

## Chapter 2

# Manifestations of Racism in the 21st Century

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**Abstract** For people of color (African-, Asian-, Latino-, and Native-American descent) in Western countries, the important attributes of the social system are ideals, which they internalize. According to James Baldwin, the root of American difficulty is directly related to skin color ideals. All matters considered necessitate the construction of the Bleaching Syndrome to acknowledge and comprehensively organize what is otherwise obvious, i.e., issues involving skin color. Much of what the Bleaching Syndrome involves is pathological to people of color and could not be imposed because it is contrary to their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. In the aftermath, people of color and the social scientists among them, including Whites, must aspire to more conducive, somatic norms to escape the pathological influences of the Bleaching Syndrome or risk manifestation of racism in the 21st century and beyond.

### Introduction

For people of color (eg., African-, Asian-, Latino-, and Native-American descent) in Western countries, the most important attributes of their social system are its ideals, which they internalize. Those ideals that reach the level of institutionalization become in effect standards of personal consequence. Such standards do not require, although they often have, the support of law; standards help persons organize their universes by determining what is appropriate and what is not. In conjunction, internalized ideals and societal institutions are the principal vehicles in the manifestation of racism in the 21st century. Racism caused by internalized ideals and societal institutions can be essentially one and the same in the absence of an equal distribution of power, which people of color do not have.

The ideals of a society are also important in holding it together. That includes the implied or expressed, the formal or informal agreements instilled

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in a nation's citizenry. The ideals internalized by people of color in Western countries eventually become synonymous with expectations. When the expectations of the citizen and the larger society are conducive, normal development will ensue. Conflict occurs for people of color who must assimilate into alien societies. The normal process of development is interrupted in such a way as to cause psychological pain, a product of their denigration through having or experiencing conflicting ideals. The pain is associated with an attempt on the part of people of color to adjust to what is, in fact, an inconducive or oppressive environment for them. The immediate solution would be to alter the environment, which their lack of power does not permit them to do.

Western ideals can be internalized by people of color either as a matter of choice through achieving their aspirations or by coercion in a White-dominated environment. The worth of any set of ideals is in the stability and order they bring to the psyche. Characteristic of most social phenomena, ideals are not static but are fluid entities constantly responding to social pressures during the assimilation process. The inability of people of color, both at home and abroad, to recognize this process and interrupt it at the appropriate point is an obstacle to their escape from the effects of racism, which then denigrates their native identity.

According to Linda Acupanda McGloin (1992), under racist circumstances the issue of identity is relevant to both men and women of color. But unlike oppressed Whites in such circumstances, the minority psyche has experienced decades of historical assaults by more than one colonial power. Each experience that may be manifested today originated from the brutalities of societal oppression and various forms of hierarchical subjugation that is long past but no less apparent. No doubt problems in the Americas existed prior to Western colonization. However, in the aftermath of colonial social, economic, and political control identity and other psychic phenomena for people of color have been complicated to a pathological extent. Thus, given the importance of social and historical events, the following questions are posed where racism in the 21st century and people of color are concerned: Can assimilation contribute to the repair of a denigrated self? Will awareness of the newest forms of racism enable the dissipation of self-denigrating fantasies? Under healthy circumstances, assimilation has played a key role in the liberation and psychological well-being of a people. For people of color, health will be contingent upon their ability to obtain organized glimpses into the psychological damage that has been incurred over time from racism and post-colonial oppression. In the wake of oppression are images that have been fashioned from Western dominant-group fantasies.

Upon their arrival in the Philippines, Spanish colonials had visualized a Filipina prototype that would best serve the exploitation and subjugation of Filipino people. They required that the Filipina be demure, modest, patient, devoutly religious, cultured, submissive, and virginal. Her status would be valued commensurate with the quantity of Western blood that ran through her veins. Spanish ancestry was important because it would vary the color of her

skin accordingly, making her increasingly lighter as a result of a lineage of sexual contact with the dominant colonial male. The major portion of this dynamic is repressed in the Filipina psyche, making her for the most part like all people of color who are unaware of its significance, ultimately becoming an accessory to her own victimization.

Spanish colonial fantasies of the Filipina ideal are still upheld today, enabling impediments to Filipina liberation and psychological health. Colonial fantasies served the purpose of Spanish males whose Western counterparts reinforced the continuation of domination in more sophisticated ways. Perhaps some very minor progress might be evident in that the indigenous people of the Philippines who were once embarrassed being called “indios” (an ethnic reference assigned to them by colonial Spaniards) now insist upon being known as “Filipino,” while the descendants of colonizers now prefer to call themselves “Spanish” (McGloin 1992).

