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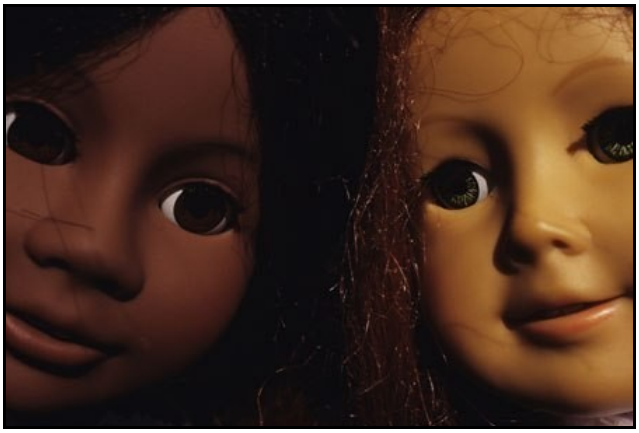

Layers of Blackness

Colourism in the African Diaspora

By Deborah Gabriel

Layers of Blackness: Colourism in the African Diaspora

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Introduction

> Some of us in America, the West Indies and Africa believe that the nearer we approach the white man in colour the greater our social standing and privilege and that we should build up an "aristocracy" based upon caste of colour and not achievement in race. Marcus Garvey, 1923.[1]

Marcus Garvey's observations in 1923 are an apt description of the topic of this book. But why write a book about colourism – a term that is rarely used in public spheres and a topic that is equally rarely discussed in private circles? As a journalist who writes predominantly about issues that impact on the African Diaspora, I am acutely aware that a lot of attention is devoted by community leaders into addressing issues of racism that disadvantage the black community and in fighting for social, economic and political equality that is routinely denied to people of colour. But we never stop to examine the inequalities and prejudices that exist within our communities that are related to our skin colour, which generally regards light skin more favourably than dark complexions. Having researched the subject for a dissertation project, I found that there was an abundance of information on the USA and numerous studies which prove that people with darker skin earn less and have lower educational outcomes that light skinned persons. I was curious to discover whether the same could be said of Britain, whether we too have reached the stage where blackness has become so devalued that the shade of our skin literally controls our present

condition and future prospects. But aside from examining other regions in the African Diaspora, namely the Caribbean and Latin America, I wanted to bring a historical and political perspective to the story. I have written numerous articles about the legacies of chattel enslavement and colonisation that mostly manifest themselves in terms of the institutional racism that people of African descent experience everywhere in the Diaspora and in the continued economic exploitation of the African continent. Colourism fits into that picture as a manifestation of the psychological damage caused by centuries of enslavement which created social hierarchies based on skin colour, that maintain an invisible presence in our psyches.

This book therefore aims to examine the origins of colourism, how it has evolved among people of African descent in the USA, Latin America, Jamaica and Britain and to examine its present impact on the African Diaspora. At the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, the conference president, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, said in his closing statement: 'We have agreed that…the systems of slavery and colonialism had the degrading and debilitating impact on those who are black…'[2] He went on to say that remedial action is necessary 'to correct the legacy of slavery and colonialism and all other forms of racism.' This book takes the link between slavery and racism as a starting point from which to examine colourism as an internalised form of racism.

The first chapter examines the link between colourism, racism and white supremacy, negative associations of blackness in Christian symbolism and in Jewish and Muslim texts. It also looks at historical examples of colourism during pre-European slavery on the African continent. Chapter two examines the beginnings of

colourism in the USA from the 17th century, when enslaved Africans were first shipped to Virginia. It also explores the way in which social hierarchies among enslaved Africans established by slave owners, persisted after emancipation and have continued to exist right up to the present time. Chapter three examines the same scenario in the Caribbean island of Jamaica, where during slavery, the racialised categorisation of individuals according to the degree of whiteness in the skin, determined the social order. It also traces how mulattos (mixed race persons) emerged as the elite class within Jamaican society after emancipation and explores the effect that the denigration of blackness has had on the psyche of dark-skinned Jamaicans. Chapter four examines racism and colourism in the UK and looks at how scientific racism shaped the colonial discourse and influenced the portrayal of people of African descent in popular culture, particularly during the Victorian era. It also examines official statistics to assess whether skin tone has an impact on the educational and employment outcomes of African descendants in the UK and analyses the differences in the way that colourism evolved in the UK, compared with Jamaica and the USA. Chapter five examines the pigmentocracy in Latin America and analyses the myth of raceless societies and the reality of social, economic and political exclusion on the basis of colour. Chapter six examines the human evolution of skin colour and provides both anthropological and biological theories on the black origins of mankind. Chapter seven analyses theories on whiteness and white supremacy and looks at how they function simultaneously within contemporary societies to disadvantage non-white peoples. Chapter eight examines the meaning of blackness and its historical, spiritual and cultural significance. The final chapter summarises the findings of this book.

Deborah Gabriel

As a dark-skinned black woman from the African Diaspora, the issue of colourism is of immense importance to me on a personal level. I do not consider my experience as an African woman to be divorced from the experiences of Africans on the continent or elsewhere in the Diaspora, but inextricably linked. At the age of five during the sixties Black Pride era, my eldest sister, who is some years older than me, told me I was 'young, gifted and black' and should not let anyone convince me otherwise. That positive affirmation of my blackness has carried me throughout my life and served as a shield of resistance against any negativity I encountered as a result of my ebony hue. But I have not been oblivious to the many manifestations of colourism I have witnessed, no matter how subtle, here in the UK, during the twenty months I lived and worked in Jamaica as television producer and freelance writer, or during my journalistic travels to the African continent. But I am ever conscious that colourism is part of the complex and inter-linked history of African peoples. Writing this book has required the piecing together of this jigsaw, to arrive at a broad perspective on how colourism began, how it has evolved and the impact it has on the lives of the African Diaspora today.

The Origins of Colourism

Colourism, shadism, skin tone bias, pigmentocracy and the colour complex, are just a few of the terms used to describe the system of privilege and discrimination based on the degree of lightness in the colour of a person's skin. But whatever label is used, it remains a pernicious, internalised form of racism which involves prejudice, stereotyping and perceptions of beauty among members of the same racial group, whereby light skin is more highly valued than dark skin. It is important to note that colourism, the term the author of this work will use, does not exist and did not evolve independently of the wider system of white supremacy and racism. An apt description of the interdependence between the two is that 'white racism is the fundamental building block of colourism.'[1] White supremacy is often associated with overt displays of racism from certain groups such as neo-Nazi extremists and the Ku Klux Klan; but a more accurate definition is 'the taken-for-granted routine privileging of white interests that goes un-remarked in the political mainstream,' which is both 'structured in domination' and represents 'a form of tacit intentionality on the part of white power holders and policy-makers.'[2]

White supremacy is the process of domination which includes structures, systems, decisions and policies imposed on people of colour by white hegemonies. White privilege occurs as a result of white supremacy through a process which places a higher value on white skin colour. Both early Americans and Europeans were involved in the dehumanisation of African peoples by reducing them to the status of chattel for the purpose of their enslavement

and economic exploitation. In doing so, this brought about a profound change in human relations: 'the white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist subject represent[ed] the standard for human, or the figure of a whole person, and everyone else [was] a fragment.'[3] The chattel enslavement of Africans, commonly referred to as the Transatlantic Slave Trade is generally regarded as a defining period in history, in terms of establishing the foundations of the systematic and globalized domination of African peoples and the perpetuation of ideologies which claimed white superiority. In describing an encounter between Africans and Europeans in the 16th century, the historian Jordan, remarked that Europeans were struck by the colour of the African's skin; and thereafter whenever a traveller referred to Africans they always mentioned their colour. However: 'Well before the encounter with Africans in the sixteenth century, the English had already assigned a variety of negative aesthetic and moral values to the word "black." To be black was to be dirty, ugly, evil, deadly, devilish. To be white was to be clean, beautiful, good, lively and godly…'4

Blackness acquired negative connotations in the European psyche as early as the 3rd century, through the writings of the early Christian Fathers who depicted blackness as being synonymous with sin. The theme of darkness was introduced as the antithesis of spiritual light by Origen, head of the catechetical school in Alexandria. Initially the theme of darkness had nothing to do with skin colour but over time became associated with racial representations. Early Medieval paintings often depicted black devils as Christ's tormentors during the Passion. Religious folklore is littered with negative connotations of blackness from stories of sin turning men black, to stories of black people being born in hell, to tales of

Ormazd and Ahriman – Children of Light and Children of Darkness. According to Greek legend, Phaeton's chariot drew the sun too close to the earth, resulting in the blackening of the faces of the Ethiopians. Biological differences between blacks and whites have been used historically as a justification for imposing negative values on people of colour which in turn are used to justify the subjugation, oppression and economic domination of so-called inferior races by white hegemonies. In the 6th century, the myth of the curse of Ham – son of Noah, who is regarded as progenitor of the black race, was created by European rabbis and Talmudists. In the Christian version of the Bible in Genesis 9:22-5, after the flood has taken place Noah falls into a drunken stupor in his tent, naked. When one of his sons, Ham, discovers him he tells his brothers who bring a cloak and cover Noah's body, being careful not to look at their father's nakedness. When Noah discovers what Ham did he scolds him, saying 'Cursed be Canaan, slave of slaves, shall he be to his brothers.' There is no mention of skin colour.5 But in the Jewish version of Genesis 9: 25-27 in the Babylonian Talmud, Noah says:

> Now I cannot beget the fourth son whose children I would have ordered to serve you and your brothers. Therefore it must be Canaan, your first born, whom they enslave. And since you have disabled me…doing ugly things in blackness of night, Canaan's children shall be born ugly and black! 6

The Talmudic version also suggests that African facial features are a curse from Noah, along with oversized sexual organs:

> …because you twisted your head around to see my nakedness, your grandchildren's hair shall be twisted into kinks and their eyes red; again because your lips jested at my misfortune, theirs shall swell…their male members shall be shamefully elongated! Men of this race are called Negros…7

During the Middle Ages the European representation of the world depicted the three sons of Noah as progenitors of the European, African and Asian continents. In 1593, the production of Iconologia, a book of emblems by Cesare Ripa, portrayed Europe as a Queen with a crown and golden rod, Asia as a woman adorned with gold jewellery carrying spices and incense and Africa as an almost naked woman carrying an elephant's trunk. In the 16th century after Europeans 'discovered' America, it was added as the fourth continent. Early biblical writings made in the 2nd century BCE and 4th century BCE that make reference to Shem, Ham and Japeth depict no links to the continents of Africa, Asia and Europe – because they did not exist at that point in time. This racial and geographical connection was invented by Flavius Josephus, a Hellenized Jew towards the end of the first century of the Christian era. The construction of European representations of the world placed Europe at the centre of the universe and other continents and races as subordinates. The Jewish version of the curse of Ham became popular among Christians in the 16th century, around the time that Europeans began their invasion of the African continent and the chattel enslavement of African peoples, serving as a convenient explanation and justification for their actions.

According to Rudolph Windsor in his study of the history of ancient black races, in ancient times blacks did not classify races

according to skin colour. Instead, national or clan names were the means by which individuals were identified. It is important at this point to note that even though Europeans are most associated with structural and systemized forms of racial domination in the 21st century, some scholars have highlighted the fact that colourism occurred in Africa well before the invasion of the Europeans. Dr Chancellor Williams alludes to colourism and its role in the ethnic transformation of Egypt, which once formed the north-eastern region of ancient Ethiopia. As a result of relentless conquests, Asians came to occupy a quarter of Egypt in the 3rd millennium B.C. The intermixing between Africans and Asians produced a new mixed class, but in the new imposed social order, black Africans, the darkest Egyptians were 'pushed to the bottom of the social, economic and political ladder wherever the Asians and their mulatto offspring gained control.'8 Whilst the sons took the identity of their Asian fathers and were born free, their black African mothers remained enslaved. 'Since the first to be called Egyptians exclusively were half-African and half-Asian, their general hostility to their mothers' race was a social phenomenon that should not be passed over lightly…'9 It becomes clear when looking at these examples of colourism prior to the chattel enslavement of Africans by Europeans, that external forces were largely responsible for its introduction. It is only following the inter-mixing of Asians with Africans, that colour and race entered the dynamics of human relations. The ideology of blackness being synonymous with evil is carried in certain scriptures in The Qur'an:

On the day when some faces will be whitened and some faces will be blackened, say to those whose faces will be blackened:

Did ye reject faith after accepting it? Taste then the penalty for rejecting faith. But those whose faces will be whitened, they will be in God's mercy: therein to dwell.10

Racist attitudes in Islam used to justify the enslavement of Africans including those who had converted to Islam, prompted the 19th century Moroccan historian, Ahmad ibn Khalid al-Nasiri to write a strong denunciation of this practice:

> People have become so inured [so] that generation after generation, that many common folk believe that the reason for being enslaved according to the Holy Law is merely that a man should be black in colour…This, by God's life, is one of the foulest and gravest evils perpetrated upon God's religion… 11

Prior to the advent of European chattel enslavement, much of Africa had already been devastated and destabilised by Arab enslavement. Europeans often claim that Africans were already 'selling themselves' before their arrival, obscuring the crucial fact that many of the Africans in question were arabized. Mixed race African slave trader Tippu Tip, who was conceived through the rape of his black African mother by an Arab slave raider, grew up to be one of the most successful and well known slave traders who was relentless in his pursuit of Africans to kidnap and enslave. But the fact that Tippu Tip was not only Muslim but a mulatto, who identified with his Arab father, rather than his African mother, is of some significance. As a result of hundreds of years of contact with foreigners from Europe, Asia and North Africa, Africans were, as

today, not one shade of black but comprised various gradients from dark to light. As Islam swept across the Eastern and Western regions of Africa, villages came under military control and economic domination and the inter-mixing of Muslim traders with indigenous Africans produced a lighter-skinned group that formed both the elite of African society as well as the slave trading class. It is therefore not a coincidence that the majority of Africans who were enslaved were the darkest black Africans, a fact that is evidenced by the maps of early European explorers, which show that the Western and Central African regions were seen as the domain of Negros, which Europeans saw as distinct from the Arabized North African region. Tippu Tip was well established as a slave merchant by the 1860s, operating to the west of Lake Tanganyika, in the region formerly known as Zaire (modern DR Congo). A study of Tippu Tipp's followers in the Manyema region of eastern Zaire found that the impact of Islamic slave trading by this distinct class had a profound impact on the social order. The rapid growth of the Islamic slave trade required more manpower to transfer slaves to Zanzibar and the coast. What developed was a new class called the Waungwama, some of whom were occasionally slaves. Arabs used to induct them into the most basic tenets of the Islamic faith, teaching them to repeat certain words and phrases. This set them apart from indigenous Africans and was a tactic to divide the Waungwama from the rest of the African population. Young adolescent males were readily enlisted because they were easy to indoctrinate into the ways of Islam and easy to manipulate. There developed a three tier social system which comprised Arabs and their indoctrinated followers, slaves and indigenous Africans. The Waungwama were encouraged to discard their traditional African

culture in terms of clothing, diet and behaviour and to adopt the Islamic way of life. As the author of the study observes: 'Perhaps even more important at least in terms of the new social system, was the turning of these Waungwama against their own kinsmen, The Waungwama seemed to treat most harshly those peoples whom they left to follow the Arabs.'12 The significance of these early examples of skin tone hierarchies in Africa is often overlooked in discussions on colourism. However, they are important in terms of understanding the role that colourism played in the involvement of Africans in European chattel enslavement which resulted in the forced removal of millions of Africans to the New World.

