater if a young African woman has the darkest skin tone compared to the lightest. This trend, although not to the same degree as women, shows up in the suspension rates for young African American men as

well (Hannon, “The Relationship Between Skin Tone and Suspension for African Americans, 292). Though there needs to be more qualitative and quantitative research conducted on this rather recently discovered phenomenon, these findings show that speculation is necessary. With zero-tolerance policies being grounded upon subjectivity, (what teachers and administrators perceive as disruptive and disrespectful) there is a lot of room for unconscious biases to dictate how they process a situation. With dark skin being linked with physicality and aggressiveness, dark skin students simply speaking their mind can be read as disrespect. Though I am more than positive this shows up in the treatment of all Black students, we must account for the disparities in school suspensions for dark skin students and light skin students.

Imagine how teachers and administrators were looking at their Black students during the Bush campaign in 1988. With the Black body being showcased as criminal, and police as a result over policing Black folks, it is sensible to assume that many white educators took the same approach pedagogically. The creation of zero tolerance policies positioned Black students as juveniles, increasing their likelihood of “being suspended” and subsequently “missing meaningful instruction time.” (Monroe, “Race and Color: Revisiting Perspectives in Black Education,” 47). Though zero-tolerance policies were originally written into school handbooks in the 90s to deter students from bringing weapons into schools, they developed into policies that would crack down on minor violations to prevent any serious crimes from happening, varying from state to state. The zero-tolerance policies are much like Bush’s tough on crime policies: there is an increase in police presence (security guards for schools) and they target Black bodies. Understanding the intraracial disparities in incarceration rates following Bush’s tough on crime

movement, we can infer that there is a similar trend as it pertains to the suspensions due to zero-tolerance policies.

Though there is not extensive research on the ways in which colorism shows up in classrooms and in-school settings, these are all great examples to prove why there should be. When we think about the impact colorism has in other domains of society, and then consider the fact that schools are a primary socializing agent in a child's life, we can begin to understand why this research is necessary. Scholars and researchers must extend their racial analysis of students in school and determine the ways in which skin color, hair texture, and facial features may exacerbate the injustice Black students are facing. Ignoring this allows colorism to persist without being named or marked and the same problem will continue to show up just in different ways. If we are really invested in Black education, we should do the work of not treating Blackness as a monolith. There needs to be a vested interest in charting the experiences of all Black students of all skin color variances and noticing how that impacts their outcomes.

Decolonization of Education

In this section, I argue that there needs to be a decolonization of the ways in which we view Black education. There are two dynamics that must change in order for this to happen: teacher preparation and teacher-student relationships. Before we come up with ways to address and combat colorism in the classroom, teachers and educators must learn the history of it, how it has manifested, and the role that they play in sustaining it. I then extend this discussion and rethink the ways in which we think of teacher-student relationships within the classroom. Teachers have always acted as the head of the classroom, which means students must always go

through them when a problem arises. Rethinking this dynamic and giving students the autonomy to speak for themselves is important when it comes to creating healthy environments in classrooms.

Though there are many reasons why one may have made the decision to teach, a care for students is typically at the forefront. Attacking this notion of care is how we should go about getting teachers to learn about issues of race, class, gender, and color and how they show up in the classroom and impact their students' experiences. Workshops that are mandatory for teachers to attend are only helpful if they are not being attacked for the ways in which they teach. Instead, these workshops should be centered around students. Teachers should be made aware of how certain classroom dynamics have made past and current students feel, which I envision will garner the teacher's attention. Whether it is by way of a video or surveys, teachers must become conscious of how their students are impacted by social issues and the role they may have or could be playing in that before they care to change how they operate in the classroom.

