

Colorism in Africa

'Racism is About the Color of your Mind Not Your Skin'
by Dawit W Giorgis

Black is Beauty?

The name Ethiopia comes from the Greek words “athio” / burn and “ops” face. It therefore means land of scorched faces. The former name of Ethiopia was Abyssinia possibly from the Arabic word “habeshi” Ethiopia refers to people whose faces have been darkened by the sun, Ethiopians have always been black. In Hebrew version of the Old Testament (torah) it is named as Cush (Genesis 2:13, Kings 19:9, Esther 1:1, Job 28:19) “Princes shall come out of Egypt, Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.” (Psalms 68:3,87:4) From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia. My worshippers, my disperse ones, will bring my offerings (Zephaniah 3:10).

This is the name, (Ethiopia) reverberates in the bible either as' Cush' and translated version 'Ethiopia.' The English version of Cush has been replaced by Ethiopia but the Hebrew remains with the Cush. It was renamed as Ethiopic in the 4th century. In the New Testament, the Greek term Anthiopic (Ethiopic) does occur many times, referring to a servant of Candice or Kentakes.

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or leopard his spots “asked Jeremiah (38:7-14), Moses who was born and educated in Egypt married an Ethiopian. “And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian women whom he had married for he had married an Ethiopian women (Numbers 12:11-16)

“Few other nations are mentioned in ancient European literature as much as Ethiopia and even fewer as highly esteemed. Ethiopians are first esteemed in the oldest Greek texts, Homers Iliad (circa 800 Bc) as a place frequented by the Greek gods. Homer states “twelve for Jupiters stay with the Ethiopians, at whose ruin Thetis prefers her petition “and “Zeus is at Oceans River with Ethiopians feasting, he and all the heaven-dwellers.”

Homer also says “Tithonus was the son of Laemodon, King of Troy and the Nymph Strymo . He was and extremely handsome youth and when Eos (Dawn) first saw him she fell in love with him and brought him to her palace by the stream of Ocean in Ethiopia. They had two children. ... one became king of Arabia ... he took a force of Ethiopians to Troy and died while fighting the Greeks 1 “To wash an Ethiopian white” was a common expression in the Greek and roman world used to describe gentle

labors or to illustrate unchangeable nature. The Greek historian Herodes used Ethiopia to refer to all the physical characteristics and provide great detail about traditions of Ethiopians: “**the men are taller, handsomer, burnt skin curly haired and longer lived than anywhere else. The Ethiopians were clothed in the skins of leopards and lions.**” The King Solomon’s version of the Songs of Solomon (1.6) says “Look not upon me, because I *am* black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother’s children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; *but* mine own vineyard have I not kept.”

The biblical and early B.C history shows that there were Ethiopians, and they were black and were part of the holy scripture and the bloodline of the holy people, the foundation of the three major religions. Black people were holy, blessed, respected and part of the biblical and early history. Black was beauty: they were pharaohs, they were prophets, they were people of wisdom and they were blessed divinely by God. The history of Ethiopians, Aettropic, Cush proves that irrevocably. *The fundamental principle of Islam is that all human beings are equal.* In the sight of Allah. Bilal ibn Rabah a black Abyssinian (Ethiopian) was one of the most beloved and significant companions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who became the first Muezzin (caller to prayer) in Islam. The Prophet is said to have heard Bilal’s footsteps in paradise. The story of Bilal’s Footsteps in Paradise is rooted in Islamic tradition, particularly in the hadith narrated by Abu Huraira (Hurairah) one of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Then, where did this prejudice against Blackness come from? Not from the ancient world. “Few other nations are mentioned in ancient European literature as much as Ethiopia, and even fewer are as highly esteemed. Ethiopia is first mentioned with honor in the oldest Greek texts, Homer’s Iliad (circa 800 BC), as a place frequented by the Greek gods.” 1 Even though there were symbols of black demons, and black was associated with death and darkness, there was no anti-Black sentiment either in ancient Greece or among the early Christians. 2 There were long-term contacts with Blacks, and an appreciation of the beauty of Blackness. Both Whites and Blacks were slaves in the Middle East and in the Greek and Roman civilizations. Blacks and slaves were not synonymous. Black immigrants were welcomed in any society. In every aspect of life, both material and spiritual, they were assimilated. Color was never the reason for exclusion. The ancient world was free of the “curse of acute color-consciousness, attended by all the raw passion and social problems that cluster around it.” 3 It is difficult to pinpoint a timeline when color prejudice grew, but whenever that was, it wasn’t in the ancient world. “The Christian vision of the world in which ‘there is no question of Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman’ owes not a little to earlier views of man in which color played no significant role.” 4