Colourism in the USA

> I have a foolproof method for controlling your black slaves…it will control the slaves for at least 300 years…I take these differences and make them bigger…you must use the dark skin slaves vs. the light skin slaves and the light skin slaves vs. the dark skin slaves. William Lynch 1712[1]

The above extract was taken from a speech by William Lynch, a white slave owner, on the bank of the James River in 1712 and although in recent times its authenticity has been hotly contested, whether or not William Lynch actually existed, the fact remains that among the white plantation owners and colonial administrators, there was a deliberate strategy employed of using skin tone to divide and control enslaved Africans. The origins of colourism in the USA can be traced back to 1607 when the first English colony was established in Jamestown, Virginia. In 1619, the Dutch brought the first shipment of Africans to Chesapeake Bay from Santo Domingo where they had been enslaved on sugar plantations. Some of them spoke English and had even converted to Christianity which gave them the right to freedom after serving a specified term as a slave. Race mixing between whites, Africans and Native Americans was widespread during this period, which resulted in 'a kaleidoscope of skin tones and features.'[2] In 1669, the State of Virginia ruled that any non-Christian servant arriving by ship would be enslaved for life and by 1700 slavery was well established. The fate of Africans was further sealed in 1705 when the Virginia General Assembly ruled that all Negros, mulattos and Indian slaves were to be classed as

property, 'in the same category as livestock and household furniture, wagons and goods.'[3]

Because of earlier race-mixing before slavery became firmly established, many mulattos born to free coloured parents lived as free individuals, as did those who were born to white mothers. But they were mostly treated as social pariahs. The State of Virginia, determined to keep the races apart, introduced the 'one drop rule' in 1705, which declared any person with the slightest trace of African ancestry to be black. In Virginia and Maryland this rule was firmly adhered to, but in the Deep South, including South Carolina, mulattos occupied the middle stratum of society, with some of them even passing for white. Colourism also manifested itself in the division of slave labour, with mulattos being assigned domestic work, whilst dark-skinned slaves toiled in the fields. Skin colour was used as a mechanism to divide enslaved Africans, thereby minimising the likelihood of slave rebellions. As long as there was disunity and suspicion among the slaves the environment was safer for the whites, who were vastly outnumbered by the blacks.

If slavery proved divisive among black Americans, then post slavery, colourism served to intensify those divisions. Before the American Civil War, slave masters occasionally paid for their mulatto offspring to have an education and sometimes even assisted in their escape from slavery. Some sent their children overseas to be educated in Europe, who, upon their return to the USA took up positions as lawyers, doctors and teachers. After the Civil War, the number of emancipated blacks increased, as those who had served on the side of the British became free upon their surrender, whilst other slaves escaped during the war. A small minority were also freed by their masters when the USA declared its independence

from England. With the huge increase in the number of free, dark-skinned blacks, the mulattos moved swiftly to distance themselves from the newly freed and darker black population. Gradually, free dark-skinned blacks were excluded from every realm of society by light-skinned mulattos, who were keen to retain their position in society - below whites, but above dark skinned members of the black population. During this time, many preparatory schools, colleges, business networks, churches and other institutions earned the nickname 'blue vein,' denoting that only an individual who was light enough for their veins to show through their skin were admitted. Paper bag tests were also used as a mechanism for excluding anyone whose skin was darker. In the early 19th century, de facto segregation was in existence in Washington D.C among the black population, including places of worship. The St. Thomas Church earned a reputation for colour elitism because the vast majority of its worshippers were mulattos. The Nineteenth Street Baptist Church was thought to exclude dark-skinned blacks by introducing a 'comb test' at the entrance to the church. Those whose hair was considered to be too 'nappy' (kinky or frizzy, as is usually the case with natural, African hair) were refused entry. Mulatto owned barber shops in West Washington refused to shave or cut the hair of dark-skinned men, catering only for light-skinned black men and whites.

In the mid 1900s, Dunbar High School was considered to be the best high school for black students and as such attracted children from black middle class families in Washington. Several former students of Dunbar suggested that dark-skinned students had to be extremely intelligent to be accepted at the school, whereas light-skinned students with average grades were readily admitted. At

Howard University, light-skinned administrators were often believed to give preferential treatment 'to those who resembled themselves.'4 Howard University was not the only higher education institution to exclude dark-skinned blacks. Biased admission policies in favour of light-skinned blacks were also practiced at many other universities including Fisk University in Nashville, Atlanta University in Georgia and Wilberforce University in Ohio. Dark-skinned students were largely directed towards vocational education and industrial training and many of them ended up at the Tuskegee Institute of Alabama, established by Booker T Washington in 1881. By the turn of the century, the mulatto class had clearly emerged as leaders of the black community. In 1903, WEB Dubois made his famous call for 'the talented tenth,' advocating for an elite class of Negros – 10 per cent of the black population, to lead and uplift the black masses. He compiled a list of 21 persons whom he considered worthy of the task, of whom 20 were mulattos. His idea was published in the second chapter of a book by African American scholars called The Negro Problem. Around this time, Jamaican born Marcus Garvey was fast becoming 'the apostle of pure blackness,' as he called for black pride among African Americans. Garvey criticised Dubois, suggesting he was trying to be 'everything else but a Negro,' to which Dubois retaliated by calling Garvey 'fat, black and ugly.'5 By the 1950s, the domination of the black middle class by mulattos was beginning to decline. However, studies conducted in the 1960s showed that skin tone still influenced educational outcomes, employability and social status.

A 2006 study conducted at the Harvard Law School, which examined national data compiled in the late 1990s, found that whilst lighter skin among black Americans does appear to influence

educational outcomes, it has a lesser impact on wages. It seems that the perception of preferential outcomes for light-skinned African Americans is more pronounced than the reality. Women with fair skin average 1.7 years more education than dark-skinned women, while for men the differential is 1.3 years greater for those with light skin. In the labour market, women with very dark skin are especially disadvantaged, with the employment rate being 15-20 per cent lower than that of light- skinned women. But there is limited evidence that skin tone affects wages - in fact women with a medium skin tone had the lowest average wage. One of the ways in which skin tone can influence economic outcomes is through access to mainstream educational and work environments. The study showed that women with lighter skin were less likely to attend all-black schools whilst light-skinned men are less likely to work for a predominantly black organisation. Jobs within mainstream organisations tend to pay higher wages, whilst predominantly black businesses pay less. Whilst studies show that there is a link between skin tone and socio-economic status, it is not easy to determine whether this is due to the historical advantage that lighter-skinned individuals gain through being born into the wealthier and highly-educated mulatto class, or whether it is through the daily experiences of discrimination and disadvantage that dark-skinned blacks experience. Parents of African American children are often more caring and supportive towards light-skinned offspring than they are towards children with dark skin. Marita Golden, a professional dark-skinned black American, wrote a book about her experience of colourism. Her account of her childhood provides a perfect example of how negative associations with dark skin are perpetuated through the generations, in her description of how '…for my mother, darkness, blackness, in

its own way was a kind of disease…'7 Golden's mother made her feel inadequate and unattractive because of her dark skin, even suggesting that she should marry a light-skinned husband for the sake of her children.

Children who suffer from negative racial experiences through parenting as a consequence of their skin tone can develop psychological problems and low self-esteem, it has been suggested. 'A child who grows up feeling hopeless, helpless and unlovable might later become a parent who feels hopeless, helpless and unlovable, thus perpetuating a discouraging cycle.'8 In Thurman's classic novel on colourism: The Blacker the Berry, Emma Lou, the main character who was socialised by her mother to have negative feelings about her own dark skin as well as dark-skinned people generally; realises during her teens, that she had internalised these colour and class-based discriminations which had influenced her own prejudiced behaviour towards people of her complexion: 'It was clear to her at last that she had exercised the same discrimination against her men and the people she wished for friends that they had exercised against her...'9

Maddox and Gray carried out research to examine the role that skin tone plays in the perception and representation of Africans Americans. They found that both blacks and whites perceived a cultural distinction between light and dark skinned blacks. In both groups, negative stereotypes of blacks were associated with those with dark skin, including aggressiveness, lack of intelligence, and lack of education. Dark skin was also associated with poverty and unattractiveness. These perceptions may be a consequence of representations of darker-skinned black men and women in the popular media, where men are portrayed as gangsters and criminals

and women as welfare-dependent mothers Furthermore, these stereotypes may explain why many employers believe that dark-skinned African American men are 'violent, uncooperative, dishonest and unstable' and are therefore less likely to employ them.10 Colourism has more pronounced effects on the self-esteem of dark-skinned black women than it has on dark-skinned men. Combined with racism and sexism, colourism functions as 'a triple threat that lowers self-esteem and feelings of competence among dark black women.'11 Women are socialised to be more concerned with their appearance and are more likely to feel that being judged attractive is important. However, dark-skinned black women with high incomes who are successful have equally high levels of self-esteem as light-skinned women. Sexism and racism work together to transform beauty into a form of social capital. Because white skin is personified as the beauty ideal, lighter skinned women are seen as more beautiful than darker skinned women. Beauty functions as social capital because it has an impact on the type of job a woman can secure as well as the social and economic status of a marriage partner. Lighter skinned women can get well-paying jobs and marry wealthy husbands to a greater extent than dark-skinned women, because in general most men buy into the European beauty standard. As Hunter argues: 'Because beauty is a racist construct, many women of colour are not viewed as beautiful by mainstream society and thus do not possess beauty as a form of capital.'12

Dark-skinned black women are further disadvantaged by the fact that the European or Anglicised standard of beauty which has become a universal standard, privileges whiteness through the degradation of blackness. This is because white beauty is not judged in isolation but in relation to blackness, over which it claims superi-

ority. White beauty is therefore 'based on the racist assumption of black ugliness.'13 The mainstream media are particularly culpable in perpetuating colourism by using predominantly light-skinned black models that have European facial features, but it is not only the mainstream media who adopt this practice. Black magazines are equally at fault. Early studies of American magazine Ebony, showed that the black models that graced its pages were invariably light-skinned. This trend was only halted temporarily during the seventies, following the Black Power Movement of the mid 1960s and the accompanying Black is Beautiful, campaign. But by the eighties Ebony had abandoned its use of dark-skinned models and returned to using those with light skin. A 1994 study found that black people portrayed in advertisements were less black than blacks found in editorial photographs. The assumption being made was that black people in editorial photographs represent reality – a more accurate representation of the skin tones of African Americans. Clearly, the use of predominantly light-skinned models in advertising is a distortion of reality. The light-skinned black women used in advertisements in the vast majority of cases were several shades lighter than black males, confirming the view that black women suffer more than black men through colourism by being excluded from advertisements, sending the message that black is not beautiful in women. Golden argues that it is questionable as to whether a 'legitimate' black standard of beauty that is inspired by white female beauty can be created. She claims that African Americans have been socialised into accepting light skin and long, straight hair as the defining standards of black beauty and as a consequence: 'The European standard of beauty reigns and rules the world…'14 White beauty is big business and white beauty sells. Globalisation, multina-

tional media organisations and the new world economy help to maintain US cultural imperialism by exporting images of white beauty, white affluence and white success whilst at the same time exporting negative images of black people as criminals or entertainers. But because internalised racism is so firmly entrenched in the consciousness of black people, they are often unaware that they have a colour complex. This explains why many black men claim that in preferring the look of lighter-skinned women, it is simply a question of individual taste.