The implication of post-colonial assimilation has been captured for all people of color theoretically by W.E.B. DuBois. Early on, DuBois wrote of the “Double Consciousness” aspect of the African-American experience—a no less colonized Western minority (Myrdal 1944). DuBois supported this assumption by making reference to the fact that dark-skinned African-Americans who socialized in a post-colonial culture maintained one set of behaviors that were appropriate within the group and another set composed of assimilation norms that were preferred by the dominant group mainstream, into which they were required to assimilate. The purpose of assimilating was to realize their aspirations and ultimately the “American Dream.” In some cases light-skinned African-Americans “passing” for white—where an African-American would assume the identity of a white American in order to take advantage of the privileges and opportunities brought about by successful assimilation—was used as a strategy to circumvent racism and other forms of societal oppression. These light-skinned Black Americans were frequently the descendants of African slaves and slave masters. The act of passing in brief does not necessarily represent a desire on the part of such African-Americans to denigrate themselves, but is rather a necessity of survival. It allows for a degree of function to the extent that victims assume another identity, but the longevity of that identity is ultimately pathological because it requires the host to accept and indeed value the denigration of self. It reinforces psychological pain, in that it is a game, which requires those who play to be constantly on guard. It may also require separation from family to affect the colonial role, which to members of a family-oriented culture is the most painful act of all. As pathology the act is potent and destructive to the psyche because family is where the sense of identity originates. L. Chestang (1995) referred to this as the “nurturing environment.” The “nurturing environment” may be compared to Erik Erikson’s (1968) “significant others,” those who are closest and most involved in the determination of an individual’s sense of who they are. The individual’s experiences and sense of identity growing out of his or her relationship with “significant others” play an important part in socialization and the ability of

the individual to live a sane, productive life, and most importantly to escape the ill-effects of racism for a healthy life experience.

Regarding racism in the 21st century, George Mead's (1934) concept of the "generalized other" may also be used to understand people of color who, by assimilation, internalize conflicting Western ideals. Mead (1934) defined the "generalized other" as taking on the attitude of the dominant (Western) society in regard to the self. In this way one learns to become an object to the self, to have an identity, to know the self through role-taking and from the reflection of others. In acting out the roles of Western others, people of color take others' roles into their own nature and begin to alienate themselves from all that is in their best interest. From the many roles assumed, there gradually arises a generalized other. This attitude of the generalized other or alien Western self is intended to unify the self, as people of color incorporate society's responses and react accordingly.

Mead spoke only of one generalized other. However, people of color in Western cultures who assume the images of Western fantasy have a strong possibility of seeing themselves stigmatized, as in fact they often are. The more they incorporate a negative image of themselves into their identity, the more they will be stigmatized in their perception of who they are. Yet it is apparent that people of color do attain a good sense of self despite the challenges. That sense of self can be assumed as an alternative generalized other, to which Dolores Norton refers in her notion of the "Dual Perspective," where people of color unlike whites experience the social environment as a "twoness" (sustaining and nurturing) (Norton 1978).

The alternative generalized other, as Norton would contend, is the attitude of the family and immediate community environment, the "nurturing environment" of Chestang, the "significant others" of Erikson. If people of color receive love and care from their families as children, this can instill a positive sense of self and effectively combat racism. Since many are reasonably isolated from the dominant community physically and socially—at least early on—the attitude of the more immediate generalized other, the family, can develop, restore, or help them maintain self-esteem. People of color can use that esteem as a buffer against the effects of the attitude of the generalized other from the larger Western society as they experience the wider community. This cannot be accomplished totally though, for even as youth people of color are very much aware of the biased, race-based attitude of the Western mainstream. Especially in today's age of advanced media technology and urban living, the attempt is made more difficult. If the mechanisms of socialization in the nurturing environment or the more immediate generalized other are positive, this may help children of color balance the racist images that may come from the environment of post-colonial populations, else the consequences may impair the individual for a lifetime.

Regarding people of color in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Abraham Maslow (1971) perceived individuals as having a wide range of potential for personal development. He thought it natural and universal for human beings to want to develop

to their fullest capacity. For people of color, the problem starts in how they define their fullest capacity. By nature human beings are basically fit. Without prompting, they will strive to develop themselves for the benefit of society. Maslow referred to this as “self-actualization” (1971) and is the highest possible stage of human development. In fact those who reach such a stage are indeed rare. Once a stage is attained, by satisfying the needs of the prior stage, the individual is prepared to move on to the next level. In the West, unfortunately, most persons are in a state of constant struggle to realize aspirations for a particular stage of the Western hierarchy: At the base of the hierarchy are physiological needs such as food and water. At the next level are safety needs such as security, stability, and freedom from fear. At the level following is the satisfaction of belongingness and love needs provided by friends, family, and significant others. Self-esteem needs include self-respect, attention, and appreciation. The final stage, self-actualization, is reached by the highest developed individual as pertains to morality, etc. All but the very exceptional members of humanity tend to stagnate for different reasons just at or below the third stage of development. People of color may stagnate because of complications extended from racism and colonization. Members of the Western mainstream stagnate because of the spoils extended from racism and colonization. While Maslow does admit to the relevancy of age for progression through the various stages, the dynamics associated with Western assimilation are also a strong factor. As per the aforementioned theoretical constructs, that assimilation has become exceedingly complicated by the impact of post-colonial norms, in particular for people of color who reside in Western countries today.

The ethnic landscape of Western civilization today comprises one of the most diverse populations of humankind ever (Kitano 1985). The descendants of Europeans, Africans, Asians, and others have made significant contributions to its wealth. However, all have not shared equally in its prosperity. Despite such racial and ethnic diversity, being referred to as a person of color remains an obstacle to full or structural assimilation into Western society, because being a person of color has strong implications for stress levels. It may also limit opportunities for any members within the group and aspirations for the quality of life so aptly desired (Burke, Divinagracia, & Mamo 1998). Is it any wonder that African- and Euro-Americans are obviously similar in genetic structure? Both frequent a common existential space and both rely upon nourishment from that space to evolve. However, their evolution within that space may differ significantly. For African-Americans, skin color is critical. For Euro-Americans, skin color though relevant is almost completely inconsequential as a disadvantage (Frost 1989). In human genes, as in social experiences, people may have much in common yet may have evolved from distinct social and genetic heritages.