Once teachers understand that there is a problem that exists, they should receive knowledge about whatever issue is at hand. So, if the problem is teachers acting on implicit biases about color limiting the educational success of dark skin students, then teachers should learn about the history of colorism. Teaching this history is necessary because teachers will not only have knowledge to pull from, but they will also be able to see the ways in which it intersects with other issues. For example, if teachers learn that in the 20th century, when colorism became an intraracial issue, that the Black middle class was undergirded by color, they may also investigate how class dictates their treatment of dark skinned students. Do they treat those who come from low income families differently than those who come from middle class families?

They can also learn about the ways in which dark skin Black women experience colorism differently than dark skin Black men and evaluate their role within that as well.

When teachers learn the history of colorism and study the ways in which it has manifested overtime, it is likely that they will be more aware about how it may show up in their classroom. Some teachers are just plain oblivious to comments made about skin color while others may not know how to interject out of fear of making the situation worse. When I was in class once in the 5th grade, our teacher turned off the lights because she was about to use the projector. When she turned them off, one of my classmates said "turn the lights back on because we won't be able to see Glen." Her response to this comment, after the entire class laughed at this intervention, was "cut it out and let's focus on our work." She did not inquire how that comment made me feel, she did not talk to the kid who made the comment and explain to him why that was offensive and hurtful; she did nothing besides enable colorist notions to persist in her classroom. This was a moment where I remember not only being mad at my classmate for just being rude, but more upset at my teacher for not sticking up for me.

Whether my teacher did not understand what that comment meant or was afraid of exacerbating the problem, I remember feeling like she failed me. In the hallways and cafeteria I knew I would hear jokes about my skin color left and right and there was nothing I could do about it. The classroom, however, was always my safe space. I knew once we got in class the people making jokes about me wouldn't have the time to do so anymore. This opened my eyes to the fact that even if my teacher was not making jokes herself, her remaining complicit in them was just as harmful. The classroom was no longer the safe space I previously thought it was. This is why it is imperative for teachers to develop the language necessary to detect when

colorist remarks are being made. Even if the teacher was afraid to intervene in front of the whole classroom, she could have talked with the student after class about how that comment is hurtful and why they should not say things like that to people.

Most importantly, gaining this knowledge about colorism will enable teachers to address the implicit biases they have towards dark skinned students. The previous section addresses how colorism can be expressed through teachers by way of favoritism and racialized expectations. When teachers become aware of the multitude of ways in which they may negatively impact their dark skin students, they may be more cognizant of their actions. Before they give up on a dark skin student or give special treatment to light skin students, they may ask themselves how much of that is motivated by the implicit biases they possess about dark skin individuals. An example of this is when I was in middle school and wanted to join the gifted program. I asked my friend, who is light skin and was in the gifted program, who he talked to in order to get in. He told me to go to a teacher he and I both had in the past. He and I were both motivated and intelligent students that earned straight A's each semester, and this teacher knew both of our capabilities. However, when I asked them about it, their response did not reflect the confidence I thought they had in my abilities. They were in a state of ambivalence and cautioned me about applying for the program, saying that it is really tough and I should consider if I'm up for the challenge. Were they ambushed by their implicit biases about dark skin individuals and projecting them on to me, their dark skin student? Whether they were or not, my goal with this example is not to show that this was undeniably an act of colorism. Rather, I am highlighting that their ambivalence could have influenced me to not view myself in a high regard, especially in

comparison to my light skin friend, and influenced me to meet the racialized expectations she may have had for me and other dark skin students.

Though teacher preparation is an integral component in relation to changing teacher-student dynamics, the ultimate goal is to imagine the classroom anew. Frantz Fanon argues in *Wretched of the Earth* that in the grand scheme of things, decolonization is the substitution of one species of mankind for another through an overturning of the colonial process (35). The proof of success, he argues, lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up. In other words, his process of decolonization calls for the eradication of what has been normalized. Though he is speaking in the context of the colonial process, we can also understand his process of decolonization in relation to the schooling system in America. For decades, teachers have been the head of the classroom and students have been under their control. As Fanon asserts, there must be a change in the people and a change in the structure for this process of decolonization to happen. The change in the people comes with the change in which we prepare teachers to be aware of different social issues and the way they show up in their classroom. The change in the structure, however, entails the eradication of the previously understood teacher-student dynamic.