Ronald Hall argues that skin bleaching among African Americans is a response to cultural domination and is carried out as a means of assimilating into American society. He suggests that African Americans have internalised the ideals of white dominated American society and seek participation in the American Dream by becoming whiter. As studies provide evidence that black Americans with lighter skin earn more and are better educated, they feel that by lightening their skin they can improve their future outcomes in this respect. Because dark skin is equated with poverty, low class and ugliness, African Americans develop an aversion towards dark skin, replicating dominant cultural values. The aversion towards blackness is also the outward manifestations of a 'psychic conflict' which occurs as a result of never being fully accepted into mainstream American society, despite the adoption of the dominant cultural values. That light skin is deemed to be the most attractive among African American females is a clear sign of the impact of cultural domination, Hall asserts. As Windsor observed in his study on the ancient black races, skin colour was not the means of identification among black peoples, but shared culture, language and traditions. Hall similarly argues that a preference for lighter skin as a symbol of

attractiveness is not endemic to Africans, but is a consequence of cultural domination.

Schiller's theory on cultural imperialism focused on global power structures in the international communications industry and the relationship between multinational corporations and dominant western nations. However, cultural imperialism theories are primarily centred on the dominating influence of western nations on societies within developing countries, rather than the effect of cultural domination on minority communities within western states. Nonetheless theories on cultural imperialism serve to demonstrate the power and modus operandi of white hegemonies. Schiller himself argued that cultural imperialism was merely the evolution of colonialism which transformed the source of exploitation and adapted to a modern system of control. He astutely contested that the colonial machine, far from being disabled is alive and well in a new form. Neo-colonialism functions in the modern world through 'economic, political and cultural dependencies.'15 Sreberny-Mohammadi in tackling the issue of cultural imperialism argued that developing countries suffered irreparable cultural damage as a consequence of slavery and colonisation well in advance of globalisation. She therefore examined the cultural impact of imperialism on former colonised nations in the developing world. She made an interesting observation concerning the pervasive nature of Christian missionaries, who carried an explicit cultural message, which was the concept of Africa as a primitive and backward society which needed to be 'redeemed' and 'civilised' through the Christian faith. But the most interesting aspect of her investigation was on black American missionary activity in Africa, which she argues demonstrates the degree to which imperialism impacts on an individual's

social consciousness. Sreberny-Mohammadi argues that whilst black churches in America functioned as centres of social, political and community activity and places where resistance to racial discrimination was debated, planned and organised; black Americans had nonetheless internalised negative views about Africa and took these values abroad on their own missions. Although they may have had shared experienced of racial discrimination and oppression, they did not identify with their African counterparts and had little respect for indigenous African culture. They had been socialised into western culture and therefore shared the imperialist view that Africans needed to be brought under western paternal influence. Sreberny-Mohammadi's study provides evidence of the degree to which African Americans had internalised the negative views of Africans held by the American white hegemony in the 20th century. Their ideas about Africa and Africans had been so profoundly shaped by the dominant white culture that black Americans were placing themselves in the role of the white paternal imperialists and embarking on their own 'civilising' missions to Africa. This goes some way to explaining why, as Hall asserts, some African Americans are keen to find a means of escape from their blackness and may resort to skin bleaching to achieve this: As Fanon wrote: 'The colonised is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle.'16

Skin Tone Hierarchies in Jamaica

Colourism exists everywhere in the African Diaspora where slavery or colonisation brought with it the imposition of western ideology and white supremacy. But if the systems and structures under which slavery operated can be judged to have contributed to colourism in the USA, then this is equally true of the British Caribbean. Although Britain established ten territories in the West Indies, Jamaica was the largest. The first English settlers to arrive on the island were part of Cromwell's expedition in 1655. In 1661, the island was turned into a royal colony and by 1662 the white population stood at 3653. Many immigrants came to Jamaica from England and Barbados during this period and by 1680 the white population had risen to around 10,000. It is important to note that the Spanish invaded Jamaica in 1509 and totally decimated the indigenous Arawak peoples before being defeated by the British in 1655, after which they began to establish a network of sugar plantations. Slavery was considered to be of vital importance to the British Empire.

Indians were the first non-white peoples to be used as slaves in the British Caribbean. Between 1647 and 1650 in Barbados, slaves were imported from the mainland and other islands. The British frequently raided the Mosquito Coast of Central America, seizing Indians from their settlements, until the practice was eventually outlawed in 1741, when an Act was passed declaring this illegal. Jamaica had the largest demand for slaves out of all the British colonies. The labour of enslaved Africans in Jamaica accounted for 42 per cent of sugar imported into Britain. Between 1655 and 1808,

3432 voyages from Africa shipped 915,204 Africans to Jamaica, who were captured from the Bight of Biafra, the Gold Coast, West Central Africa and the Bight of Benin. Between a quarter and a half of all enslaved Africans arriving in Jamaica died within three years of arrival. The construct of race served the purpose of establishing the foundations of white supremacy in Jamaica. Biological difference – skin colour was used to impose the assumed positive attributes of whiteness and negative attributes of blackness. This construct was then used to form the basis of white domination and oppression of African peoples:

> In this manner, a racist social system is developed on an ongoing basis by a colonial elite – i.e., an external group that migrates to another society, conquers the local population and imports other race groups for economic-labour purposes, and develops a racist economic and social structure to ensure its super ordinate position.[1]

Both by custom and law anyone of European ancestry was born into a system of privilege and high social and economic status. Skin colour in Jamaica represented enforced labour and denial of human rights if you were black and extraordinary wealth and carefree leisure, if you were white. Whites regarded blacks as innately inferior and ideally suited for the task of physically demanding labour. It was not uncommon for a Jamaican household to have forty slaves. Miscegenation between Africans and whites, often through rape, produced a new racial group as in the USA – the mulattos. As with the division of slave labour in the US, mulattos

were assigned domestic work, whilst dark-skinned slaves carried out field work:

> '…it was widely held that slaves of colour should not be employed in field labour and that they should be given preference in the training of tradesman, "the flower of the slave population." They were also given preference in the appointment of headmen, except that the "drivers" of the field slaves were generally black. The resulting hierarchy of supervisory roles and occupational statuses contained within it the elements of coercion and the incentives fundamental to the maximisation of the slaves' labour output.'[2]

Manumission did not occur on a frequent basis in the British Caribbean, but when it did, was usually in favour of mulatto concubines and mulatto children who were often provided with an education. In the latter part of the 18th century, many white slave owners left Jamaica for England to live in luxury off the wealth created from enslaved Africans, as a result of high sugar prices. But when the decline in revenue from the plantations occurred and plantation owners began to sink into debt, some of them left the colonies. This movement off the island by the whites left a void in the social hierarchy, which mulattos came to fill. Many of them were offspring of the plantation owners and their concubines and some had been educated in Europe. In the 18th century, individuals were categorised by skin colour and degrees of whiteness, as black, mulatto, terceroon, quadroon, mustee, musteefino and white. The child of a white and a mustee, musteefino or quadroon was regarded as English and 'lightness, valued as a promise of higher status,

became valued for itself, and status became equated with lightness.'[3] The same social hierarchy based on skin tone that characterised Jamaican life during enslavement also operated during the emancipation period. The protection of the offspring of whites was written into the original colonial charters, which gave certain privileges to mulattos, such as a higher social status than dark-skinned blacks. Concubinage in Jamaica was not only sanctioned but almost encouraged. The historian Edward Long, wrote in Volume II of The History of Jamaica:

> He who should presume to shew any displeasure against such a thing as simple fornication, would for his pains be accounted a simple blockhead; since not one in twenty can be persuaded, that there is either sin; or shame in cohabiting with his slave.4

Many mulattos inherited property from their white ancestors, sometimes when there were no legitimate heirs to white estates, as illegitimate heirs, they were granted an inheritance and began to acquire great wealth. During a House of Commons debate in 1827, Dr Lushington reported several wealthy individuals among the mulatto population who had inherited estates worth £120,000, £150,000, £200,000 and £250,000. Mulattos entered the professions, trades and administrative jobs mostly in urban areas and before apprenticeships began, made up the majority of voters in Kingston and three of the Parishes. After the decline of the planter class, the roles of mulattos increased. Many became educated, acquired property in urban areas and inter-married. John Bigelow, owner and editor of the New York Post reported after a visit to

Jamaica in 1850 that both revenue officers and the majority of police officers were mulattos. Inter-marriage was a common feature between whites and mulattos, whose families regularly moved in the same social circles.

In the middle of the last century illiteracy rates for children of seven years and older stood at 98.6 per cent for blacks, compared with 88.9 per cent for mulattos, 87.5 for Chinese, 97.7 for East Indians and 38.8 per cent for whites. A survey in 1950 and 1951 into the complexion of professionals – doctors and lawyers, found that a large portion was light skinned: 'who by the attainment of professional status have validated an elite identity.'5 It should be noted that despite the distinctions made between dark-skinned blacks and mulattos which had served to foster divisions between the two groups, after the Abolition Act was passed in 1807, mulattos were not granted full citizenship rights. Like free dark skinned blacks they were prohibited from giving evidence against a white person, had to carry their manumission papers with them everywhere they went and were denied the right to vote. They petitioned the Jamaica Assembly in 1823 asking for the removal of restrictions on their citizenship rights, but the Jamaica Assembly refused. Three years later Jews were granted full rights, but mulattos continued to be denied. After this point they joined with the rest of the black population to bolster their cause. This led to the partial emancipation of black Jamaicans in 1833 and full emancipation by 1838.

However, class distinctions based on skin colour have been hard to eradicate. When Jamaica gained independence from the British Empire in 1962, it merely represented the transfer of power from the white colonial elite to the local black bourgeoisie, but economic power remained with the local white settler class and a

large proportion of mulattos. As a result of this legacy, Jamaican society is characterised by a 'struggle' between 'middle and upper class, British-educated Jamaicans who subscribe to the "superiority" of British culture and…a people's culture whose defiance of the "super-culture" is expressed most artfully in the reggae music of Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff and Don Drummond.'6 Marcus Garvey lamented in 1916, that despite 78 years having passed since emancipation, Jamaica had not managed to produce a credible black leader. In a letter he wrote that year to Booker T Washington's successor at the Tuskegee Institute, Garvey shared his concerns about the widespread impact of colourism on Jamaican society:

> The whites claim superiority, as is done all over the world, and, unlike other parts, the coloured, who ancestrally are the illegitimate off-springs of black and white, claim a positive superiority over the blacks. They train themselves to believe that in the slightest shade the coloured man is above the black man and so it runs right up to white… 7

Like John Bigelow 66 years earlier, Garvey observed that mulattos dominated the administrative and professional occupations. To Garvey, blacks in Jamaica inherited a damaged psychology as a result of being enslaved and colonised by whites, which resulted in the self-negation of black identity and black interests:

> Whenever a black man enters the professions, he per force, thinks from a white and coloured mind… Whenever the black man gets money and education he thinks himself white and coloured, and he wants a white and coloured wife,

and he will spend his all to get this; much to his eternal misery.8

Contemporary scholars have observed, like Garvey, that one of the most damaging legacies of slavery was its impact on the psyche of Jamaican people. This is often manifested through a condition called Acquired Anti-Own Race Syndrome (AAORS), which is defined as 'the philosophy and psychology of assumed European world cultural superiority expressed by African peoples in their relations with each other and in perceiving and operating in the world.'9 It is characterised by self-denial and self-negation, factors associated with colourism. In his article published in the African Peoples Review, Hutton, a lecturer in political philosophy and culture at the University of the West Indies in Mona; alludes to a novel by Alice Spinner published in 1984 called A Study in Colour, in which the characters were real people interviewed by the author. One of these characters, Justina, spoke of her desire for a light-skinned child as opposed to a dark-skinned child, who she felt would 'bring shame on her,'10 She confessed that she could not find it in her heart to love a dark-skinned child and revealed her ambition to marry a light-skinned man to improve her social status. But it is not just skin tone that colour-conscious Jamaicans are obsessed with. 'Texture and length of hair are linked to the racist notion of femininity and feminine beauty.'11 AAORS (and by association colourism) have a negative impact on Jamaican society because of the disunity it fosters amongst black people:

The notion that anything tu blak noh gud (anything too black is not good) is often used to justify or to predict the failure of

any individual, group or indeed the entire race of Africans, or to argue against uniting or working for common goals with people of African descent.12

Derogatory insults like 'blak like sin' and 'blak and ugly' are evidence that AAORS pervades 'the sub-consciousness of masses of African people in Jamaica and manifests itself in attitudes that are like second nature to them.'13 Skin bleaching is often cited as evidence of the psychological damage caused by slavery and colonisation. Children are told by their mothers that white is superior to black and that dark skin, along with natural hair, is bad. In a letter to the Jamaica Observer in 2001, a reader, a young black woman wrote: 'I realise why my friends used to spend so much time bleaching….fairer is better in our country, the guys say so, dancehall [music] says so, beauty contests say so, my friends say so!'14 The media and popular culture play a part in reinforcing the notion that light skin equates with beauty and superiority through the images that they portray of success, which is most often of light skinned persons.