Thus, analysis of commonality in some respects may co-exist with contrasts in others. In regard to people of color, any observer would be in error to categorize by race, independent of skin color, in this 21<sup>st</sup> century millennium. The most significant consequence of this error has been a tendency to

underestimate the impact of skin color, because there is no analogous impact on Euro-Americans, i.e.: Eurocentrism. As a result, understanding African-Americans in the context of theories designed by and for Euro-Americans is less effective because it misses an essential component of the African-American assimilation experience. In the hyper-utilization of white constructs, people of color are poorly portrayed, and such poor portrayal is an outgrowth of Eurocentrism and the accompanying trivialization of skin color. In the context of racism, it ultimately sustains pathologies among dark-skinned populations who become social and societal failures in their subjection to racist oppression (Arroyo 1996).

There are a few methods to circumvent Eurocentrism and to correct this methodological flaw. The first is the utilization of the democratic process: to incorporate a variety of demographic tools and settle upon the most popular tool. This approach would prove fitting in a democratic sovereignty, but not necessarily as an effective one. Demographic tools that rely on popularity run the risk of collapsing into an intellectual solipsism that is unproductive and no less hegemonic than the Eurocentrism of race. The second alternative suggests a more encompassing and universal approach, which must accommodate a meaningful effort and knowledgeable sensitivity to a diverse population that now comprises the world. Although African- and Euro-Americans have a distinct evolutionary heritage, they also have a common genetic variation in skin color. The boundary of their color exceeds racial demarcation, which has no biological significance. Consequently, the use of skin color by social scientists will prove less biased in a time when Western racial homogeneity will have all but completely diminished (Lee 1991).

## **Skin Color: African-Americans**

In studying the theoretical dynamics of skin color among African-Americans, relative to racism in the 21st century, a dramatic demonstration may be seen by examining stereotypes seen in film and litigation. In film, the “tragic mulatto” stereotype represented light-skinned African-Americans who were born into a world that defined them as Black if they had any known African heritage. Donald Bogle (1989), in a well-researched effort, offers a detailed chronology beginning with a 1912 film called *The Debt*: set in the old South, a White man’s wife and his Black octoroon mistress bear him children simultaneously. After growing up together, his white son and light-skinned, African-American daughter become romantically involved and decide to get married. Eventually, it is revealed to them at a crucial moment that they are, in fact, brother and sister. Their lives are thus ruined, not only because they are kin but also because the young woman has Black blood. She has white skin and blue eyes, which would otherwise define her as white, but here they are irrelevant. Her societal identification must be that of an African-American.



In reality, many light-skinned African-Americans left the South for the North, where they could pass as white. *Pinky*, a film released in 1949 (Bogle 1989, Kazan 1949), featured a light-skinned nurse who returns to the South after having passed as white in the North. *Pinky* is depressed by the Black Southern life of daily threats and insults, and plans to return North to her white fiancé and to her life as a white woman in a free society. However, her African-American grandmother convinces her to stay with her people. *Pinky* confides to her white fiancé, "Tom, you can change your name. . . . I'm a Negro. I can't deny it." And so, as was true of all African-Americans, *Pinky's* life meets tragedy by the racist standards of color.

True to life, actress Dorothy Dandridge exemplified the ultimate metaphor of the "tragic mulatto" in the failings of her film career (Bogle 1989). The African-American attributes that enabled her professionally may have forced her to live out a screen image that eventually destroyed her. *Carmen Jones* was the celebrated film that established her as the definitive Tragic Mulatto. In the film, her love interest was a "good-colored boy," portrayed by Harry Belafonte. *Carmen* convinces him to desert the army and run away with her, after which they end up in a Chicago hotel. Then she leaves him for a prizefighter, and is later strangled for her unfaithfulness. Dandridge appeared to experience the racism of skin color not only through her film characters but also in her real life, as a light-skinned, African-American woman. She eventually succumbed to alcoholism, drugs, and destructive love affairs. Finally in 1965, at the age of forty-one, Dorothy Dandridge was found dead following an overdose of anti-depression pills. The catastrophe in Dandridge's life was that, as a light-skinned African-American, color more than race denied her the possibility of fulfillment, either as completely African- or completely Euro-American. That is because the most significant but seldom acknowledged attribute for people of color is their skin color. Accounts of such oppression are not limited to film, and are apparent in recent litigation.

Perhaps the first case brought to trial by African-Americans on the basis of skin color was that of Tracy Walker versus the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). It was tried in the Atlanta Federal District Court in 1989. The plaintiff was a permanent clerk typist, a light-skinned African-American, in the IRS's Atlanta office. Her supervisor—employee of the defendant—was Ruby Lewis, a dark-skinned African-American. Employees of the office in which the plaintiff and the defendant worked were predominantly African-American. In fact, following her termination, the plaintiff was replaced by another African-American. According to the record, the working relationship between the plaintiff and the defendant was strained from the very beginning, since approximately November of 1985. The plaintiff contends that the defendant singled her out for close scrutiny and reprimanded her because of her light skin for many things that were false or unsubstantial. In the summation expert testimony by Dr. Ronald E. Hall was heard, and the court determined the plaintiff's case to have merit. At the conclusion of the trial, though, the federal court ruled in favor of the IRS. The charges were deemed poorly documented, and Walker's claims of

skin color harassment could not be supported by witness testimony. It was allowed, however, that skin color prejudice could exist between Blacks (similar to racism among whites), although perhaps the case before the judge was not the best test of the issue. At present, the plaintiff is considering higher court (*Walker v. IRS* 1989).