A component of Fanon's process of decolonization is that it is always a "violent phenomenon" (35). Fanon believed that colonized countries had to gain political independence through the means of violence. Without violence, a process of decolonization was not feasible. As it pertains to the decolonization of the classroom, it is best we think of violence as courage instead. George Yancy argues that when we are discussing race in America, parrhesia, or courageous speech, is a necessity (*Backlash,* 61). This fearless speech must also coexist with

courageous and fearless listening as well. There must be honest dialogue that challenges people to reflect on their experiences and speak truthfully about them and others to listen and examine themselves according to what has been stated.

Embedding this component of parrhesia in classrooms and allowing students to speak honestly about their experiences is an effective way to decolonize the teacher-student dynamic. The incipient stages of this parrhesia must consist of providing kids the space to speak about themselves and their relations to various classmates. In *Starting Small: Teaching Tolerance in Preschool and the Early Grades*, the authors discuss children's ability at a young age to recognize racial and ethnic complexities. They state that children become aware of a "wide range of physical characteristics in themselves and others" including those we call racial, early in their identity development (16). Young children are able to acquire ethnic values, customs, language styles, and behavioral codes long before they are able to label them as ethnic, and numerous studies show that infants and preschoolers notice racial cues (16). Instead of ignoring this fact, it is imperative that we capitalize off of this and enable children to cultivate a sense of self.

Giving kids the space to reflect on their connections with other students enables them to think of themselves in a social context. Even if they do not comprehend the meaning of their social existence, they will start to see the interconnectedness of humanity. They will begin to see the similarities and differences they have with classmates, which can be understood as them building knowledge of social identity. Making this a consistent practice in preschool and kindergarten classrooms across the country will give kids the tools to speak honestly about their experiences by the time they are in elementary and middle school. Since they were given the space when they were younger to reflect on their experiences and relations, it is likely that a

ramification of this iterative process is that students will be more confident in speaking up, despite the teacher's presence.

Alongside students being more confident to speak up about their experiences, teachers must encourage group dialogue that focuses on social issues related to identity. Authors of the Teaching Tolerance Project suggest that these dialogues should be among the children themselves instead of the ordinary teacher-child question response (48). The teacher can be there to intervene when necessary, but the children themselves should direct the conversation. This will challenge students to think critically about their identity and the ways in which it impacts their experiences at school. Also, speaking amongst other children may enable them to speak more fearlessly and courageously. Without the presence of a teacher, they may feel as though they are having an ordinary conversation with their friend without realizing the importance of these discussions.

We can imagine how this would interrupt the current dynamic that exists between the teachers and students. As students over the years are given space to think about their identity, reflect on their experiences, and share their feelings, they are more likely to garner belief in themselves, what they know, and how they feel. So, when students feel as though they have been subjected to unfair treatment, they may be more willing to acknowledge it. When students begin to acknowledge and speak up about being mistreated, teachers will no longer have the right to say that they were unaware of how they made a student feel. They will be forced to tarry with their actions, and even if they did not intend to treat their student unfairly, they must interrogate why they subconsciously did whatever they did to make the student feel a certain way.

Creating spaces for students to engage in conversation with one another also can reduce the effects of colorism as it pertains to student-student relationships. Being that by the age of five children can typically describe a range of physical characteristics using a mixture of race/color terms, it is likely that preconceived notions about people with certain characteristics come shortly after (*Teaching Tolerance,* 18). One day in elementary school, we were all waiting to go into the cafeteria. As we were waiting, girls in my class decided that it was a perfect time to rank which guys were the most attractive. I can vividly remember wanting to seep into the wall in hopes that they would forget that I was there. Unfortunately, they did not. As I sat there anxiously waiting to hear an insensitive comment about my skin color, this girl proceeded to say "well we all know where Glen ranks on that list since he is the darkest." Another girl agreed and said "yeah Glen, you would be attractive if you weren't so dark," as if I had a way to control that. Thinking back on these comments now I notice the ability for colorist notions to be entrenched in schools and in the minds of children. At such a young age, these girls understood what the color hierarchy communicated. They knew that by virtue of my dark skin, I could not be as attractive as anyone who was lighter than me. Though it produces different outcomes in school contexts, the color hierarchy still had the capability of establishing Afrocentric features as innately ugly.