Donna McFarlane, Director and Curator of Liberty Hall: The Legacy of Marcus Garvey, suggests that skin bleaching is popular, once again among men as well as women, particularly in Jamaica's inner-city communities. She said: 'It's not just that so many of our children are bleaching but their mothers and their fathers are bleaching. It is really widespread.' She argues that the preference for lighter skin in Jamaican society is a legacy of African chattel enslavement, as demonising Africa 'permeated the whole of the education system for the 400 years that we were enslaved and the 100 or so years after slavery that we were under colonial rule.' She ruefully admitted that during teaching sessions when she asks

children whether they are black or whether they are African very few hands go up, but all hands go up when asked if they are brown or if they are Jamaican. In Mc Farlane's view:

> The images of lighter skinned people seen on music videos and on advertisement boards promote the message that lighter skin is more beautiful and desirable to the opposite sex, and a prerequisite for access to the "good life". People don't want to be white, they just want to be light skinned as they perceive it as a means of social and economic upliftment. It was not until the 1960's that dark-skinned Jamaicans were allowed to work in banks, government offices, or in the front offices of private businesses. In spite of the gains of the Black Power era, the mantra of I am Black and I am Proud has receded into the background only to be replaced, once again, by bleaching creams. 15

A recent study by Ferguson and Cramer examined levels of self-esteem among Jamaican children in rural and urban districts. The authors note the similarities in the way that colourism manifests itself in both black North American and Jamaican societies. Both societies have, they argue 'a shared negative attitude toward dark skin and a culturally valued preference for white/fair skin…'16 The study focused on Jamaican children of nursery and primary school age (between three and six years old); when awareness of race and ethnicity is just beginning to develop. The study was carried out in the Parish of St. Andrew, which in the urban area boasts highly reputed schools, two universities (there are only three in Jamaica) and large upper and middle class communities. In stark contrast, the eastern rural area of St. Andrew comprises a small farming community, smaller schools and a greater proportion of dark-skinned

people among the rural population. Researchers asked the sample of children to describe their actual skin colour and to state their ideal skin colour – that is, the colour they would prefer to be. The findings revealed that children who self-identified as white had higher levels of self-esteem than those who self-identified as black. A clear link was established between social stigma related to dark skin and self-esteem. However, overall, the rural Jamaican children showed higher levels of self-esteem than the privileged urban children. But light-skinned rural children had greater levels of self-esteem than dark-skinned rural children. This finding has led the authors to conclude that stigmatised children compare themselves with other children in their own group (rural community) rather than those outside the group (in the urban community). The findings confirm that a stigma against dark skin in Jamaica does exist and impacts the self-esteem of young children, who show a definite preference for light/white skin. Ferguson and Cramer argue that the solution is not to encourage children to self-identify as black, because this could be psychologically damaging for children living in a society in which whiteness is the cultural ideal. Their solution is therefore that 'The Jamaican society as a whole must move towards a black skin colour preference if it hopes to assist its children in doing so.'17 On 4 February 2007, former Jamaican Prime Minister Edward Seaga, writing in the Jamaica Gleaner about the legacies of slavery, stated:

> There is no greater sin of slavery than the systematic brain washing that occurred for over 300 years that instilled a belief in the second class character of the people of African de-

scent….This distorted image received by people of African descent continues to haunt their psyche until today as an enduring sin of slavery.18

Racism and Colourism in the UK

The embryonic period of racism in the UK can be attributed to theories of scientific racism claiming the superiority of the white race, which first emerged in the 18th century. Carl Von Linnaeus was the first to divide the human family on the basis of skin colour in 1735. He assigned moral and intellectual characteristics to the white, black, red and yellow races which were profoundly racist. Whilst whites were said to be 'gentle and governed by laws' blacks were classified as 'cunning lazy, lustful and careless,' amongst other things. In 1775, a German anatomist, Blumenbach, published his classification of races, which he divided into five groups: Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, (Native) American and Malayan. He claimed that the white race – whom he called Caucasian, was the original and superior race, the others occurring through an evolutionary and degenerative process. Many of the ideologies that both underpinned the construct of whiteness and denigrated blackness occurred during the intellectual movement known as the Age of Enlightenment. With its self-appointed declaration as the Age of Reason, the Enlightenment demarcated clear boundaries between Europeans as possessors of intellect, morality and beauty and Africans as primitive, backward and ugly. In doing so it created the concept of European racial superiority. For example, the Philosopher David Hume, in his 1748 essay entitled: Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations wrote in a footnote:

I am apt to suspect the Negros and in general all other species of men…to be naturally inferior to the whites. There was never

a civilised nation of any other complexion than white….There are Negro slaves dispersed all over Europe, of whom none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity.[1]

Immnauel Kant, the German philosopher strove to make a correlation between whiteness and intellect and therefore attested that blackness was the antithesis of reason. He is credited with saying: 'This fellow was quite black…a clear proof that what he said was stupid,'[2] The Enlightenment was a close knit movement with philosophers often using each other to back up their theories. In 1764, in an essay entitled: Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime, Kant claimed that Africans are incapable of aesthetic and moral feeling which he referred to the beautiful and sublime:

> The Negros of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from other countries, although many of them have been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality.[3]

The first encyclopaedia, called the Encyclopaedie, created by French philosophers published between 1751 to 1752 had this entry for Negre (Negro): 'If one moves further away from the Equator towards the Antarctic, the black skin becomes lighter, but the ugliness remains: one finds there this same wicked people that

inhabits the African Meridian.'4 Little had changed by 1798 when the American edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica was released. Under Negro it stated:

> Vices the most notorious seem to be the portion of this unhappy race: idleness, treachery, revenge, cruelty, impudence, stealing, lying, profanity, debauchery, nastiness and intemperance are said to have extinguished the principles of natural law and to have silenced the reproofs of conscience.5

Hegel, another German philosopher, like Hume and Kant was a key proponent of European racist dogma. However, he went a step further than claiming Africans are intellectually and morally inferior to Europeans. Hegel claimed that Africans are less than human, because they are perpetually in a child-like state of consciousness where they are unaware of their existence as human beings. This is an extract from Lectures on the Philosophy of World History 1822-8:

The characteristic feature of the Negros is that their consciousness has not yet reached an awareness of any substantial objectivity – for example, of God or the law – in which the will of man could participate and in which he could become aware of his own being…All our observations of African man show him as living in a state of savagery and barbarism and he remains in this state to the present day…nothing consonant with humanity is to be found on his character.6

Hegel went on to describe this 'primitive' condition as 'a state of animaility.'7 These ideologies played a fundamental role in

shaping perceptions of people of African descent amongst the educated classes and they continued through to the Victorian era, shaping the discourse on slavery and colonialism. The denigration of blackness was at its height during the Victorian era. Even though the Emancipation Act was passed in 1833, 'In the British mind he was still mentally, morally and physically a slave.'8 From the 1790s to the 1840s, ironically the most detrimental literature on Africans which had a profound influence on English society came from the abolitionists. Their portrayals of Africans were often derogatory, even if this was not the intention. Africans were often portrayed as 'simple savages' who need to be civilised.9 Thomas Fowell Buxton, leader of the British Anti-slavery Movement after William Wilberforce, initiated the Niger Expedition of 1841 to spread commerce and Christianity throughout the continent. He wrote in graphic detail about ritual human practices of some nation groups as being representative of the entire continent: 'Such atrocious deeds as have been detailed in the foregoing pages, keep the African population in a state of callous barbarity, which can only be effectually counteracted by Christian civilisation'10. These ideas conveniently served as moral justification for the colonisation of Africa by reinforcing the notion of Africans as primitive pagans who could only be saved through the civilizing missions of Europeans.

The myth of the Dark Continent, a label which has survived well into the 21st century, has its origins in the Victorian era. Various explorers wrote accounts of their expeditions to Africa, which they portrayed as an ungodly place inhabited by savages and barbarians, which became best sellers. These included David Livingstone's Missionary Travels (1857), Joseph Thompson's To the Central African Lakes and Back (1881) and Henry Stanley's In

Darkest Africa. (1890) The myth was part of a wider discourse on the role of the British Empire 'shaped by political and economic pressures and also by a psychology of blaming the victim through which Europeans projected many of their own darkest impulses onto Africans.'11

One of the most popular pastimes during the Victorian era was the theatre, where before the arrival of the mass media and universal education, functioned as the primary medium through which ideas were transmitted. The earliest black characters tended to focus on the evil Moor. For example, plays in the 16th and 17th century featuring Moors, including: The Battle of Alcazar in 1589, Lust's Dominion in 1600, All's Lost by Lust in 1619 and Abdelazer in 1677 all carried the message that black is synonymous with evil :

> They were given over almost wholly to monstrous evil and driven by overwhelming lust. Lust was not only a moral sin in itself but also a threat to the foundations of Christian civilised society. Outside the moral framework altogether, these black figures are linked explicitly to the devil, their black skins standing in for their evil natures.12

Because blackness and dark skin was such a strong a signifier of evil, light skin was initially problematic for black actors. For example, The play The Africans: or, War Love and Duty at the Haymarket in 1809, followed the passing of the Abolition Act in 1807 when the mood was somewhat sentimental. The main character Selico, who is due to be married to the daughter of an Islamic priest, takes his mother to safety at a house of prayer when the wedding feast threatens to be interrupted by slave raiders. When he

returns the town is in flames, the residents have been sold into slavery and his bride to be has been murdered. He plans to sell himself into slavery to provide for his mother but is unsuccessful: '…for he is considered too light-skinned to be truly hardy – a reflection of the belief that the dark-skinned African is closest to the brute and so most fitted for the brutish work of slavery.'13 In 1825, the light-skinned American actor Ira Aldridge appeared in a West Indian Melodrama called The Revolt of Surinam or A Slave's Revenge. A Times reviewer is scathing in his criticism, but makes reference to his skin tone: '…the reviewer once again turns the attack onto Aldridge's skin colour. He is not black enough to fit the preconception.'14 By 1836, new racial attitudes rooted in Jim Crow laws on segregation made their way to England from across the Atlantic:

> It was a trend that incorporated a new conception of the black individual as no longer the vengeful African of yesteryear but a comic black American slave, grotesque in appearance, manners and language. Its effect was to render the black as a species apart; it was a conception that quickly rooted itself into popular culture and continued to grow there.15

As the influence of the anti-slavery movement permeated the theatre, plays required serious dramatic treatment to capture the mood. But due to the prior degradation of the black character and its association with evil, the mulatto, nearest in colour to whites, were called upon to represent the acceptable face of the black race. The mulatto character brought to the stage both a black representation of beauty and of morality. Young, beautiful women who were

presented to the audience as octoroons or quadroons – denoting part European ancestry, often played the role of innocent characters that were blissfully unaware that any part of their genetic make-up was of African origin. Any hopes of a noble stage character for the dark-skinned black, was finally lost when the Uncle Tom character was introduced through the book of the same name. Uncle Tom plays made their way into the theatre and they had a specific agenda: '…to retain the stereotype of the black-skinned character as foolish or ineffectual and also retain the stress on the indignity of slavery as visited on the more intelligent and mixed race character.'16 In the story, the main characters George and Eliza Harris are attractive, light-skinned persons, whilst by contrast, the dark-skinned Tom and his wife Chloe, are comic characters who speak in a strange slave dialect, while George and Eliza speak almost perfect English.

Theories on race continued into the 19th century. Gobineau's 1854 Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races had a profound influence on notions of race during this era, which centred on his notion of biological differences between the races. He wrote: 'The black variety is the lowest and lies at the bottom of the ladder. The animal character lent to its basic form imposes its destiny from the moment of conception.'17 By the 20th century the political landscape of Britain was still largely shaped by the colonial discourse 100 years earlier, where the 'civilising missions' of the anti- slavery movement had served as a justification for its colonial invasions of the African continent. The British Empire therefore stood firmly as the rock of civilization in the minds of the British public.

Anti-black racism was firmly entrenched in British society before the large-scale migration of African descendants from the

former British Caribbean colonies in the 1950s. But coming from countries where social hierarchies based on skin colour existed, it was not only dreams for a better life that some immigrants brought with them, but their own form of prejudice which valued light skin and derided blackness. Dami Akinusi, producer of a television documentary on skin bleaching confessed to trying to bleach her own skin as a teenager. 'I was branded too dark by people that I met at the time [and] contemplated was I too dark to be successful? Too dark to be pretty? All of these different things.'18 Describing the documentary as a 'personal journey' she stated that it was only in her adult life that she developed positive self-perception about being dark-skinned. Counsellor and psychotherapist Vernon De Maynard argues that many of the negative perceptions that dark-skinned people have of themselves are gained through socialisation within their own communities, 'in black households where children are subjected to the devaluation of their own skin colour as expressed by family and friends and people the child meets during the course of their everyday life.' As a result of living in a society where European features are more revered, some black women turn to skin bleaching as they come to resent their own physical features and black skin. Writing in The Times, ex architect, model and writer Ben Arogundade said that 'an undisclosed caste system' exists in the modelling world. White female models occupy the top strata whilst black females and black males occupy the bottom two rungs. The insecurities exemplified by skin bleaching are symptoms of the process in which people of African descent internalise white values on beauty, which is unsurprising, argues Arogundade, given that we live 'in a culture which has historically derided blackness.'19 a As a result, African representations of beauty in terms of dark skin,

natural hair and strong facial features, have 'been almost tuned out of our beauty consciousness.' Most black models, actresses and singers widely regarded as beautiful such as Beyoncé Knowles, Halle Berry, Naomi Campbell and Tyra Banks, to name a few, are light-skinned or mixed race with European features such as straight noses and high cheekbones. By contrast, Sudanese model Alek Wek is very dark skinned with very short, natural hair, a broad nose and full lips -very strong African facial features. When Wek appeared on the Oprah Winfrey show, the host confided: 'If you had been on the cover [of a magazine] when I was growing up, I would have had a different concept of who I was.' 20 It is unsurprising, therefore, that Arogundade sees Alek Wek 'as the face of the 20th century, as her looks … go against Western values about beauty.'21