## **Skin Color: Hispanic Americans**

Travel brochures for the island of Puerto Rico aptly profess the rich variation in skin color and other physical attributes of its people. Vacationing tourists are impressed by the apparent lack of color prejudice that the residents proudly proclaim. Unmentioned, however, is the blatant discrimination against dark-skinned Puerto Ricans. Its existence is invisible to the casual observer, but substantiated as fact by documented litigation similar to that of African-Americans Lewis and Walker. This case is important, in that it accounts for charges of skin color discrimination, both across and within group and gender lines. The Latino-American case of Felix versus Manquez in fact preceded that of the African-American case of *Walker v. the IRS*.

The U.S. District Court of the District of Columbia litigated the case of the dark-skinned Felix versus the lighter-skinned Manquez in 1981. Both the plaintiff and the defendant were Latino-American employees of the Office of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in Washington, D.C. (OCPRW). The plaintiff alleges that the defendant did not promote her on the basis of skin color discrimination. At trial, the plaintiff introduced the personnel cards of twenty-eight of her former fellow employees. She testified that, among them, only two were as dark, or darker, in color than her. All of the other employees in the office, according to the plaintiff, were light-skinned. In summation, the court determined that the plaintiff was not promoted in grade for legitimate business reasons, having nothing whatever to do with her skin color (*Felix v. Manquez* 1980).

In a more recent case brought by Latino-Americans, the U.S. District Court of the District of Puerto Rico litigated Falero versus Stryker Corporation in 1998. Falero, the plaintiff, is a dark-skinned male while Rigoberto, the corporation defendant, is a light-skinned male. The plaintiff claims he was terminated from his job because of his dark skin. Rigoberto contends that Falero did not establish that he was replaced by someone who was not within the protected class. He further stated that the plaintiff's job had not been filled by anyone, but admits one of his areas of work was assigned to another employee. Thus, direct evidence of skin color discrimination was lacking.

Although part of the case rationale had been accepted, the court decided that no reasonable judge of the facts could conclude from the evidence in the record, when viewed in the light most favorable to plaintiff, that the defendant discriminated against the plaintiff on the basis of his skin color. Therefore, the



court granted the defendant's motion for summary judgment. Additionally, after dismissing the plaintiff's foundational federal claims, the court reassessed its jurisdiction over the supplemental state claims. Thus, in the exercise of its discretion, and after balancing the competing factors, the court declined to exercise jurisdiction over the plaintiff's supplemental claims. The plaintiff's state law claims were then dismissed without prejudice (*Falero v. Stryker Corporation* 1998). However, the inability of African- and Latino-Americans to prevail in a court of law should not imply that the issue of racist skin color discrimination is without merit. Regardless of the outcome, the mere filing of litigation makes the importance of skin color among African- and Latino-Americans obvious.

### **Skin Color: Asian-Americans**

The issue of skin color among Asian-Americans conforms to White racism and has a long, established history (Banerjee 1985). It determines their manifestation of racism in the 21st century. When Japanese migrate to the U.S., they bring with them their notions about light skin, which include the denigration of dark-skinned persons (Washington 1990). When they begin the assimilation process, the belief that light skin is superior and dark skin is inferior negatively affects their ability to interact socially with darker-skinned Americans (1990). It may even have contributed to the recent tensions between African and Korean American communities in Los Angeles, and various other parts of the nation (Kim 1990). It is a reflection of Western assimilation whereby Asians from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka who constantly seek, once settled in the U.S., ways to prove themselves "White" (Mazumdar 1989).

The most dramatic illustration of skin color issues among Asian-Americans pertains to marital patterns. Free and uninhibited assimilation would view the selection of marriage partners as an indicator that color would not be a barrier (Aguirre, Saenz, & Hwang 1995). An alternate approach would infer that marrying outside of one's race was a function of inequality in dominant, stratified societies. For Asian-Americans who participate in out-marriage, that marriage becomes a means to exchange status characteristics (Shinagawa & Pang 1988). The result is "Eurogamy," a racist social phenomenon defined by a predisposition to the selection of spouses on the basis of skin color (Hall 1997). On that basis, dark-skinned persons are presumed to be ineligible for ideal marriage, even if they are of equal or higher socioeconomic status. Eurogamy among Asian-Americans is therefore influenced by skin color discrimination. While some do marry people of color, Asian-American men who marry "out," or Eurogamously, are apparently less likely to do so than Asian women (Rhee 1988).

Eurogamy is a universally obvious but previously undocumented aspect of the Asian-American social environment. It is used as an assimilation strategy

under the social rules of Western domination and racism. It is the preferred marital pattern of a darker-skinned group (by fact or metaphor, Asian-Americans) into a lighter-skinned group (by fact or metaphor, Euro-Americans). In acquiring Euro-American genes via marriage, the stigma of Asian skin color is lessened in their children. The phenomenon is most frequent among Asian-Americans who settle in large urban centers.

In New York City, Asians who practice Eurogamy tend to be second generation Americans or later, female, older, better educated, of higher occupational status, and have higher incomes (Sung 1990). These urbanized citizens are associated less with the customarily closed Asian community. Whether or not Eurogamy adversely affects their children has not been substantiated, but their children do appear to have problems (1990).