The Color of Jesus

White racism is supported by and entrenched in the belief that Jesus Christ was White. This has affected the Black psyche in some significant ways and contributed to the lack of a Black sense of pride, confidence, self-image, and esteem to the extent that some sincerely believe that White people as a race are better and being White is better than being Black. In a 1971 interview, heavyweight champion Mohammed Ali describes how he fell into this thinking as a boy: And I always asked my mother, I said, "Mother, how come is everything white? Why is Jesus' white with blonde hair and blue eyes? Why is the Lord's Supper all-white men? The angels are white and, oh, Mary, and even the angels? ... I said, "Oh, I know, if the white folks were in heaven, too, then the black angels were in the kitchen preparing the milk and honey. 5... Black people have been brainwashed. How we've been taught to love white and hate black, how we've been robbed of our name in slavery, how we were robbed of our culture, and how we were robbed of our true history. So, it left us a walking' dead man. 5But what if Black people find out that Jesus Christ had Black lineage and, by Western definition, was either Brown or Black? I have read several well-researched books that argue that Jesus Christ was from the tribe of Cush (Ethiopia), but I found one small book more convincing than any others. What Color was Jesus? by William Mosley. 6 The introduction was written by Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., President Obama's pastor from Chicago, whose controversial statements prompted the memorable speech on race that I cited.

The Archbishop of Canterbury fully supports the need to debunk the idea that Jesus was White. He points out that Jesus would most likely have looked Middle Eastern, but the larger point is that churches around the world portray Jesus as Chinese, Black, White, even Fijian depending on their location, and these representations are meant to serve as a reminder of the "universality of the God who became fully human," not to sow division by elevating one ethnic group or race over another. 7 This is indeed a very sensitive subject, and I cannot pretend to know more about it than William Mosley or any reader looking at his evidence. I therefore refer interested readers to his book.

Colorism in Africa begs the question that Black is Beauty.

The earlier history of humanity shows quite a different reality, where people of all complexions coexisted with respect. Now, colorism is spreading. It has travelled to Africa, a continent with untold survival problems, but that does not seem to bother a significant segment of the population who spend a considerable percentage of their meager resources trying to be light-skinned. The industry is brutal in preparing the trap. The desire to be light-skinned has become international for various reasons, but in essence, it comes from the period of slavery and Whites owning the power and resources to physically subjugate Blacks.

In my travels in Africa over the last 30 years, people's preoccupation with the color of their skin has begun to bother me more and more. Shades, colorism, complexion—Whatever you call it—make one group believe that they are better than the other but always inferior to Whites. The most harmful aspect of this cancerous notion is that Black people internalize it, thereby creating a complex that makes being Black inferior to Whiteness across continents and cultures. For example, colorism in Kenya is a major

issue that began in colonial times. The prevailing attitude is that the closer to white the better, and Eurocentric features are dominant as the standard of beauty, as is in other parts of Africa. This was demonstrated recently in South Africa, where in September 2020, street protests erupted after an ad for hair products referred to Black hair as “frizzy and dull” while blond hair was “flat and beautiful.” 8 As with everything, the reach of social media can easily worsen the problem.