Whilst in the US, studies continue to provide evidence that skin tone does have an impact on social status, educational and employment outcomes, can the same be said of the UK? Are there particular factors which might have a bearing on the way in which colourism manifests itself in Britain? In observing the history of colourism in the US and the Caribbean, many people might assume that light-skinned blacks enjoy social advantages over those with dark skin in the UK as well, even if the reality may be entirely different. Whilst no specific studies have been carried out there is some evidence to support the hypothesis that no such advantages exist. Dr Mark Christian, a Liverpool born black, argued that 'In relation to the Africans of mixed origin in Liverpool, there have certainly been no social privileges awarded to them over their darker complexioned sisters and brothers.'22 The term 'Liverpool born black' refers to the unique experience of a black community which includes a significant population of mixed race persons whose

presence in Liverpool has existed for over 100 years. Professor Stephen Small, also a Liverpool born black, states that when African Caribbeans migrated to the UK in the 1950s from Jamaica, Trinidad, St. Lucia and other islands; they came with the assumption that light skinned blacks received preferential treatment, but for Liverpool born blacks their experience was the opposite: 'Our experience in Liverpool is one of being despised, vilified and oppressed as light-skinned people.'23 The similarities in the experience of Liverpool born blacks and other black communities in the UK were characterised by high unemployment, racism and tensions with the police, at the height of the Sus law. In the 1940s and 1950s, unemployment in Liverpool was twice the national average. Conflicts broke out in Toxteth, Liverpool in 1981 24 and in Brixton during the same year.25 In explaining why light-skinned blacks in Liverpool shared the same experiences of racism and social disadvantage as other black populations in the UK, Dr Christian argues:

In terms of the black experience in Liverpool, the division in relation to colour is not the major criteria for social privilege. White supremacy in the history of Liverpool is the unwritten mode of social franchise. If you are white, you are alright; if you are black, you are supposed to stand back. There is no privilege in between, only added racism. 26

The experience of Liverpool born blacks may well provide a vital clue in determining whether mixed race and by definition light-skinned blacks, fare better than those with dark skin within the areas of education and employment. Whilst there is no data in the UK which categorises people on the basis of skin tone, it is possible to

analyse data for the mixed race population for the purpose of a crude comparison with the mulatto classes of the Caribbean and USA, who have clearly shown historical and contemporary social and economic advantages over the black populations. The mixed race population in the UK for persons of African ancestry stands at 316,000 of which 237,000 are of African Caribbean/white heritage and 79,000 are of African/white heritage. Mixed race persons with African Ancestry account for 47 per cent of the entire mixed race population. The total black population stands at 1.1 million. At secondary level, pupils of African Caribbean/white heritage number 23,507 and make up 0.7 per cent of the secondary school population, whilst pupils of African/white heritage number 5,382 and account for 0.2 per cent of the secondary school population. The attainment of both groups at secondary level at key stage 4 is below the national average and the main barriers to achievement are similar to those experienced by African Caribbean pupils.

They are both more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds, experience institutional racism through low teacher expectations and to be excluded from school. Low teacher expectation is often based 'on a stereotypical view of the fragmented home backgrounds and "confused" identities of white/black Caribbean pupils.'27 However, close examination of Key stage 4 results for 2003 in terms of the number of 5 or more good GCSE/ GNVQs (graded between A-C), reveal that there are marginal differences in attainment in favour of pupils of mixed heritage. For example, 46.8 per cent of African Caribbean/white girls achieved 5 good GCSE's/GNVQs compared with 40.3 per cent of African Caribbean girls. Whilst for boys the rates were 32.3 per cent for African Caribbean/white boys compared with 25.1 per cent of African

Caribbean boys. Figures are higher for African groups with 55.1 per cent of African/white girls achieving 5 or more good GCSEs/GNVQs compared with 46.8 per cent of African girls. For boys the rates were 39.5 per cent for African/white boys compared with 34.1 per cent of African boys. It should be noted that within different local education authorities, the results are variable. For example, in LEA 5, where the percentage of pupils achieving 5 good GCSEs/GNVQs was 38.6 per cent, African Caribbean boys and African Caribbean/white boys achieved exactly the same results – 33.3 per cent. But this is still below the national average for all boys which is 45.5 per cent. But what do these results mean in terms of colourism and whether it plays a role in the educational outcomes of black children? One interesting pattern that emerges is that in each ethnic group –mixed race pupils outperform black pupils, at least on a national level. Mixed African/white pupils did better than African pupils and mixed African Caribbean/white pupils did better than African Caribbean pupils. But in examining the group as a whole, African girls had the same attainment level as African Caribbean/white girls and African boys had a higher attainment than mixed African Caribbean/white boys. From these results and given the fact that there is only a very marginal difference between the educational attainment of mixed race pupils and black pupils, the logical conclusion would be that deep rooted problems experienced by African Caribbean pupils are shared by mixed African/Caribbean/white pupils. If African pupils have higher educational outcomes than certain pupils of mixed race with light skin, then colourism is not a contributory factor, but socialisation and experiences of institutional racism and social disadvantage are the primary forces at work here. This theory is borne out by the level of

school exclusions. In 2002/2003 the permanent exclusion rate for African Caribbean/white pupils was 2.9 per 1000 and for African/white pupils 2.6 per 1000. This compares to 1.3 per 1000 for African pupils and 3.7 for African Caribbean pupils. In this instance, African pupils were less excluded than mixed race pupils and African Caribbean pupils. Tikly et al suggest that 'the similarity between the exclusion rates for black Caribbean, white/black Caribbean and white/black African suggests common experiences.'28

There is no data for mixed race students within higher education that separates those with African ancestry from other mixed race groups, so higher education has not been analysed in depth for the purpose of examining colourism within the African Diaspora. However, a cursory inspection of data on degree attainment shows greater participation rates in higher education among the African and African Caribbean population (61 per cent) than of the mixed population as a whole (40 per cent). However, in terms of degree attainment, a lower percentage of African Caribbeans obtained a 1st class degree (2.9 per cent) compared with Africans (3.3 per cent) but this was significantly lower than those from the mixed race population (9.4 per cent). But given the large number of different ethnicities within the mixed race category it is impossible to determine the performance of mixed race students of African ancestry.

Similar difficulties arise when looking at data on employment when the mixed race population form one category instead of being separated by ancestry. However, the Commission for Racial Equality's Ethnicity and Employment report which examines employment patterns for 2004, shows that the unemployment rate for the mixed race population as a whole stands at 10 per cent,

compared with 11.8 per cent for African Caribbeans and 13 per cent for Africans. Both Africans and people of mixed heritage were equally employed in the business, financial and private sector industries (25 per cent), compared with 22 per cent of African Caribbeans. Much higher numbers of Africans (37 per cent) and African Caribbeans (40 per cent) worked in public administration, education and social care, compared with 29 per cent of the mixed race population. Finally, the average Median earnings per hour for people over 18 in 2004 showed that people of mixed heritage earned £7.60 per hour, compared with the black population which earned £7.33 per hour. But again, what does the data tell us about colourism? Given the marginal differences between people of mixed heritage and the African and African Caribbean groups, there is very little evidence to suggest that people with a lighter complexion fare any better in employment that those with darker skin, a crude assumption made on the premise that the persons within the mixed race population are likely to have lighter complexions than persons within the black population, as a whole. It is also important to note that the mixed race group in these statistics include people who are not of African ancestry and it is possible that mixed race persons of African ancestry may have more similar experiences to African and African Caribbeans if they were examined separately. Once again, the data appears to suggest that mixed race persons share similar experiences to Africans and African Caribbeans in the employment arena as they do within the education system.

Based on the analysis of data available, it is reasonable to conclude on examining the experiences of the African Diaspora in the UK, that persons with light skin are not in an elite class within the UK. Light-skinned individuals of African descent do not show

significantly higher levels of attainment within education, or higher levels of employment or a marked difference in earnings than their darker skinned counterparts. Therefore, light skin among persons of African descent does not confer any marked social or economic advantage. The fundamental difference between Africans in the Diaspora residing in Jamaica and the USA, compared with those living in the UK, is the historical experience of European chattel enslavement. In Jamaica and the USA, enslaved Africans were shipped to the New World where social hierarchies based on skin tone were established by the colonial administrations. This divisive strategy fostered disunity among the enslaved black populations whilst at the same time reinforcing the ideology of white supremacy. Blacks closest to Europeans by virtue of having some white ancestry in their genes, were considered to be superior to dark- skinned Africans. Post slavery, these divisions persisted and the mulatto classes sometimes gained economic advantages through being allowed an education and by occasionally inheriting money or property from white relatives. In both societies, the mulatto classes emerged as the elite after emancipation.

By contrast, race relations in the UK have evolved very differently to Jamaica and the USA. Although there have always been small populations of Africans in Britain throughout history, black people only became 'problematic' to British society following large scale migration from former British colonies in the 1950s, including those who came from Africa and the Caribbean with the hope of better prospects. Members of the former Commonwealth were needed to help rebuild Britain after WWII and were invited to come to the 'Mother Country.' Faced with a large influx of black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean, the reaction of white policy-

makers was to treat the non-white population as a homogenous group, in stark contrast to the skin tone hierarchies they created in their former colonies. This is supported by the experience of the Liverpool born black community, which comprise a significant number of mixed race persons, but who shared similar experiences of social and economic disadvantage with blacks in other parts of the UK. As a result of this policy, people of African descent have for decades been regarded by whites as black, whether they are of mixed African ancestry or not. This is evidenced by the fact that a category was only created for mixed race people in the Census in 2001. However, shared experiences of racial disadvantage have sometimes been obscured by the perception among some people of African descent that light-skinned blacks are treated more favourably within British society and are regarded as being more attractive. Some of these ideas occurred through the socialisation of children whose parents were born in the Caribbean and who had been accustomed to social hierarchies based on skin tone. But perceptions are also based on images of beauty portrayed in the media and popular culture, which clearly promotes the European standard of beauty as the ideal. It is clear from these findings that although colourism does not exist on the same scale within the UK, as it does in the USA and the Caribbean, it still undermines the efforts of the African Diaspora to free itself from the shackles of the past. Colourism, as an internalised form of racism, is undeniably a legacy of the dehumanising process of chattel enslavement and colonisation.

Pigmentocracy in Latin America

Pigmentocracy in Latin America – that is the social groupings of individuals based on race and colour, was established by the Spanish colonial rulers in the 17th century. Although the primary determinant was skin colour, other qualities included texture and colour of hair, thickness or thinness of lips, the structure of the nose, width of the face, eye colour and body structure. Whites were referred to as Spaniards or Euro-mestizos, Africans as Afro-mestizos and Indians (the indigenous group) as Indo-Mestizos. The offspring of a black and a white was a mulatto and the offspring of whites and Indians known as Zambos. But as miscegenation took place frequently throwing early classification into disarray, the colour line became blurred and other racial classifications sprung up that had a greater emphasis on actual skin tone. There were white, light and dark mulattos known as mulatos, blancos, claros and moriscos. In order to prevent the lightest of the mulattos with blond hair or coloured eyes from passing for white, their owners branded them on the forehead or the shoulders. Later classification included moral judgements such as scorn, contempt, mockery, sneer and jest, while other names had animalistic connotations, such as mulatto, which is a hybrid of a horse and a mule. In Mexico around 1538, many black slaves sought unions with Indian women partly because of a shortage of black females, because enslaved African males were brought to Mexico at the ratio of 3:1. But a strong motivating factor for a black male slave choosing a female Indian partner was because the children of an Indian mother were born free, because Indian women were considered free subjects. At-

tempts to persuade the King to revoke the freedom of slave children born to Indian mothers met with stern resistance from the Council of Indies.

> The children of Negro men and Indian women continued to be born free and the mixing was the principal source of the Afromestizo population of the colonial period, a population which remained under the protection of the Native mother and inherited the indigenous cultural patterns.[1]

By the 18th century the number of Afro and Indian mestizos rose enormously and individuals crossed from one category to another as they were able. Eventually by the end of the colonial period, racial classifications were just names and did not necessarily reflect the reality of a person's ancestry. In Mexico it was decided that all citizens who were neither Indians nor dark skinned could be considered as Spaniards. Many mulattos took the opportunity to 'cross over' into the European category to escape the social and economic life of subordination and discrimination that came with being classed as black. For example, in Cordoba in Argentina, black women whether free or enslaved, were prohibited from wearing fine imported clothes. Women who refused to dress according to their social position could be undressed, whipped and burned, as was the case of a mulatto woman, according to Concolorcorvo in 1944. In 1570 in Latin America there were around 140,000 whites, 262,000 blacks and mulattos and 12 million Indians. By 1825 the racial composition had changed to 13 ½ million whites, 12 million blacks and mulattos and less than 9 million Indians. The reason for the dramatic rise in the number of whites is believed to be through light

skinned persons of mixed ancestry crossing the colour line and the whitening of the population through the introduction of white immigrants from Europe. 'The African did not disappear but has been so absorbed and diluted as to not be visible.'[2] The elite of Latin America's pigmentocracy is today is represented by the direct descendants of the Spanish colonial rulers and aristocrats who are white and well-educated whilst at the bottom are dark-skinned Afro descendants. Those of mixed ancestry – mestizos, occupy the middle stratum of this colour coded hierarchy.