At the time, like I always did when someone made a negative comment about my dark skin, I did nothing and said nothing. Although it was hurtful, it was such a commonly held belief that I did not think she was saying something that would be considered wrong. This could be altered though if students were encouraged to engage in dialogue with their classmates and discuss how their classmates make them feel. If I had had years of practicing this on a weekly basis, I may have felt more comfortable expressing that comments such as the ones the girls

made in the lunch line were hurtful and there could have been some further intervention by the teacher. Instead of teachers only being able to address comments that they hear themselves, students could have the ability to hold their classmates accountable and speak on instances in which they feel ostracized or wrongly treated.

With my theory of decolonization, both teachers and students will show up and exist differently in the classroom. Though it may not seem like the most radical form of decolonization, it is important that kids are given the tools early on to develop language that assists them in understanding their social existence and how that impacts the relations they have with people. If parrhesia were to be one of the essential components in the way in which classrooms operate, it is likely that children will be more aware of when they are treated unfairly and have the language to express how they feel. In tandem with better teacher preparation, teachers would be in a better position to intervene whenever a child is bullied, teased, or treated badly due to an aspect of their identity. As a result, colorist notions will no longer have the ability to hide in plain sight because both teachers and students will be more aware of remarks made and how it may make others feel.

Recommendations for Educators

Though students are to have a more centered role in classroom operations, it is important that teachers are still aware of the role they play in the development of their students. As a result of the way in which the American education system is set up, teachers will always play a dominant role in the classroom (they are the ones giving out grades). Since this is the case, it is necessary that they have certain strategies for dealing with colorism when it shows up in the

classroom. The first strategy is to treat students as knowers and not minimize the magnitude of the problem a student is bringing to attention. When teachers write off students and their problems, those students may not feel like they can't go to that teacher for help anymore, or any other adult. They may close themselves off from other adults or start believing themselves that they are being dramatic and that colorist remarks aren't really hurtful. Another strategy for educators is to locate themselves within the conversion of colorism. Like every other profession, teachers bring their past experiences with them into work. Past experiences often influence the ideas and beliefs we currently have and this is important to consider when it comes to colorism. Locating themselves in the conversation of colorism will assist them in pinpointing things they need to work on so they do not perpetuate notions of colorism themselves. This ties into my final strategy, which is resisting color favoritism and color exclusion in their interactions with students (Resisting Everyday Colorism in Schools, 19). Teachers must remain cognizant of how they are treating their students and how their students' identity is impacting that. Are they more favorable and have higher expectations towards light skin students? Do they perceive dark skin girls as more disruptive than everyone else? Combating colorism is a constant struggle so teachers must make sure that they are critically and honestly examining themselves during interactions with students.

Teachers must keep these three strategies in mind in order to create a healthy environment for all of their students, but especially dark skin students. Colorism is often unnoticed, swept under the rug, or believed to be some made up racialized phenomenon. Since this is the case, teachers must remain hyper aware of student comments that have colorist undertones and also their own implicit biases. These strategies alongside the decolonization of

the classroom should be the first steps taken by teachers and educators to combat colorism in the classroom. All black students deserve to exist in a setting that makes them feel comfortable and is conducive to their growth as students.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I presented the history of colorism, focusing on how it started as an interracial issues then became entrenched in the Black community. In order to maintain power, slave owners constantly had to recognize ways in which they could divide the enslaved community. Though often times it happened unconsciously, skin color was one way in which they sought to divide enslaved folks. Enslaved folks with lighter skin were granted certain privileges that darker skinned enslaved folks could not enjoy themselves. Some of these privileges were learning how to read and write, not receiving harsh punishments, and given tasks that required intellectual capabilities that they would be able to monetize post Emancipation. On the other hand, darker skinned enslaved folks were only relied on to carry out tasks that required hard labor because they were perceived as having little or no intellectual capabilities.