Light-skins are a topic that has trended for the better part of the last years. On Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, people are going on and on about the social favoritism and the bragging rights of the fair-skinned brothers and sisters. This is sending a message to our younger generation that there is a privilege that comes with being ‘Light-skinned’; that light skin is beautiful and deserving of a lot of socioeconomic privileges, and more so, undying love.⁹ East African immigrants also continue the same sort of prejudices. Besides the cultural disconnect between African Americans and African immigrants, some feel as if they are inherently better than the other. From living inside a White power structure, those who are not white tend to turn on each other. In addition, many Black immigrants use Black culture as an accessory. Sometimes, they whip it out of their pockets enough to call someone a “nigga” or engage in other cultural behaviors only to put it back when trying to appease their white eyes. Realistically, there are vast differences between these two groups in terms of culture, but we have one thing in common, which will always mold us into one (according to the eyes of the U.S. Census or average people walking on the street or even people of our own), and that is our Blackness.¹⁰

There is a colorism story to tell in every African country. The Rwandan genocide of 1994 was inspired by colorism, turning Hutus against Tutsis, who, because they had Eurocentric features, were granted power and privilege in Rwandan society. In Gambia, there is now an argument over whether to repeal a 27-year-old law banning skin bleaching. In a bizarre twist, proponents of the repeal say it is necessary to stop men from abusing women by threatening to turn them in to the police for secretly bleaching their skin.¹¹ The skin color of the albino community in Tanzania has a negative social meaning and connotations. Albinos have been vulnerable to many kinds of attacks, including murder and mutilation to sell body parts associated with witchcraft. Ghanaians’ obsession with being light-skinned and the privilege that comes with it is a major topic of discussion within that country. The roots of this obsession, the commodification of Whiteness, and the selling of the notion that light-skinned is beautiful are described in detail by Prof. Yaba Blay in an article titled “Skin Bleaching and Global White Supremacy.”¹²

This deplorable brainwashing even finds its way into the church:

*“Lord, I long to be perfectly whole
I want thee forever to live in my soul.
Break down every idol, cast out every foe
And now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”*

This is a line from a popular hymn. Whenever a congregation sings it, they are expressing the desire to escape the kingdom of darkness, whose devil has so often been represented in most human cultures as someone with dark skin.¹³ On YouTube, you can watch a trio singing this hymn, two of whom are Black, apparently oblivious to the irony of their words.¹⁴ Apartheid in South Africa has divided the people into four distinct categories based on their colors, which often define their rights and privileges. The Whites were the first-class citizens, followed by the Coloreds (Mulattoes), then the Indians, and last the Black people. During apartheid, it even came to its lowest, most absurd level by prohibiting Black people from buying white bread—they were allowed only brown. Over 35 years after apartheid: The unemployment rate breaks down exactly as you would expect along color lines: 2024 published by Statistics South Africa¹³ highlights the extent of the divide using the narrow definition of unemployment (which requires an active job search):

Black/African: 36.9% (51.5 million population): **Colored:** 23.0% (5.3 million population): **Indian/Asian:** 12.6% (1.1million population): **White:** 9.2% (4.5 million population)

These gaps are even wider when using the expanded definition of unemployment, which includes discouraged job seekers who have given up looking for work. For example, in 2024, the expanded unemployment rate for Black Africans was 43%, compared to 12% for White South Africans. This is mirrored in the United States' Jim Crow system as well, neatly summed up in an old blues song by Big Bill Broonzy:

If you is white,
you're alright,
if you's brown,
stick around,
but if you're black,
get back. 15