Afro descendants in Latin America are socially, economically and institutionally marginalised as a consequence of slavery and colonisation and on account of their black skin. Colour-coded racial discrimination is the major factor contributing to poverty among Afro descendants, who are absent from the political arena and have no voice with which to participate in the creation or implementation of policies that affect their lives. 150 million people of African descent live in Latin America and account for about one third of the total population. They reside mainly in the rural areas which are blighted by poor infrastructure, few schools and health facilities, low income and high unemployment. Afro descendants in Latin America account for 40 per cent of the poor in the region. Studies carried out by the Inter American Development Bank (IDB) in 2001 found that in Brazil, the allocation of school places was determined by skin colour, which resulted in a large number of Afro descendants being denied access to education. Brazil has the largest number of Afro descendants in the whole of Latin America, which is estimated at 150 million – 20 million less than Nigeria, the most populous country on the African continent. In Colombia, 98 per cent of the

black population are without basic public utilities, compared with just 6 per cent of whites. These examples are representative of the experiences of Afro descendants throughout the region. The notion of white supremacy has characterised the style of governance in Latin America by white hegemonies for over 500 years, since the expulsion of the black Moors from the Iberian peninsular in 1492 which aimed to eradicate Africans and blacks from the colonies:

> Spanish American societies have consciously and unconsciously continued this process and sought to support emblaquecimiento or 'whitening' of their populations. This is an elevation of all things white and European, whilst denigrating and excluding other non-white cultures and races.3

Governments of all Latin American countries took drastic steps to whiten the black population by encouraging white European immigration. Descendants of former enslaved Africans make up the majority of the Afro descendant communities and the oppression and discrimination they experience on a daily basis are a direct consequence of European chattel enslavement. People of African descent were denied full rights of citizenship through being prohibited from owning property, from receiving education, from having banking facilities and from obtaining jobs in the government, church or the military. Today, these prohibitions may not be legally enforced but exclusion still remains on a de facto basis. However, Latin American governments have sought to disguise this type of racial oppression and segregation through the careful construction of a mythical raceless society. Only in recent years have Censuses started to include racial monitoring. Many people of African

descent, particularly those of mixed ancestry, are reluctant to identify themselves as Afro descendants because of the social stigma and the history of discrimination, even though 'a large percentage of the mainstream Latin American population could claim African ancestry.'4 Dark-skinned people in Latin America are subjected to racial insults on a regular basis and are often referred to by their colour rather than their names. Today there are still more than 20 different terms used to describe people of African descent including trigeno (wheat coloured); Moreno (brown); Zambo (half indigenous); pardo, mulatto (mixed race – white & African) and preto (dark). A 2002 study by IDB revealed a link between skin colour, education and employment. Whilst education is essential to gain access to high paying jobs, discriminatory practices work against Afro descendants. Poverty restricts most from being able to obtain a good quality education – the majority of Afro descendants do not progress further than primary education, they are therefore confined to low paying jobs. There are very few black skinned people in top management jobs in any industry sector. At the recruitment stage advertisements for female jobs often stipulate that the applicant must be of good appearance or ask for women with nice faces, which is a discreet way of saying only light-skinned persons or whites need apply. A World Bank study compiled in 2003 entitled: Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean: Breaking With History, found that the richest tenth of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean earn 48 per cent of the total income of the region, whilst the poorest tenth earn only 1.6 per cent. According to the study, race is the single most important factor that determines social outcomes. The research focused on Brazil, Guyana, Guatemala, Bolivia, Chile, Mexico and Peru. Across the

board, indigenous men earn 36-65 per cent less than whites, whilst in Brazil, men and women of African descent earn 45 per cent of the wages of whites. But the figures disguise the fact that many of the privileged members of Latin American countries racialised and self-classified as white are of African ancestry and are able to escape poverty, exclusion and discrimination because they have light skin and less obvious African racial features. The report makes no reference to colourism nor examines its impact on the social and economic disparities imposed by skin colour.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, in making a comparison between race relations in the USA and Latin America, argues that the USA is turning into a pigmentocracy, because the population is becoming darker, with non-whites accounting for a third of the population. Predictions on future populations suggest that by 2050, ethnic minorities may become the majority, as indeed they are on a global scale. According to Bonilla-Silva, the solution is to adopt the strategy used by Latin American governments and 'whiten' the population. This involves establishing a 'tri-racial' system of social stratification which comprises whites at the top of the hierarchy – Euro-Americans, Europeans, assimilated white Latinos, some multi-racials (mixed race) and a few people of Asian origin. The second tier, known as 'honorary' whites consists of white middle class Latinos, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, Asian Indians, Chinese Americans and Arab Americans. Predictably, those at the bottom of the social ladder are 'collective blacks' which include Filipinos, Vietnamese, dark skinned and poor Latinos, African Americans and blacks, Caribbean and African immigrants and Native Americans who live on reservations. This is effectively a replica of the colour-coded system which governs every aspect of

life in Latin America. Bonilla-Silva states that whilst race mixing is actively encouraged in Latin America, this is only a strategy for whitening the population and there are strict rules under which it is permitted. Sexual unions are only encouraged between white men and black or Indian women and the men involved are usually poor or working class. The whitening of the population is the ultimate goal, not to promote racial harmony. For this reason: 'racial mixing…in no way challenged white supremacy in colonial or post-colonial Latin America.'5 Another consequence of the tri-racial racial system is that dark skinned members of the population are driven to trade their blackness, their very humanity, for social mobility by marrying lighter, thereby weakening the collective strength and identity of black people. By buying into to the colour hierarchy system, instead of seeking to disable and dismantle it, those who trade on colour are helping to maintain and reinforce the system of white supremacy.

In a lecture given at UCLA in May 2003, Dr Carlos Moore, an Afro-descendant born in Cuba argued that whilst on the surface Latin America may appear to be comprised of colourless societies, in reality race and colour are the most pervasive and dominant features of life. According to Dr Moore, Latin America's pigmentocracy has its origins in the Arab invasion of the Iberian Peninsula (modern Spain and Portugal) in 711 CE. Dr Moore lived in Egypt for a year at the age of 21 and was astonished at the striking similarities with Cuba in terms of the role that colour played in the social and political spheres and the attitude towards dark-skinned people. Following this revelation he began to study race relations in Arab countries. He has written two books Castro, the Blacks and Africa (1989) and African Presence in the Americas (1996) According to

Dr Carlos, Spain and Portugal learnt much from the Arab enslavement of African peoples, which was a way of life for them. He states that four million Africans were captured and brought to the Iberian Peninsular. When Europeans defeated the Arabs, they simply adopted the Arab model of slavery. Dr Moore also believes that the middle stratum of the colour-coded hierarchy occupied by mulattos is viewed as a rung on the social ladder that leads upwards. Essentially, the mulatto class is viewed as a social buffer that enables whites to avoid contact with blacks and dark-skinned people. The first slaves brought to Latin America were not transported from Africa, but were enslaved Africans who had already been brought to the Iberian Peninsula by the Arabs and who spoke Spanish and Portuguese. He observed a major difference between the attitude on race mixing held by North Americans and that held by Latin American governments: 'In the US one drop of black blood makes someone black. In Latin America one drop of white blood makes you white.' 6 Writing in the New York Post in February of this year, Tego Calderon, the Puerto Rican rapper spoke out against the stigma of being black in Latin America and the discrimination and oppression experienced by Latin Americans:

We are treated like second class citizens. They tell blacks in Latin America that we are better off than US blacks or Africans and that we have it better here, but it's a false sense of being. Because here, it's worse. They have raised us to be ashamed of our blackness. It's in the language too. Take the word denigrate - denigrar- which is to be less than a Negro.7

Pigmentocracy in Latin America

The historical evolution of colourism in Latin America clearly demonstrates a link, yet again to the enslavement of African peoples, first by the Arabs and then by the Europeans in the sixteenth century, coinciding with the expansion of European chattel enslavement in the Caribbean and North America. In comparison with the other African Diasporas that this book has examined, as with both North America and Jamaica, the introduction of enslaved Africans brought with it the categorisation of human beings on the basis of colour, but for Africans, being dark skinned meant that you were not human, humanity was denied. In common with colonial rule in Jamaica, miscegenation was actively encouraged. But whilst white plantation owners were unable to repress their lustfulness for black women, it was still largely a form of social control and a perfunctory means of reproducing slaves. But crucially, the colour-coded social structure remained rigid and intact – being born a mulatto carried certain privileges, but crossing over into the white class was not one of them. In Latin America, those with light skin and less obvious facial features were allowed a more fluid identity which carried with it the opportunity to self-identify as white, but it must be clear that there were no benign motivations behind this strategy. Faced with a dark-skinned black majority, Latin American governments realised that conferring white privilege among acceptably light-skinned members of society would imbue them with undivided loyalty to white values and ideals and remove the threat of resistance and challenge to the system of white supremacy. Their strategy has succeeded. Whilst there has been a growing body of resistance to white supremacy among Afro-descendants, it is a far cry from the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement in the USA. But there are valid reasons for this. The US

Administration denied black Americans civil rights through Jim Crow laws that they were compelled to fight for to win the right to be treated as equal under the US Constitution. By contrast, Latin American governments have not relied on legislation to deny equal rights to Afro descendants. Oppression has been far more subtle. Instead of denying human rights through laws, Latin American governments do so on the basis of colour, whilst simultaneously promoting a false sense of nationalism. By heaping privileges upon white and light members of society and denying these privileges largely to Afro-descendants, this has fuelled the desire for those with light skin and a willingness to discard their blackness like garbage to leave their black communities and join the ranks of the social climbers. Despite the de facto segregation that occurred in some parts of the USA among the black population, the one drop rule in some respects helped to maintain a fragile but effective solidarity. Many mulattos were some of the most outspoken leaders against racism, such as WEB Dubois, Frederick Douglas, to name but two. In Latin America, the option to identify as white, removed that sense of shared oppression that kept a sense of unity and spirit of resistance amongst black Americans. Bonilla-Silva has argued that North America is heading in this direction and the studies on colourism which reveal the large extent to which skin colour determines educational, social and economic outcomes would seem to suggest some validity to Bonilla-Silva's claims.

Human Evolution and Skin Colour

This book has so far established that colourism is an internalised form of racism which places dark skin at the bottom of a colour-coded hierarchy that is part of a wider system of white supremacy. It has examined the role that slavery and colonisation played in establishing social hierarchies based on skin colour, which left an indelible imprint on the psyche of people of African descent and has led to the perpetuation of colourism within the African Diaspora. Yet this aversion to blackness is often based on ignorance about the origins of mankind. Anthropologists believe that the first members of the human family were black-skinned. Recent maps depicting the geographical distribution of skin colour show that dark-skinned people are found near the equator and lighter skinned people near the Poles. Furthermore, there are more dark-skinned people in the Southern Hemisphere than the Northern Hemisphere. Other data points to females having lighter complexions than men in all populations that have been studied. One of the problems that presents when looking at the skin colour of indigenous populations is that anthropologists generally use the year 1500 as a cut-off point in determining indigenous populations from migrant ones. Although this accounts for the onset of European colonisation, it fails to take account of large scale Bantu expansion in Africa that occurred before 1500. Jablonski argues that European colonisation has 'fundamentally altered the human landscape established in prehistoric times.'[1] However, a consistent pattern emerges in terms of the geographical distribution of skin colour, which is that darker skins are more often found in the tropical regions than in moderate

climates. But within the African continent, which has the largest equatorial land mass, there is great diversity of skin colours, with the darkest colours occurring in open grasslands, rather than in the lowest latitudes.

In their analysis of the human evolution of skin, Zihlman and Cohn begin with their theory on the evolution of the human species from the hominids – members of the hominidae (great apes) family, which includes humans. Fossil finds between two and four million years old were located in several areas across eastern and southern Africa. Hominids lost body hair and developed dark skin pigmentation to protect their skin from the ultra violet rays of the sun. At the same time, the reduction of body hair allowed the development of sweat glands, as sweating cools the body down. Archaeological evidence suggests that the hominids were vegetarians who survived on a diet of plant foods. A distinguishing characteristic of the hominids in their evolution from the great apes is their bipedal ability – standing, walking and running, which marked the beginning of a new life mode that depended on dwelling on the ground and travelling around. Anatomical studies indicate that human skin is very similar to that of African apes and molecular evidence points to the ape-human evolution occurring between 4 and 8 million years ago. The great variation in human skin colour is due to the amount of pigment melanin in the epidermis (outer layer of skin). Pigment-producing cells known as melanocytes that are found in the basal layer of the epidermis, produce cell structures called organelles and it is on these structures that melanin is formed through a series of chemical reactions. Melanosomes are cell structures that contain melanin. In light skin they are confined to the basal layer of the skin, but in dark skin they are dispersed

throughout the epidermis. Among modern human populations there is no difference in the number of melanocytes between people of different skin shades. Darker skin is caused by a greater number of melanosomes, which are larger and degrade more slowly. Dark skin provides greater protection from the sun, protects against the reduction of important cell chemicals such as folic acid and is less easily irritated than light skin. According to Zihlman and Cohn, dark skin became widespread among hominids as it was important for their survival. They also posit that skin pigmentations could have altered several times during human evolution in response to changes in latitude, diet, body covering and shelter and this could have happened relatively quickly in biological terms, within a few thousand years or less.