This history on the plantation translated into lighter skinned Black folks enjoying different forms of social uplift that darker skinned Blacks could not. Since lighter skinned Black folks during slavery were exposed to jobs that sharpened their intellectual skills and were taught to read and write, they were able to receive formal education and/or acquire jobs due to the fact that they were skilled laborers. In addition to this, lighter skinned Black folks would also pass as white and immerse themselves in white spaces in order to enjoy the same benefits as white folks in the early 20th century. This resulted in the Black middle class being undergirded by skin color

and there were often colorist tactics that would keep darker skinned Black from being able to enjoy this social uplift, such as brown paper bag tests. Lighter skinned Black folks began to realize that though all Black folks were at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, there was a color hierarchy that granted them benefits at the expense of their darker skinned brothers and sisters.

In my second chapter, I discuss the multiple tenants of this intraracial form of colorism. I begin by discussing my definition of colorism in relation to Alice Walkers, who coined the term. The main difference between our definitions is I center mine around darker skinned individuals. It is imperative that I do this because it acknowledges the existence of a color hierarchy and the fact that darker skinned individuals are negatively impacted by colorism. After this, I talk about how colorism is also contingent upon race and gender, which is why darker skinned Black women are the most impacted by it. When marginalized identities intersect, they inform the ways in which those of a particular demographic are perceived and treated. This is where I coin the term misogynfonce, which highlights the ways in which darker skinned Black women are the most impacted by colorism and why that is. Then I discuss why reverse colorism exists as a phantom and not an injustice, building upon the idea that the conversation of colorism must be centered around the systemic and institutional discrimination of darker skinned individuals. Finally, I discuss the role that media plays in reinforcing negative stereotypes of darker skinned individuals and erasing them from history. For this section, I primarily focus on Tyler Perry and his portrayal of darker skinned men in his plays and films.

In my third and final chapter, I focus on colorism through the lens of education. I began this paper by reflecting on my experiences in school so I thought I should end it by coming up with ways to improve the dynamics that exist in in-school settings. In order for this to happen, I

argue that there needs to be a decolonization of the classroom and education. In relation to the presence of colorism, we must change the ways in which teachers are prepared to recognize when colorist notion are prevalent in their classroom and we must also give students the space to speak truthfully about their experiences. Stemming from Fanon's theory of decolonization, there must be a change in both the people and the system. I end this chapter by giving recommendations for educators and highlighting things they should keep in mind when addressing colorist remarks in the classroom.

Throughout these three chapters, my goal is to highlight the relations of dominance that is at play in relation to the manifestation of colorism. In the first chapter, I highlight the dominance that white folks had over Black folks in order to create a color hierarchy. In the second chapter, I discuss the ways in which lighter skinned Black folks utilized their dominance to enjoy privileges at the expense of darker skinned Black folks. Finally, in the last chapter, I talk about the ways in which teachers, as the head of the classroom, allow for colorism to permeate in-school settings, leaving darker skinned students out to hang dry. The goal of this paper is to highlight that colorism is a phenomena that deserves more attention. These relations of dominance affect the outcomes for darker skinned individuals and it is time we devote our efforts to eradicating these issues in society and in in-school settings.

WORKS CITED

Aronson, J. 2002. Stereotype Threat: Contending and Coping with Unnerving Expectations. In *Improving Academic Achievement: Impact of Psychological Factors on Education.* 279-301. New York, NY: Academic Press.