So, what do you do when you're up against this kind of prejudice? You try to lighten your skin with bleaching products. "The skin-lightening industry is worth \$31.2 billion in the global beauty industry in 2024, and every day millions of people around the world slather creams with names like 'Fair and Lovely', 'White Radiance' and 'White Complete' on their skin in a bid to achieve these ideals."¹⁶ South Africa is marketed to the world as Mandela's rainbow nation, where everyone is proud of his or her race and heritage. But for some black South Africans, there is such a thing as being too black. A recent study by the University of Cape Town suggests that one woman in three in South Africa bleaches her skin. The reasons for this are as varied as the cultures in this country, but most people say they use skin-lighteners because they want "white skin."
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The WHO reported that in Nigeria, 77% of women lighten their skin. In Togo 59%. South Africa is next with 35%. It's becoming more common in South Africa because of the influence of Nigerians and people from the DRC. These products pose risks of cancer

and other dangers, but overriding that concern is self-hatred and low self-esteem because they were born Black. It's not just women. One male hairstylist told a reporter, "I pray every day, and I ask God, 'God, why did you make me Black?' I don't like being Black. I don't like Black skin." 18 In Mali a conflict simmers between lighter-skinned Tuaregs in the north and darker Bambara from the south. Formerly, the Tuaregs would regularly raid the Bambara and capture some as slaves. In post-colonial Mali the Tuaregs are under threat from Islamist groups, but they accuse the Bambara-dominated army of not doing enough to protect them in retaliation for past problems. The result has been an uprising by Tuareg separatists, displaced persons in Burkina Faso, and ongoing skin-tone tensions throughout the country.¹⁹

Colorism: A New Form of Bondage

Skin color from a scientific standpoint is all about exposure to the sun: people close to the equator have dark skin because the body tries to protect itself from ultraviolet rays, while in places where there is extreme cold weather, Whiter skin helps produce more vitamin D. But from a social standpoint, skin color is linked to power and exploitation. Long before colonialists and explorers came to Africa and took Blacks as slaves to the USA and Europe, there was no color prejudice in Africa. We were all just Black until the Whites, using sheer force and tricks, made us feel different. Many of our fathers fought against this perception of Blacks. Now the continent is infested with the plague of colorism. It is all about access, resources, privilege, power, feeling superior, and feeling different. Some people are light-skinned biologically, and there are those who develop light skin through strong bleaching. In Africa, these have created more categories of people, increasing the likelihood of conflicts and separation.

In 1963, Haile Selassie gave a magnificent speech at the UN that later inspired Bob Marley to incorporate it nearly word-for-word into one of his top-selling songs: "War."

That until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned; That until there are no longer first-class and second-class citizens of any nation;

That until the color of a man's skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes; That until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all without regard to race;

Until that day, the dream of lasting peace and world citizenship and the rule of international morality will remain but a fleeting illusion, to be pursued but never attained.²⁰

It is immoral to build a society based on racism or colorism. It demeans us as human beings. America, which prides itself as the greatest democracy and the most powerful country in the world, has one of the worst track records in race relationships. Much of America was created by the labor of Africans in bondage, and yet it has also produced some of the finest men of color who have left their footprints in American civilization. Blacks of whatever complexion have proved to the world that they can be saints, generals, leaders, scientists, astronauts, musicians, and even highly regarded

presidents. Blacks can do anything. This was never questioned since before the time of Christ. It was only modern White men, who happened to possess superior tools of oppression and war, that forced Blacks into physical bondage, though they were never able to enslave their minds. If anyone needs to be reminded of Black achievements, consult World's Great Men of Color by J.A. Rogers, and you will find dozens who left their mark on the world.²¹

African countries have produced some of the finest human beings on earth as well. In the fields of religion, construction, medicine, literature, and agriculture, African Blacks have contributed enormously to civilization, but there are many in the world unaware of their existence. World history is written and spread by the mighty. Only a few know that the civilization in Mali was considered the center of Islamic scholarly studies by people from Africa and the Arab World. Ethiopian history, as told from biblical times, is hardly known by the West. Studies on evolution have now proven that Africa is the cradle of humanity. "All people alive today are Africans — like it or not, that's how everything started." ²² Little is told about any of that, and even if it is told, it rarely matters in the face of the dominance of the White historical narrative. Even the color of Jesus has been bleached to make him Whiter. When Marcus Garvey was preaching about the pride and glory of Black people, America was still not free for all. Africa was always free until the colonizers came and went on a rampage to destroy what it had been. Africans were Black, free, and little is told about any of that, and even if it is told, it rarely matters in the face of the dominance of the White historical narrative. Even the color of Jesus has been bleached to make him Whiter.