Charles Finch, a protégé of Cheikh Anta Diop, was urged by his mentor to recognise the importance in the realm of human history of investigating the origins of mankind and acknowledges that the wisdom of Diop drove him to realise the interdependence between pre-history and history. Despite the fact that in 1871, Charles Darwin stated that the search for the origins of mankind should begin in Africa, European anthropologists and palaeontologists could never conceive that Africa could be the cradle of humanity. But the first discovery of a human fossil aged around one million years was made in 1924 in Taung, South Africa by a student of Raymond Dart, an anatomy lecturer at the University of Witswatersrand. Dart named the fossil Australopithecus africanus. Another find in 1974 in Ethiopia called 'Lucy' and a 'family' of 13 was dated at 3.5 million years and named Australopithecus afarensis. This is the ancestor of all later hominids, including the Homo genus, which includes modern man. The arrival of Australopithecus afarensis was

the beginning of mankind. They were upright walkers who occupied open savannah and woodland and lived in hunter-gatherer societies. Like the pygmies of central Africa they are short in stature and do not grow to a height greater than 3 ½ to 5 feet. Their present day descendants are believed to be the San community, also known as the Bushmen of Botswana. Finch argues that:

> The earliest humans had black skins; in the environment in which they evolved it could not have been otherwise…had the original human population not developed this melanin cover as black skin, it would be reasonable to surmise that there would be no human race today.[2]

A study in 2005 carried out by a cancer research team at Penn State University found that that key to the human genetics of skin colour are present in the genetic information of the zebrafish. The researchers found that a single human gene accounts for 30 per cent of the difference in skin colour between Africans and Europeans. The colour difference is caused by two versions of a single gene called SLC24A5. One version is common among people of African descent causing more melanin – the dark pigment, to be present in skin cells. The other version of the gene is common among people of European descent and causes less melanin in skin cells. The research points to the earliest humans living in Africa carrying the first version of SLC24A5. Biologists believe that humans began to migrate out of Africa between 55,000 and 85,000 years ago, with some of them ending up in the colder climates of Europe. At some point either before or after the migration, it is believed that a mutation of the gene occurred in one of the ancestors of modern

Europeans causing less melanin to be present in the skin of individuals carrying the mutated gene. The African version of the gene provides greater protection from the UV rays of the sun, whilst allowing enough penetration for the body to absorb vitamin D, which needs ultraviolet light to be absorbed into the body. Vitamin D helps the body to absorb calcium, which is essential for maintaining healthy bones. The European version of SLC24A5 has less melanin which allows higher levels of UV rays to penetrate the skin, facilitating the absorption of Vitamin D, which would otherwise be hard for the body to produce in darker and cooler climates. It had already been established before the discovery of SLC24A5 that the earliest human remains found in Europe in eastern Russia around 50,000 years ago were of the Africoid type. The book: African Presence in Early Europe, also examines the theory that the genes that give black skin colour mutated to enable the body to produce vitamin D in the darker and cooler European climate. There is also a hypothesis as to why the facial structures of the African changed. At the time of the African migration to Europe, this was the ice age where sheets of ice that were a mile thick, covered the landscape. The broader nose of the original black African became narrower to more efficiently warm the cold air. The early European African is named as the Africoid Grimaldi and credited not only with being the first humans to occupy Europe but conquerors of the Neanderthals – the human sub-species that existed during the prehistoric age. It is argued that the genetic mutation of skin colour and facial composition from black to white was critical for human survival in this region. Furthermore, a prolonged period of isolation in this region facilitated the development of the original black African into a distinct sub-species known as the Caucasoid or Caucasian. As

Finch notes 'It is fair to say that the change in skin colour more than any other single feature put its stamp on the individual races.'[3]

It is precisely because of this ignorance of the black origins of mankind, that individuals racialised at white, sub-consciously or otherwise, often buy into the notion of black inferiority, which sows the seeds of racism. Simon Dyson, is a sociologist at De Montfort University in Leicester with a special interest in sickle cell. He recently conducted research based on the experiences of African and African Caribbean sickle cell counsellors. Although sickle cell is predominantly found in people of African descent, the genes associated with it are inherited separately from the genes that are associated with skin colour. It is therefore possible to have blonde hair, blue eyes and white skin and either be a carrier of sickle cell, or contract sickle cell anaemia. During the research the counsellors told Dyson that in some cases, mothers who come for counselling who regard themselves as white English become very hostile and unleash their racial prejudices when they discover they have the sickle cell gene. Some have complained of feeling 'polluted' and 'contaminated' because they see sickle cell as a black disease, Dyson said. 'They say that it can't be true, I don't have any black blood in me.' It even led to one woman storming home to fetch her husband, her in-laws and her own parents and dragging them back to the counsellor's office to prove they have no blacks in the family: "look, all my family going back generations are white. We can't possibly have this sickle cell gene,"'4 the woman had said. In many instances, the only way to restore calm is by distancing the sickle cell from any association with black African ancestry. According to Dyson, associating the gene with Mediterranean groups distances it from African Ancestry, which makes it easier for white women to

accept. Whilst one might question the wisdom of pandering to the racial prejudices of white women, Dyson insists that it is has been the best way for counsellors to handle the situation and carry out their responsibilities. There are five types of the sickle cell gene, one of which originates in India and Arabia: 'So it is entirely possible that you could have genes associated with sickle cell and have not African ancestry, but Indian and Arabian ancestry,' he insists, but admits: 'It's not a perfect solution, it's a working solution that a number of them came to in order to manage the tension.'5

As this example shows, there is widespread belief that skin colour represents not the diversity of human beings, but confirmation that humankind is comprised of different races which are separate but certainly not equal, as dark skin is seen as representing inferiority. Dyson himself does not believe that race exists. "As a sociologist, I have difficulty accepting the idea that there is such a thing as race, as opposed to that there is such a thing as racism. Racism is created by culture, but I don't accept that there is any such thing as distinct biological races,"6 he contends. Whilst anthropologists and geneticists are aware of the black origins of mankind and accept that race is a social construct fashioned to create the myth of European superiority over non-white peoples; the vast majority of ordinary people accept the concept of race as the norm. Because of the ideologies through which race was conceptualised - to confer inferiority on black and non-white peoples, this means that concept of race can never exist without racism. Scientific racism was not created to make man equal, but to make non-white peoples inferior to whites – to create whiteness and white supremacy.

Whiteness and White Supremacy

Many non-whites seldom consider whiteness as an ideal that influences their thoughts and feelings about self, because it's so taken for granted, nature renders it the norm and that makes it dangerous to all of us. That is why whiteness as an anti Afrikan presence in the black imagination needs to be considered in any discussion of the power of white privilege. Dr William (Lez) Henry.1

Whiteness is often viewed from a one-dimensional perspective as simply a social identity ascribed to individuals racialised as white. However, in reality, it is a multi-faceted construct which serves both to maintain white supremacy – the structured and systematic social, political, cultural and economic domination of non-white peoples, and to confer advantage and privilege upon those classed as white. There are several key elements that determine how whiteness functions within society. In the first instance, it shapes the world view and understanding of self and society of whites. Because whiteness is portrayed as universal when really it excludes the perspectives of other cultures, its viewpoint is decidedly narrow and limited. By default, whiteness functions as a tool of racial oppression because it only exists within a hierarchy of colour placing itself at the top and non-whites in subordinate positions. As Owen argues: 'Being located in a social position by whiteness is not merely a location of difference, but it is also a location of economic,

political, social and cultural advantage, relative to those locations defined by non-whiteness.'2 One of the most potent aspects of whiteness is its invisibility. This is largely because it is defined as normal and therefore is incorporated into the mainstream, where it is never questioned or held to account. As a consequence, whiteness becomes invisible to whites, yet is highly visible to non-whites. Whiteness is highly visible to non-whites because it is easy for them to recognise when their interests are excluded from the mainstream. Black feminist and womanist writers have been particularly adept at articulating how whiteness functions to the exclusion of black people. Evelyn Brooks Higginbottom speaks of the resistance among black women feminists to the homogenising of white womanhood which rests on the presumption of the universal oppression of all women and accuses white feminists of being unable to separate their whiteness from their womanhood. Bell Hooks describes the way in which a white woman can publish a book which purports to be about the universal experience of women, but which in fact is only about the experience of white women – who by virtue of their whiteness are deemed to represent the norm. How many black women could publish a book that was only about black women yet did not carry the word black in the book's title? Oyeronke Oyewumi sums up the exclusionary facet of whiteness perfectly as: 'The ethnocentric idea that the white woman (or man) is the norm…'[3] Whiteness is not just a skin colour as has been mentioned earlier, but nonetheless it is still 'grounded in the interests, needs and values of those racialised as white.'4 Whiteness should not be regarded as static, but something which has a socio-historical existence that is constantly being redefined. It should not be seen as something which acquires privilege through perceptions

and values alone. As Owen argues, it must be acknowledged that whiteness is also maintained through and produces violence.

> Not only does whiteness have its origins in the physical and psychic violence of enslavement, genocide and exploitation of peoples of colour around the world, but also it maintains the system of white supremacy in part by means of actual and potential violence.5

There are numerous examples of the use of violence and potential violence to impose white supremacy on non-white peoples. The Chagossians, for example, are African descendants who were forcibly removed from their homeland in the Chagos Archipelago, some 2000 miles from Kenya, to make way for a US military base by the British. The peaceful population of slave descendants watched their pets being killed by colonial gangsters after being dragged out of their homes and rounded up like cattle. The murder of their treasured pets was a warning of what might happen to them if they resisted. The purpose of this exercise was to protect white interests – that of the British colonial administration and of the white American hegemony. Let us not forget the wars waged on the non-white populations of Afghanistan and Iraq from the island of Diego Garcia, which resulted in the slaughter of many thousands of innocent civilians. Another example of violence used to protect white interests occurred during the colonial invasion of Kenya. Yet again, a population of black people were on the receiving end, this time of real, rather than threatened violence, so that a white British hegemony could take over the ancestral lands of indigenous African peoples in order to further their economic interests. The Mau, Mau

– freedom fighters who put up a resistance to British colonial rule and their supporters, suffered the brunt of white brutality. At least 11,000 were murdered after the British hunted them down in the forests and butchered them. Around 160,000 were rounded up and placed in concentration camps where they were subjected to all manner of human rights abuses including rape, torture and severe beatings. The reason for the violence – to dispossess blacks from their land and secure economic and political advantage for white settlers.

Whiteness contains a structuring element which places non-whites in a subordinate position within a hierarchical structure that locates whites in a position of social, economic and political superiority and advantage. This structuring property operates within all modern social systems and influences the social practices of those who operate within the systems and institutions. This occurs as the members of societies in the western world and where colonisation has occurred are automatically socialised and acculturated into whiteness, which is established as the norm. This is why, Jamaicans, for example, as was discussed earlier in this book, have been left with the legacy of colourism, because the enforced social stratification based on skin colour that occurred during slavery became the norm. The organisational structure of Jamaican society was based on white supremacy, white superiority and white privilege. The fact that the majority of Jamaicans are black does not prevent whiteness from imposing its destructive nature. Of greater significance is the reality that Jamaicans were acculturated by law and custom into a social hierarchy where the social order was determined on the premise of white superiority.

Returning to the modus operandi of whiteness within western societies, as stated earlier, it is so pernicious precisely because of its secret hiding place within the mainstream of society where it is normalised. Under this guise, it continues to wield immense power by subordinating and conferring racial disadvantage among non-white peoples, whilst members of society are duped into believing that real racism is the overt type that makes the news headlines. In reality, it is whiteness and white supremacy that is shaping the world to the advantage of whites. A particularly astute observation of whiteness is the 'way that it maintains the legacy of racial inequality as a central aspect of modern social systems, while at the same time, masking the impact of that history upon the present.'6 How many times do British politicians allude to Britain's role in the African Holocaust – the chattel enslavement of African peoples in debates and discussions about racism in society or in the formulation of race policies? Never. Yet as this book has demonstrated, scientific racism and the construction of race served as a justification for Britain's role in chattel enslavement and colonisation – which took away the humanity of African peoples and sowed the seeds for the racism that pervades society today – both the institutionalised form and individual racial prejudice. Whiteness and white supremacy is also reinforced using the powerful medium of cultural imagery. Therefore virtually anyone of significance is racialised as white. We see this in the representation of God and Jesus as white - despite all the evidence to the contrary and as another example, until the painstaking work of Cheikh Anta Diop, western Egyptologists denied the black origins of the ancient Egyptians. Even where race is not mentioned, the assumption is always that the subject is white: 'because whiteness means that whites are represented everywhere,

but not as white.'7 The social, cultural and historical dynamics of whiteness as has been mentioned in this chapter ensure the reproductive nature of whiteness which results in 'de facto social, economic, political and cultural supremacy of those racialised as white.'8 Therefore race relations laws are rendered ineffective, which is why institutional racism continues to flourish, because whiteness ensures the maintenance of white supremacy which undermines the legislation and policies that are supposed to address racial inequalities.

Gillborn provides an excellent example of how whiteness and white supremacy functions within the British education system whilst maintaining a discreet invisibility. Within the school system white supremacy is achieved through maintaining high intellectual and educational achievement among white pupils and the low educational achievement, or under-achievement as is commonly referred to, of non-white pupils, especially those of African Caribbean descent. The most widely used mode of comparison of educational achievement is the GCSE and as has been discussed in an earlier chapter, pupils are assessed and judged based on the number of five GCSEs they obtain between grades A-C. As Gilborn highlights, GCSE's are tiered, which means that within each band there is a maximum grade that can be obtained. In most cases in the lowest tier, the highest grade that can be obtained is C. But for mathematics, it is lower than C. An investigation conducted on two London schools revealed that two thirds of black students were placed in the lowest tier for mathematics. Therefore, even if they scored a perfect 100 per cent in their examination, they could never achieve grade C, much less grades A and B. Therefore, in placing black students in the lowest tier – and we are talking about a

significant number – two thirds of black students in these particular schools, it was ensured that black pupils would always be the lowest achievers.