Bailey, Moya, and Trudy. 2021. *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance.* NYU Press

Bianca, Taylor. 2008. *Color and Class: The Promulgation of Elitist Attitudes at Black colleges.* 189-206. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

DuBois, William Edward Burghardt. 1903. *The Souls of Black Folk.* A. C. McClurg & Co., Chicago

Fanon, Frantz. 1952. *Black Skins, White Masks* Translated by Charles L. Markmann in 1967. Grove Press.

Fanon, Frantz. 1961. The *Wretched of the Earth.* Translated by Constance Farrington in 1963. Grove/Atlantic, Inc.

Foy, Steven L. and Rashawn Ray. 2019. *Skin in the Game: Colorism and the Subtle Operation of Stereotypes in Men's College Basketball.* 730-785. *American Journal; of Sociology* 125.3.

Frazier, E. Franklin. 1957. *Black Bourgeoisie.* Simon and Schuster Inc.

Gasman, Marybeth and Ufuoma Abiola. 2016. *Colorism within the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).* Theory into Practice 55.1.

Gatewood, Willard B. 200. *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920.* University of Arkansas Press.

Hannon, Lance, Robert DeFina, and Sarah Bruch. 2013. *The Relationship between Skin Tone and School Suspension for African Americans.* 281-295. *Race and Social Problems*.

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. 1994. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920.* Harvard University Press.

History. 2021. "Rosa Parks: Bus Boycott, Civil Rights, and Facts. A&E Television Networks.

Hunter, Margaret L. 2002. "*If You're Light, You're Alright" Light Skin Color as Social Capital for Women of Color.* 175-193. *Gender & Society* 16.2.

Hunter, Margaret. 2013. *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone.* Routledge

Hunter, Margaret. 2007. *The Persistent Problem of Colorism: Skin Tone, Status, and Inequality.* 237-254. Sociology Compass.

Jacobs, Harriet. 1861. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.* Thayer & Eldridge.

Johnson, Walter. 1999. *Soul by Soul: Life in the Antebellum Slave Market.* Harvard University Press.

Kendi, Ibram X. 2019. *How to be an Antiracist.* One World

Little, Monroe H. 1980. *The Extra-Curricular Activities of Black College Students 1868-1940.* 135-148. The Journal of Negro History.

Mancini, Olivia. 2001. *Passing as White: Anita Hemmings 1897.* Vassar: The Alumnae Volume 98 Issue 1.

Monroe, Carla R. 2016. Race and Color: *Revisiting Perspectives in Black Education.* 46-53. *Theory into Practice* 55.1.

Reece, Robert. 2019. *Color Crit: Critical Race Theory and the History and Future of Colorism in the United States.* 3-25. Journal of Black Studies 50.1.

Reece, Robert. 2018. *Genesis of US Colorism and Skin Tone Stratification.* 3-21. *The review of Black Political Economy.*

Teaching Tolerance Project. 1997. *Starting Small: Teaching Tolerance in Preschool and the Early Grades.* Southern Poverty Law Center.

Thompson, Maxine S and Verna M. Keith. 2001. *The Blacker the Berry: Gender, Skin Tone, Self-Esteem, and Self-Efficacy.* 336-357. *Gender & Society* 15.3.

Utley Jr., T.J., and William Darity Jr. 2016. "India's Color Complex: One Day's Worth of Matrimonials. *The Review of Black Political Economy* 43.2. 129-138.

Walker, Alice. 2004. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose.* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Ward, Janie Victoria and Tracy L. Robinson-Wood. 2017. Resisting Everyday Colorism in Schools: Strategies for Identifying and Interrupting the Problem that Won't Go Away. In *Race and Colorism in Education.* 5-24. Taylor & Francis.

Wilder, JenniferAnne. 2018. African American: Colorism in *Morrow v. IRS Litigation.* 1978-1987. *American Behavioral Scientist* 62.14.

Yancy, George. 2018. *Backlash: What Happens When We Talk Honestly About Racism in America.* Rowman & Littlefield.