Perhaps the most spectacular manifestation of racism in the 21st century among Asian-Americans is referred to as "brown racism." According to Robert Washington (1990), brown racism is perpetrated by Chinese, Filipino, and Southeast-Asian-Americans against persons of African descent. It is a variation of discrimination that probably occurred as a result of Western colonization. The behaviors are obvious but seldom addressed given the Eurocentrism of racism as a purely black/white racial issue.

## Skin Color: Native Americans

Dark-skinned Native-Americans are well aware of their African roots and are not ashamed to make reference thereto (Hooks 1992):

Speaking primarily to the folks who have always denied the many truths of U.S. history that tell of imperialist expansion, cultural genocide, and racism, Katz makes it seem that it is important to convince his audience that 'black Indians' never even existed.

William Katz (1986), the author of *Black Indians*, is criticized by hooks for not acknowledging the Eurocentrism that has made the African-mixed Native-American "invisible." Furthermore, the invisibility of such persons has been made easier by the social discourse of "full-blooded" Native-Americans and their lighter-skinned Euro-mixed counterparts particularly in urban locations. Arguably, that discourse contributes to racist discrimination against dark-skinned Native-Americans of whatever parentage by those who are light-skinned, "full-blooded" or otherwise. Thus, "full-blooded" Native-Americans and Native-Americans of mixed Euro-American parentage, by virtue of being light-skinned, have allowed for the alienation of dark-skinned Native-Americans on the basis of the "one-drop" theory (Russell, Wilson, & Hall 1992). In fact, according to V. Dominguez (1997) it may be that a substantial number of African-Americans have at least 25% Euro-American ancestry and perhaps 80% Native-American ancestry. Were those same persons citizens of some South American countries, they would undoubtedly be considered "mestizo," or of mixed-blood.

For various reasons irrespective of urbanization and “blood quantum,” scholars contend that the Native-American population appears to be experiencing significant growth (Snipp 1989). Unfortunately, their research has ignored the implications of skin color and its effect upon the Native-American perception of dark skin. Some, such as J. Nagel (1997), have acknowledged it in their research, but this acknowledgment has been all too subtle. Perhaps similar to the Latino-American community, there is a feeling in the Native community that the acknowledgement of intragroup discrimination would invite group disjuncture at a time when unity is imperative (Jarvenpa 1985). However, scholars, in their hesitation, may actually contribute to group disjuncture. In Avery F. Gordon’s (1997) *Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, discrimination can be banished from the literature but not wholly from reality of the people. Such banishment contributes to tension in the absence of dialogue, making it even more offensive and less likely the subject of healthy intellectual debate. Those who prefer to define Native-American identity on the basis of skin color then worsen that disjointedness. Conversely, in opting for a purely color-based prerequisite, scholars realize that authentic Native-American identity may be questioned by other Native-Americans, tribes, and governments (Wilson 1992). Thus, on the basis of skin color, the perception of a Native-American population growth is arguably a manifestation of personal beliefs.

As for identity, the prevalence of racial constructs validate blood quantum by skin color, which impairs the ability of African-mixed Native-Americans to be accepted as authentic and to circumvent racism. For example, claiming their Native-American identity may be problematic for reasons including: (a) African-mixed Native-Americans may be seen as wanting to escape the social stigma associated with being “Black;” and (b) discrimination on the basis of their dark skin may disqualify them because in appearance, unlike their lighter-skinned, Euro-mixed counterparts, they are more physically similar to African-Americans, for example the Lumbee, Pequot, Seminole, and others.

Under the circumstances it is plausible to suggest that Native-Americans, especially those who have been urbanized, have been encouraged to discriminate against their own through African blood quantum (dark skin). In the outcome, dark-skinned Native-Americans, regardless of their parentage, have been denied legitimate acceptance into the fold of group nationhood. That denial is racist in essence because the Native-American psyche, like others among oppressed populations of color, has been shaped, transformed, and constructed in such a way as to create a hierarchy that validates dominant race category and diminishes the significance of color. The acceptance of light-skinned Native-Americans into the fold as archetypal has resulted in their assimilation through “white” ways, “white” culture, and on occasion “white” racism, as in the case of Chris Simon.

Chris Simon, a professional hockey player and member of the Ojibwa tribe, was fined \$36,585 and suspended three games for apparently directing racial slurs at a “Black” player named Mike Grier (National Hockey League 1997). In

arguably the most “white” and homogeneous of major sports, the behavior of modern-day Native-Americans is analogous to that of their slave-owning ancestors. What is more, Native-Americans have criticized African-Americans for playing on sports teams that degrade them by the use of such mascots as the NFL’s Washington “Red Skins” and the major league baseball team the Cleveland “Indians.” Yet no African-American has ever degraded Native-Americans in their use of mascots for professional sports teams, as their ownership is all but nonexistent. Criticism by Native-Americans of team ownership is all too tacit. This oversight on their part is arguably a manifestation of racism in the 21st century indicated by all people of color (1997).