When Marcus Garvey was preaching about the pride and glory of Blacks, America was still not free for all. Africa was always free until the colonizers came and went on a rampage to destroy what it had been. Africans were Black, free, and proud then, and they are as intelligent now as any White person, and as human. Given an opportunity, they can excel, as has been proved time and again. Many of today's African youth want to resemble the Whites; they want to leave Africa and go to Europe or North America. In the process, they feel that they will never feel free until they get rid of their Blackness. But they never realize that the one-drop rule will always apply, like it did for Princess Meghan Markle, Prince Harry's wife, that this world will never accept them, no matter how light they look, how much they assimilate culturally, how intensely they bleach, or how hard they work. They will always be Black. In the process, they deny themselves their natural rights to live as equals to all other human beings—Brown, Colored, or White.

Now, all gates to Europe and America are closed, but Africans still come. They dare the tortures of the Sahara, knowing full well that many will not make it across, and those who manage to reach the coast of the Mediterranean must risk their lives again crossing in illegal, dangerous vessels. They know some of them will perish, some of them may have their organs pulled out by traffickers, but those who are able to make it move up to the gates of Europe and beg to become third-class citizens, trying to construct their lives in a hostile environment. Most of these Black people take all these risks not because they are running from real persecution but because they are looking for better

opportunities in employment and education, opportunities they could have created in their own countries. For them, all hopes of a bright future in Africa have vanished. They see Africa as a cursed, dark continent where they cannot have a future. Most are people with no choice, but a large number had the choice of staying behind, and with half the labor they give to the Whites, they could make their country better and leave a legacy to their children as proud Black people. Instead, they go to distant places where they are officially unwelcome and where they are legally persecuted, chased, shamed, and treated as third-class human beings. There are times to flee one's country, but not for the reasons many do these days. But the push factors and pull factors are too powerful and can only be changed by education and good governance that could instill a sense of pride and hope in their own continent.

Conclusion

It is a documented fact that systemic racism, the legacy of slavery, and discriminatory practices throughout history and in the present day, have perpetuated harmful stereotypes and ideologies suggesting that blacks are inferior. For early humans, night and darkness were dangerous times associated with predators and the inability to see. This inherent fear of darkness, reinforced by some religions (i.e., Image of Satan, Hell, etc.), created a strong, subconscious link between darkness (black) and danger or evil. Ascribing these conceptions to dark or black people is intertwined with racism, where "darkness" symbolizes danger, negativity, and eventually racism. These attitudes have been embedded in social, economic, and cultural systems, which can have profound psychological effects on individuals and communities, impacting their self-perception and self-worth. Race is a social construct, not a biological one, and all human beings share fundamental equality and dignity [1]. Movements and initiatives focused on celebrating Black culture, history, and achievements—such as the Black is beautiful movement—have long worked to counter these negative narratives and promote self-acceptance and pride within the Black community. The root of the problem is that many Africans have been made to believe that being Black is a curse. We have to throw off the self-imposed bondage of feeling like lesser human beings. New challenges are emerging with current policies of the USA. Cara McClellan, opinion contributor to THE HILL writes "The Trump administration is fighting against diversity, equity and inclusion and for a return to extreme racial exclusion, inequality and white supremacy. Trump seeks a return to America's racist roots — and he's moving fast." Blacks can bring change to their home countries as Europeans and Americans did to theirs. They just need confidence in themselves. They need to pay the sacrifices that must be paid to remove the system that allowed or forced them to lose their inherent freedom to create nations that can compete, even excel. In a free society, Blacks have proved that they have the capacity and intelligence to do anything that any other human being can do. Let us create that free society so that we can change the countries where we belong,

and then color will never matter..... **Black Had Always Been Beautiful and Should.**

END

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Details on this subject is to be found in my book; “What A Life”

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