

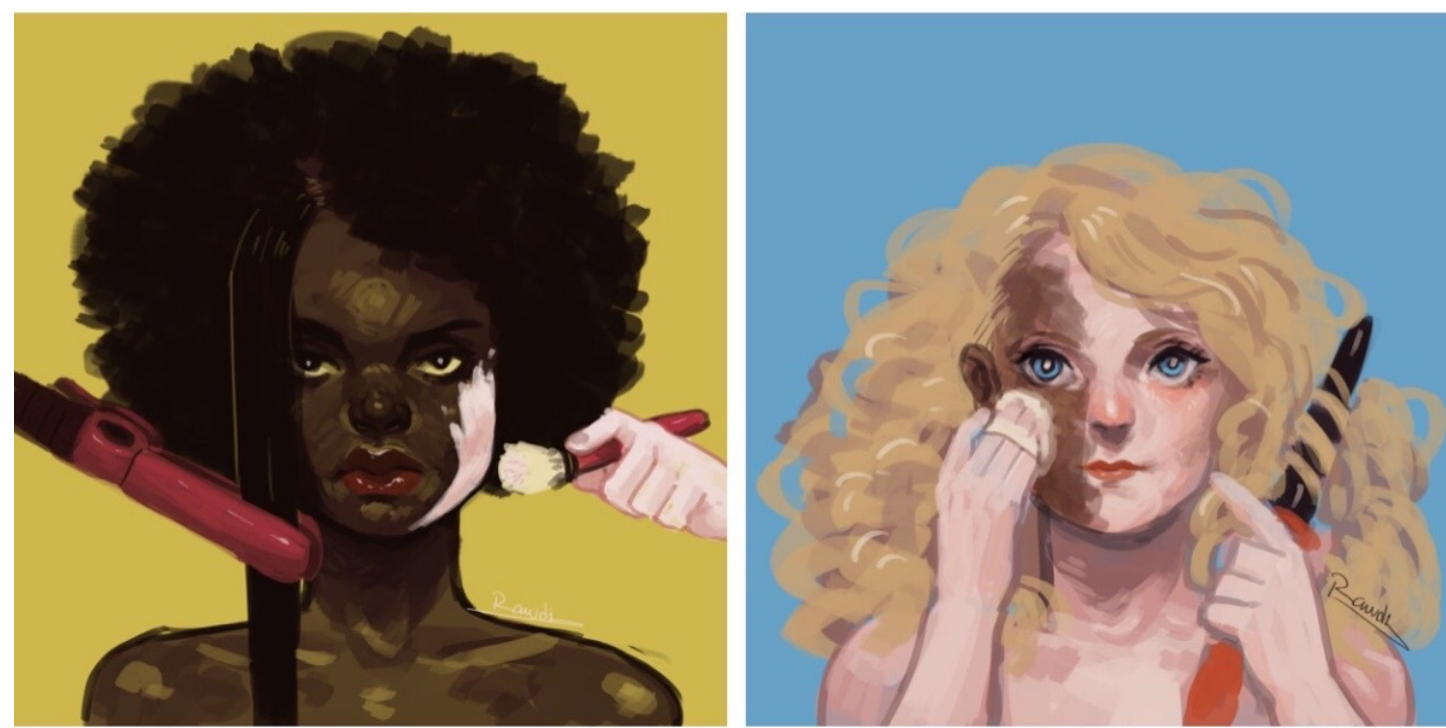


# GCI GLOBAL SHOWCASE 2021

## The Origins and Development of Colorism in Black Communities

### OVERVIEW

In the US and Western European countries, those of African/Afro-Caribbean descent are the minority compared to their white counterparts. By always being the minority in White populated countries, Black populations suffer from the repercussion of colonization and slavery overpowering their African origins. Among the US, UK, and France over 2,850,000 slaves were owned as cheap labor and controlled with the use of discrimination against their race and skin tone, creating the foundations of racism and colorism. Colorism, a term unrecognizable to the English dictionary, is defined by the author Alice Walker as the treatment of a person based on the tone of their skin (Tharps, 2016, p.1). While the topic of racism, is known and discussed in pop culture, colorism is widely unfamiliar and ignored in today's society. Studies have found that within the black population employers prefer light-skinned black men over dark-skinned black men regardless of their qualifications (Tharps, 2016, p.1). Colorism goes beyond the treatment of one's race and determines who is at an advantage of getting ahead in society based on skin tone.



### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How did colonialism create 2 different entities, racism and colorism, and what are the differences?

How did white supremacy ingrain itself within the color hierarchy of black communities?

What is the impact of colorism within the black community for darker skin tones?



### KEY FINDINGS

- The US, United Kingdom, and France use of White supremacy and hierarchy manipulated Africans within a system that promoted racism and colorism. While colonialism and slavery discriminated those of a difference race, the White hierarchy ingrained in these systems promoted colorism as the ideas of White supremacy and hierarchy caused discrimination of slaves based on skin tone.
- Under English colonization, Jamaican women found themselves going at extreme length to attract men. "Some captive Africans in colonial Jamaica bleached to approximate the 'sexual attractiveness' of the white skin ideal. The bleaching ads of the 1950s...states that women who lightened their skin would be sexually attractive to men" (Charles, 2011, p. 17). Bleaching occurs as a result of Western Europe creating a colorist environment revolved around Eurocentric beauty standards
- "[I]n the United States, black hair textures and natural styles carry negative connotations of being 'unprofessional'...[t]hus, African, Pan-African, and Black people are pressured to conform to...European standards of beauty in their pursuit of employment or education" (Carter, 2019, as cited in "The 'Good Hair' Study; Explicit and Implicit Attitudes Toward Black Women's Hair," the Perception Institute, 2017). Straight hair became the standard of professionalism unlike curly and kinky hair. Because of the pressure to fit Eurocentric beauty standards for life opportunities, Black women chemically change and damage their natural hair to comply with these beauty pressures.
- In the article, "The Skin Color Paradox and the American Racial Order", Jennifer L. Hochschild and Vesla Weaver provide a multitude of evidence supporting the unfair socioeconomic status within the Black community established on the foundations of skin tone and colorism. With income and education, surveys found an upward slope that corresponded with lighter skin tones (Hochschild and Weaver, 2007, p. 6). In the Criminal justice department dark-skinned male felons receive longer prison sentences - a year and a half longer than white people (Hoschild and Weaver, 2007, p.6). With college applications, jobs, housing, and even marriage, dark-skinned Black people are put at a disadvantage compared to lighter skinned Black people. Light-skinned Black people are more likely to attend a selective college, get hired, get married compared to their dark-skinned counterparts.

Figure 1  
Countries Colonized during the Rise in European Powers



As shown in **Figure 1** European powers including Belgium, France, Spain, Great Britain, Germany, Portugal, and Italy colonized almost all of Africa (excluding Liberia and Ethiopia as they were not colonized), Jamaica, and Haiti for their natural resources and the need to spread imperialism. To justify colonization, Europeans forced European social norms they viewed superior to help the natives assimilate under their control.

### ONGOING QUESTIONS

My research concluded that despite White colonizers utilizing colorism for their own means, colorism now puts dark toned men and women at risk for tumors, self-hatred, longer prison sentences, and lower socioeconomic status. With further research, I would find out policies and efforts in place currently to break down the systemic and social colorism going on in the World. Instead of focusing on the United States and a few colonized countries, it would be interesting to see how my research would change based on colorism in colonized countries rather than imperialist ones. Hopefully with more research and knowledge on color discrimination, more of society will recognize colorism and its damaging effects it has on the Black community's life.



### REFERENCES

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