## **Beauty and Women of Color**

Perhaps the most insidious manifestation of racism in the 21st century is the impact upon women of color, who under colonial influence have internalized beauty ideals that are alien to their dark skin. In Pakistan, women of color aspire to light skin by bleaching themselves. One such woman is a well-educated, 23-year-old named Nasim Jamil (IRIN 2004). While she is young and attractive she is not at all satisfied with the way she looks. “I am not fair enough,” she commented to a local news organization. She further maintains that, “white is best. When you ask Pakistani ladies what their idea of an ideal woman is, they will tell you that she should have fair skin.” This is a fact, according to Fozia Yasmin, who works for the Pakistani nongovernmental organization who reported to the IRIN news organization. At least 50% of women Yasmin has encountered have sought her business for concerns about their skin color. Her company has three practitioners in its employ, who offer workshops at colleges for building self-esteem in the lives of women who dislike their skin color. “You see advertisements for skin creams everywhere you go in this country,” which is not at all uncommon. As women who reside in an Islamic nation they are expected to look their best without exception while simultaneously required to be subservient to men (2004).

“Fair skin is considered an asset in India,” says Rachna Gupta, a 38-year-old, part-time interior designer (Leistikow 2003). Considering this, about once a month she visits her local beauty salon in south Delhi for an application of Jolen Creme Bleach. The package states, “lightens excess dark hair,” but Rachna has it applied to her face to effect lighter skin. “It’s not good for the skin,” she insists, “but I still get it done because I am on the darker side and it makes me feel nice. Aesthetically, it looks nice” (2003).

In Canada, a student named Grace, a 16-year-old woman of color, gets up in the morning and while standing in front of the mirror is hurt by what she sees of herself (Obaahema Network 2002). The image that is reflected in the mirror is one that causes her to be severely depressed. She does not like her kinky-permed-straight African hair, in a world where almost all hair is straight. Her

nose is broad and her lips are thick, in a world where noses are keen and lips are thin. Her dark brown eyes suggest she is ugly and, having no way to escape, resorts to applying bleaching creams to her skin. Each time she resorts to the bleaching creams is an opportunity to escape her ugliness. With each application she can get closer to the idealized light-skinned Western beauty. When the cream wears off, Grace is forced to acknowledge the fact that she is Black. She must admit that she is undesirable to men and only by bleaching to lighten her skin can she be rescued from her fate. She believes her failure to bleach will sentence her to a life of horror and shame in her dark skin (2002).

A similar woman of color named Latoya is a 17-year-old Jamaican who is determined to bleach her skin, which the locals call “brownin” (Obaahema Network 2002). “Brownin” is a Jamaican term used all over the island in reference to Blacks who have light skin. Latoya applies thick layers of bleaching creams to her face despite the fact that some may contain dangerous steroids. She is aware that the warning labels advise her that the practice of bleaching could damage her skin. Without concern she goes about daily bleaching because she is pleased with what she sees of herself. “When I walk on the streets you can hear people say, ‘Hey, check out the ‘brownin.’ It is cool. It looks pretty.” This is what Latoya wants more than anything else. “When you are lighter, people pay more attention to you. It makes you more important” (2002).

Selina Margaret Oppong is a 50-year-old African woman who started bleaching her skin “with the aim to brighten up the skin.” Her counterpart hairstylist, Maama Adwoa, is against the idea of bleaching as a practice for beautifying ugly dark African skin. She contends that fading, as it is called, does little good. African women fade “because they think they might look beautiful.” Another woman named Cecilia Animahh is inclined to be even more frank: “In Ghana,” according to her, “some of the men want bleaching girls.” That being so, it appears that getting a light skin that glows is all but impossible for naturally dark-skinned African women. “I started bleaching two years ago, but stopped because I started developing very bad stretch marks,” according to Diana Gyaamfua, who is 28 years old. Added to the incidence of stretch marks is the fact that those who bleach their skin usually eventually begin to look like they have been sunburned. Their faces develop a brick red and puffy look associated with black, grotesque-looking splotches (Chisholm 2002).

In more extreme reactions to skin bleaching, African women incur increased risks to their health leading to the disruption of internal organ function. “There is suspicion of an increased risk of renal failure as a result of the mercury contained in some of the products that people use for bleaching,” according to African physician, Dr. Doe (Opala 2001). Unfortunately, too many women who bleach do not seek medical help until it is too late. This has spurred an effort on the part of doctors to promote public service announcements in hopes of educating the public to the dangers of bleaching. Doe confides that Maama Adwoa has encountered the “stop bleaching” announcements in the media. “They say we should stop bleaching because of skin cancer and skin disease. But people don’t want to listen because they don’t know . . .” (2001). In the end they

develop such bad skin problems that they can no longer go out into the sun without risking more problems. The extent of such persons in Africa is becoming so widespread that some women are beginning to exercise caution. Unfortunately, other women are applying additional creams in hopes of getting their skin back to its natural state of color. But for women who are uneducated about bleaching and who have relied on Western beauty products, various West African nations continue to object to bleaching. For example, in Gambia, the government has decided to outlaw all skin bleaching products including Bu-Tone, Madonna Cream, Glo-Tone, and the American-made Ambi. The government decided to be lenient on those who were caught with bleached skin. Furthermore, officials in Europe have also begun to take issue with the practice as Denmark has also banned skin bleaching creams and soaps. Danish officials have traveled to a number of local African shops and collected the products. Unfortunately, Tura, a product outlawed by the Danes, is still popular in Ghana and other African countries. While the business community may find these actions extreme, doctors concur that they are not without reason.

Some of these products were banned sometime in the past, but somehow, some of them still find their way onto the local markets where most of these bleachers get their products . . . There, you don't need a prescription to buy anything, Dr. Doe explains (2001).

Thus, despite the absence of skin color issues from the mainstream literature it prevails among the most critical manifestations of racism among people of color who are yet to be counted. Notwithstanding the fact that people of color have filed litigation to combat what they feel is skin color discrimination and regardless of the fact that Black film stars are hurt by color stereotypes on screen and in reality, mainstream scholarship has not found reason to document their strife. In addition, the fact that women of color find it necessary to lighten their skin despite the emotional and health risks it poses is no less racist than when mainstream scholars ignore their strife. Their version is a manifestation of racism in the 21st century and a motivation to increasingly resort to the phenomenon called the Bleaching Syndrome in an effort to rescue themselves.

## **The Bleaching Syndrome**

According to James Baldwin, the root of American difficulty is directly related to skin color (Jones 1966; Robinson & Ward 1995). This would contradict much of the rhetoric of race and suggest skin color as the manifestation of racism in the 21st century. But as this author (1995) notes, the issue of skin color has never been subjected to rigorous debate. Thus, the well-known phenomenon of racism via race has obliged distortions in the truth. It is evident among people of color whereby light-skinned African-Americans such as Dorothy Dandridge commit suicide. African- and Latino-Americans file litigation such as *Walker v. the IRS*. Latino-Americans in both Puerto Rico and on the U.S. mainland have sought



redress through litigation before and after cases were filed by African-Americans. Asian-Americans exposed to the dominant influences of Western culture and its racism have aspired to marital patterns that associate status and marriage potential with skin color. Despite the location of some Native-Americans on reservations, the issue of skin color as a manifestation of racism in the 21st century is no less apparent among them. As a group subjected to a culture of cruelty that parallels the antebellum South, Native-Americans have resorted to authentication of identity by skin color and racist slurs characteristic of "white supremacists." But perhaps the most potent manifestation of racism in the 21st century is the impact of white beauty standards upon women of color who want little more than to be thought of as beautiful. Their pain is constant without the benefit of being acknowledged by mainstream social scientists because issues pertaining to women of color do not rise to a level of significance. Mainstream scholars such as Maslow and Mead have not accounted for people of color in the design and application of their theoretical constructs. Furthermore, scholars of color including Norton and Chestang similarly have been less than enthused about giving an account of racism as it might manifest in the 21st century—a no less racist act, however, subtle and/or unintended. All matters considered necessitate the construction of the Bleaching Syndrome to acknowledge and comprehensively organize what is otherwise obvious.

The genesis of the Bleaching Syndrome is historically rooted in old "beauty" creams and folk preparations used by people of color to make their skin lighter. According to *Webster's Dictionary*, "bleach" is a verb that means to remove color or to make white (Mish 1989). A "syndrome" consists of a grouping of symptoms, i.e.: behaviors that occur in conjunction and make up a recognizable pattern (1989). In combination, historical folklore and English terminology literally define the Bleaching Syndrome. Because of its universality, it is also a metaphor. Its relevance to people of color in the aftermath of colonialism is universal because its application is limitless. However, when applied to people of color, its existence is substantiated in a most dramatic fashion. For, it is they who have had to idealize norms, which are often radically inconsistent with outward appearances (Levine & Padilla 1980).

In addition, the psychological pain they suffer is exacerbated by Western culture's overt and covert forms of racism and general lack of tolerance for its growing diversity. The effort on the part of people of color to assimilate and simultaneously bring about a reduction in psychological pain is made possible by their obsession with the "bleached" ideal, which is manifested in their perception of preferred white norms and rootedness in white culture. No other aspect of self-denigration is more revealing.

The Bleaching Syndrome is a self-denigrating process of orientation that requires a disparity in power. Were it not for the differential in power between people of color and their Western mainstream hosts, the Syndrome could not exist. Much of what the Bleaching Syndrome involves is pathological to people of color and could not otherwise be imposed because it is contrary to their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. The Bleaching Syndrome



may be manifested by people of color in their values, interaction styles, behavioral responses, language use, and so forth. It is a distortion of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman 1990). Such impositions are not only denigrating but are initially painful. The intensity of the pain may subside over time, but the ultimate ill-effects are not lessened.

The Bleaching Syndrome is an essential fact of human experience regardless of where it is acted out or applied. Anywhere in the world, at any point in history, it has been a factor—particularly in post-colonized societies, including the West. As long as less powerful groups must assimilate into more powerful cultures to increase their quality of life, oppressed populations will continue to avail themselves to various forms of self-denigration. To the extent that people of color are willing to engage in self-denigration, the Bleaching Syndrome can become a factor in seemingly unrelated social ills, such as depression, spouse abuse, and poverty. However, not every person of color exhibits the Bleaching Syndrome to stave off the pain. Many diseases among those who succumb can be traced to experiences with Western domination. Social ills are merely one manifestation of their difficulties. It is this fact that Western society has yet to readily acknowledge in the policy or treatment process involving people of color. That is because self-indictment is not an attribute of the powerful. It then makes the Bleaching Syndrome uniquely suited for enabling the exploitation of people of color because its existence is not subject to the social, political, or philosophical indictment of any Western faction.

Focusing on the Bleaching Syndrome in the context of skin color, people of color who migrate to the U.S. are regarded as “minorities” (Kitano 1985). Their most salient feature is their darker skin, which immediately assigns them to an outgroup (Hall 1990). In the U.S., skin color may have an effect upon every phase of life, including job placement, earnings, and most importantly self-concept (Vontress 1970). It is a “master status,” which distinguishes people of color from the lighter-skinned Western mainstream. So potent is this “master status” that it has recently become the grounds for legal action between persons of relative light and dark skin color but of the same ethnic group, i.e.: Latino- and African-Americans (*Morrow v. the IRS* 1990). A resort to legal tactics is an indication that, for people of color, experiences with Western culture have been particularly painful, given the psychologically conflicting ideals of Western society. That is, they have internalized Western norms, but, unlike members of the dominant population, they are prohibited from structural or full assimilation into the population (Rabinowitz 1978). Their willingness to submit reflects an effort to improve their quality of life and live out their dreams. In doing so, people of color may develop a disdain for dark skin because the disdain is culturally reinforced. It is regarded by the various Western institutions as an obstacle, which might otherwise afford them the opportunity to realize their aspirations. However, the contradiction between dark skin and ideal light skin has resulted in psychological pain and their various attempts at self-denigration in order to cope. To minimize the consequences and at the same time enable assimilation, people of color have aspired to light skin despite the

pathology. Furthermore, since the degree of Western assimilation closely correlates with the phenotype of the dominant population, i.e.: light skin, light skin has emerged as one of the most critical prerequisites relative to the Western quality of life (Reuter 1969). To facilitate the process, people of color rely heavily upon various concoctions and social strategies to fit in. Thus, light skin has come to be utilized as a reference point in the decision-making process for whatever life-choices are considered.

Initiating the use of skin color via the Bleaching Syndrome must begin at the academic level. One suggestion is to radically address the contents of the social science literature. While skin color is less relevant to a Eurocentric mainstream for African-Americans and other people of color, it may define the reality of their existential experience (Hall 2003). A cursory review of social science literature such as *Social Work* attests to a lack of attention to skin color as an issue that is significant to people of color, and which could be used as a viable assessment tool. Skin color is in fact relevant across the entire lifespan, as is known by all African-American social workers who are informed of issues significant to people of color. Despite this fact, according to the *Social Work Abstracts* database 1977–2007, a minimum of articles have been published on “skin color” in the last thirty years. In leading social work journals, skin color content has been all but totally omitted in that time period, accommodating Eurocentric frames of reference. In leading textbooks such as *Understanding Human Behavior in the Social Environment* (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman 2006), the issue of skin color as it pertains to people of color is omitted from the index and the 300-plus pages of lexis that comprise the work in toto. The fact that both authors are of European descent cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to their Eurocentric perspective. While they may be cognizant of critical issues, they, as social work authors, determine the priority of what reaches publication. The information they disseminate then determines the realities of what people of color encounter. This results in pathological complications that are otherwise unnecessary (Bogolub 2006). Thus, modifying social work literature to equate the significance of skin color with mainstream Eurocentric content is conducive to the global elimination of racism.

Acknowledging skin color as a manifestation of racism in the future will require a new direction for social workers, psychologists, sociologists, and others. In fact, such a critical issue has been trivialized by the prevalence of racial constructs. The Eurocentric intelligentsia, which via the Bleaching Syndrome includes people of color, would argue that any accusations of trivialization are little more than disputes between one faction trying to bring about an objective conclusion and another opposing group, for reasons of intellectual discourse. Since the beginning of the 21st century, an effort to accommodate diversity intellectually and otherwise has never been more critical for Western civilization. Prior to the emergence of diversity as a valued social concept, scholars did not generally equate skin color with race as it pertains to racism. They disagreed about many things, but they shared a commitment to racial constructs in differentiating one group from another and their potential to be

racist. Subsequently, scholarly agreement on the trivialization of skin color had not been subjected to intellectual debate. Thus, social scientists in general, who might have disagreed with racial constructs as being the foundation of racism, were relegated to the fringes of the academy. What followed is the trivialization of skin color despite its obvious pathological influence, resulting in the Bleaching Syndrome.

The facts about people of color leave no doubt as to the significance of skin color in their lives. In business professions, in the arts, at the university, and the norms of society it is obvious that most in America as well as the entire West are of a similar mindset—among whom, skin color is a less salient issue (Bonila-Silva 1991). Whatever the root of our differentiation, be it race, nationality, socialization, or a simple lack of exposure to skin color issues, in the aftermath social science is rendered less effective.

To better educate the public about the significance of skin color for manifestations of racism in the 21st century will require an acknowledgement of its formidable potential. Skin color as a significant issue has, up to the present, been overlooked on the basis of cultural taboos and maintaining polite professional discourse. Some of the taboos include assumed differences between people, which are little more than myth. By disqualifying these myths from polite conversation, in fact, sustains the difficulty encountered by oppressed populations worldwide.

Acknowledgement of the Bleaching Syndrome minimizes the potential for conflict as introduced by racist motivations. Study of the Bleaching Syndrome has the potential to address current matters of assimilation, such as “passing” and repairing a denigrated self. This will accommodate awareness of a newer more insidious manifestation of racism, which cannot be limited to racial boundaries. It is increasingly evident that, at least among people of color, this racism based on skin color is pertinent to the study of their self-image, their self-esteem, their family dynamics, and so forth. Its acknowledgement is a necessity in a world that is fast becoming not only racially indistinct but ethnically and culturally indistinct as well. This subsequent diversity has facilitated assertions on the part of people of color to then redefine themselves, i.e.: to bleach their skin. Their efforts have validated the importance of skin color as having a direct correlation to their overall well-being. In the aftermath, people of color and the social scientists among them, including Whites, must aspire to more conducive, somatic norms to escape the pathological influences of the Bleaching Syndrome, or risk jeopardizing the 21st century and beyond.

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Racism in the 21st Century

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