In a second example, in one of the biggest LEAs in the country, black children were the highest achievers out of all groups in baseline assessments – tests conducted at age five when children are just entering the phase of compulsory schooling. In the baseline assessments at this particular LEA, black children were the most likely to score 20 percentage points above the national average. This indicates that black children enter the school system well prepared for formal education – yet by the age of 16 and the end of compulsory schooling, they have transformed into the lowest educational achievers and have dropped 20 percentage points relative to the national average. So what happens to a black child during the 11 years of formal schooling within the education system? Obviously these are questions of fundamental importance in examining institutional racism and its bearing on the education of black children. However, that question is unlikely to be answered given that the baseline tests have now been altered and as a result black children are once again, suspiciously the lowest performers. The foundation stage assessment has replaced the baseline assessments, but most importantly 'it is entirely based on teacher's judgements.'9

By altering the mode of assessment of young children, the school system has managed to transform black children into underachievers. Gillborn argues 'It is well known…that black students tend to be over-represented in low-ranked teaching groups when teachers' judgements are used to inform selection within schools.'10 These examples clearly demonstrate the invisible mechanics of white supremacy at work within the education system. The first, the

placing of a significant number of black children in low tiers for mathematics ensures that they could never achieve a 'good' GCSE in mathematics. In the second example, the black pupils were outperforming white children, so the assessment had to be changed – and altered radically to a totally subjective mode, so that black pupils could be labelled as low achievers. As Gillborn concluded 'These changes appear to have resulted from the normal workings of the education system…does assessment do more than merely record inequity, or does assessment produce inequity?'11

Colour-blind ideology is an area of critical race theory that is increasingly being explored by scholars and can arguably be regarded as a mechanism which disguises the racial oppression caused by whiteness and white supremacy. Kimberley Ebert writes about how colour-blind ideology operates within American society, but her arguments could equally apply to British society. A colour-blind perspective refuses to acknowledge that individuals are disadvantaged by race, preferring instead to accept the notion that western societies are structured as meritocracies, with those who educate themselves and work hard being rewarded economically and socially. Such a viewpoint is founded on the belief that inequalities experienced by racial groups are due to individual shortcomings. The danger of colour-blind ideology is in masking the underlying structures and systematic workings of white supremacy, as has been described earlier, while all manner of arguments are put forward for why a particular race is not advancing. If we apply this theory to the under-achievement of African Caribbean children in the British school system, as argued by Gillborn, where the system is manipulated to the disadvantage of black pupils – this goes unnoticed, whilst all too often the performance of black pupils is blamed on a

deficient family environment. As Ebert argues 'The racial logic of a colour-blind society especially helps the dominant group…to support an ideology that appears race-neutral but maintains the current racial order and allows whites to benefit from their own skin colour.' 12

A central aspect of critical race theory is the challenge to whiteness as the normative standard. How can white be the normative standard in a multi-cultural society where all races are supposed to be equal participants? That they are not reflects the fact that white supremacy is at work, not that black and other non-white groups are inferior. There is plenty of evidence to support this. As recent research published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows, despite educational improvements, a higher percentage of black and minority ethnic people live in poverty, compared with the white population. All non-white groups experience higher levels of poverty than the white population. Whilst just 20 per cent of whites live in poverty, 45 per cent of Africans and 30 per cent of African Caribbeans live in poverty. There are a number of factors that contribute to poverty, such as educational qualifications, industry sector, work experience, location, health, disability and family structure. However, low income from employment has been identified as the main cause of poverty. Yet whilst progress in educational attainment has improved employment levels among ethnic minorities, there are still pronounced gaps for African, African Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi men for which there are no other explanations than racial discrimination. Africans have very high participation rates within higher education, yet their rates of unemployment are inexplicably high, pointing to severe discrimination in the job market. Evidence also suggests that black gradu-

ates find it harder to gain managerial and executive positions and even when they do they still earn less than whites. Analysis of employees in managerial jobs reveals that over the last 10 years there has been an increase in upward mobility among African and African Caribbean men. However, black professionals still earn much less than their white counterparts. African and African Caribbean men earn 25 per cent and 15 per cent less respectively than whites.

> The danger of colour blindness is that it allows us to ignore the racial construction of whiteness and reinforces its privileges and oppressive position. Thus whiteness remains the normative standard and blackness remains different, other and marginal. Even worse, by insisting on a rhetoric that disallows reference to race, blacks can no longer name their reality or point out racism. '13

In the past white privilege was secured through violence – chattel enslavement and colonisation – but in contemporary western societies it is achieved through subtle methods which disguise white supremacy under the cloak of whiteness, which itself is hidden in the mainstream. White supremacy is able to maintain its power as people of African descent and other non-white groups buy into the dominant western ideology of individualism, believing in the notion of equality of opportunity. In this manner, blacks lose the power of a collective identity which seeks to secure equality for the entire race, whilst individuals seek personal success and gratification. It becomes easy then to use the argument that all blacks need are role models to inspire them to achieve. However, whilst a handful of

blacks may 'succeed' the masses remain poor and disadvantaged and white supremacy continues to reign supreme. Colour blindness is an ideology, a perspective and tool of white supremacy that disguises white privilege behind the notion that within western society there is equality of opportunity. It ignores the impact of race on the human experience of black peoples and non-white groups, particularly within a historical context. As Ebert argues: 'By claiming colour-blindness in an era of massive racial inequalities, the significance of race is ignored, the inequalities are ignored and therefore these inequalities will continue to persist.'14 Given the dominance of whiteness and white supremacy in every dimension of the global social order, how can it be addressed as part of the struggle for black liberation and of the struggle to free all of humanity from its destructive clutches? According to Owen: 'Structures of whiteness will need to be unmasked, challenged, disrupted and dismantled in the material dimensions of social life, in the ideologies that shape consciousness and in the cultural representations that transmit its meaning.'15

The invisibility of whiteness manifests itself within black communities in many different ways which individuals are oblivious to. Dr Henry argues that this often occurs when people of African descent responding to or resisting white supremacy, endorse the same prejudiced view that human beings possess immutable characteristics. Giving an example, he alludes to a black youth of mixed European and African ancestry, who because of his experience of racism regards whites as irredeemable devils. When Dr Henry challenged his perception by asking the youth if he was therefore half a devil based on his dual heritage he did not have an answer. 'The way he measures his humanity as a member of the human

family is based on the manner in which whiteness operates, because whiteness categorises who is human and who is non-human.'16 People are not necessarily aware of whiteness even though they are living through it, Dr Henry argues. This is also true of the yardsticks by which black some people measure themselves. In another example he spoke of the decision by a black mother to take her child out of a certain primary school because the child has an IQ of 160. But as he pointed out – who invented IQ tests and for what purpose? According to Dr Henry they were created by a certain class of white people for a specific purpose. 'It's about perpetuating this idea of natural superiority.' At a business event, the majority of the black men had white female partners and a sizeable number of the black women had white male partners. Dr Henry asked and answered the question as to why the black men and women could not find each other: 'What whiteness does, is that it does not matter how much you see in someone who looks like you, they will never measure up because the standard is white.' I believe that a major problem in terms of the impact of whiteness in the black imagination is the failure by people of African descent to challenge its core value that places individuals within a racialised social hierarchy. I see very few of my black contemporaries challenging white supremacy but far greater numbers looking to secure a 'safe' position within the very system that subordinates them and other people of African descent. This individualistic attitude to me typifies the white imagination in the African psyche.

Blackness and Black Identity

> Blackness is the shared experience of millions of people over many generations, all of whom are endowed by their Creator with the same essential spiritual nature, a nature which is shared in common with all human beings, and yet finds unique expression in people of African descent, by virtue of historical circumstance and physical necessity.[1]

The last chapter unveiled whiteness, not merely as a skin colour, but as a construct which confers privilege to those racialised as white, whilst simultaneously subordinating non-white peoples. Whiteness, however, as a perspective also influences the mindset of people of African descent because it is also a way of looking at the world and those within it. Blackness has far greater significance than skin colour and has to be examined outside the narrow and derogatory definitions assigned by Europeans at various points in history. Blackness carries with it history, representation, culture, identity and spirituality. This book has so far determined that colourism is an internalised form of racism that values lighter skin and derides black skin, which is part of a legacy of chattel enslavement and colonisation and a consequence of the oppressive nature of white supremacy. Overcoming this legacy and addressing the destructive nature of colourism requires to some degree the unmasking of whiteness and a sustained challenge to the structures and systems that support it, as was suggested in the last chapter. But the most effective and immediate challenge to colourism has to come from within. Understanding how whiteness affects our view of ourselves and others

and decolonizing the mind is the first and most important step in repairing the psychological damage that causes individuals within the same racial group to judge others based on the shade of their skin.

In order to appreciate blackness one has to remove the lens of whiteness and discard its limited visibility and narrow perspective and adopt a universal view of the world. However, as blackness both defines and represents people of African descent – wherever they are in the Diaspora, it is also necessary to accept the relationship between blackness and African heritage in order to appreciate the historical significance of blackness. Nationality and heritage are not the same and ought not to be confused. Being born in Britain as a black person denotes one's nationality as British, but this should not sever African ancestral ties. As IM Nur explains:

> Being Afrikan represents our relationship from a geographical, political and cultural perspective, with the landmass we call Afrika. The term also links us with her resources and with other Afrikans, historically and culturally. Therefore, Afrikans are individuals who, by virtue of common cultural roots, history, political interests and genetic linkage, have a rightful claim…to the Motherland, materially and psychologically.[2]

I should make it clear at this point that I am not suggesting that only people of African descent should be equated with blackness, but as this book is concerned with the African Diaspora, this chapter on blackness makes reference solely to people of African descent. In this respect I believe that the self-denial of one's African heritage brings with it confusion and displacement as well as a

detachment from people with whom we have a shared history and experience. The origins of black mankind predate both Caribbean history and the arrival of enslaved Africans in North and Latin America. Africa is the cradle of all humanity and the birthplace of civilisation. To deny one's African heritage is to deny one's historical and collective identity. Amos Wilson offers an articulate explanation of the historical importance of identity:

> History is what creates a shared identity in a people. It is based on that shared identity that they act collectively. To take away a people's history, to degrade their history is to degrade their sense of shared identity to remove the basis upon which they must behave collectively and reach their goals collectively. That's why the history is rewritten.[3]

Abdias Do Nascimento, writing about the experience of Afro descendants in Brazil in 1980, referred to the efforts of the white ruling class to erase the memory of Africa among the black population through excluding any history of Africa from the educational curriculum and restricting travel to the continent by keeping Afro Brazilians in a state of perpetual poverty. 'But none of these hindrances had the power of obliterating completely, from our spirit and memory, the living presence of Mother Africa.'4 It is easier for the mind of a black man or woman to be manipulated by the distorting elements of whiteness and to regard blackness as inferior, if that person is detached from the realities of their historical and collective identity as an African. This is because their existence is based on a fairly recent history which has been distorted by Europeans as a justification for enslavement and to facilitate the coloni-

sation of African peoples, as we have read in earlier chapters. Hence, at the beginning of his article, Nascimento makes a plea for 'the urgent need of the Brazilian black people to win back their memory, which has been systematically assaulted by Brazilian Western-inspired structures of domination for almost 500 years.'5 Being detached from an African heritage therefore places an individual in the precarious position of being a black man or woman in a white world. As whiteness only functions in opposition to blackness, which it subordinates, under these circumstances a black person can never value blackness but can only despise it, or at best tolerate it. As Fanon states:

> From the moment the Negro accepts the separation imposed by the European he has no further respite, and "is it not understandable that thenceforward he will try to elevate himself to the white man's level? To elevate himself in the range of colours to which he attributes a kind of hierarchy?"6

Much that has been written about blackness has been written by Europeans to denigrate, rather than to celebrate it. This book has already demonstrated how and why this occurred and how it contributed towards the internalisation of these negative associations with blackness by people of African descent, affecting intra group relations. However, this chapter is not concerned with these external depictions of blackness – it is a dangerous proposition to allow others to define you and tell you what you are or are not. This needs to be remembered when faced with what generations of scholars have proven to be false, Eurocentric and racist dogmas on black inferiority. This chapter is concerned with how we have

defined blackness ourselves in historical and contemporary times and what blackness has symbolised to people of African descent. Runoko Rashidi's studies on the African presence in India point to around 40,000 BC as the era that heralded the arrival of Africans in India known as the Harappan peoples, named after the two cities where they settled – Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro in the Indus River Valley. Some scholars assert that they originated from Egypt. Like the Egyptians the Harappa used an early form of writing based on hieroglyphs. Dravidians are believed to be the descendants of the Harappans. Cheikh Anta Diop argued that the Dravidians and Nubians belong to the same ethnic group. The term Dravidian applies both to ethnicity and language. From the 3rd century B.C the three main kingdoms inhabited by the Dravidians were Pandya, Chera and Chola. In both 1288 and 1293, Marco Polo travelled to the Pandyan kingdom and observed the role that skin tone played amongst its inhabitants:

> The darkest man is here the most highly esteemed and considered better than the others who are not so dark. Let me add that in very truth these people portray and depict their gods and their idols black and their devils white as snow. For they say that God and all the saints are black and the devils are all white.7

One could interpret the attitude of the Dravidians as a positive self-identification with blackness based on the religious association of their gods who were portrayed as black. In this respect their gods were fashioned in the image of the Dravidians themselves, as black-skinned. Hence the darkest Dravidians were more revered,

probably as they more closely resembled the Divine gods whom they worshipped. The African presence in India is also linked with the origins of Buddhism which emerged in India around the 6th century BCE. Cheikh Anta Diop attributes the Buddha to a black Egyptian priest who fled Egypt when the Persian known as Cambyses attacked Egypt in the year 525 BCE and crowned himself King of Egypt and the first of the 27th dynasty. Diop argues that this would explain the portrayal of the Buddha with afro hair. This view is endorsed by another scholar, Dr Vulindlela Wobogo, who posits that the Egyptian priests brought to Asia their spiritual knowledge from Africa and that many aspects of Buddhism such as meditation have their origins in Egyptian spirituality. Gerald Massey goes even further in asserting the identity of the Buddha in saying:

> …it is certain that the Black Buddha of India was imaged in the Africoid type. In the Black [African] god, whether called Buddha or Sut-Nahsi, we have a datum. they carry in their colour the proof of their origin. The people who first fashioned and worshipped the divine image in the Africoid mould of humanity must, according to all knowledge of human nature, have been Africans themselves. For the Blackness is not merely mystical, the features and the hair of Buddha belong to the Black race.8

Chapter one of this book looked at the origins of colourism and how the ethnic transformation of ancient Egypt caused by Arab invasions brought conflict between the Afro-Asians and pure black Egyptians. This is discussed later in Dr William's book in reference to the divisions between the southern black Egyptians and northern

Asian-dominated Egyptians, even after black pharaohs had conquered northern Egypt. The issue of contention was the decision by the black pharaohs to encourage integration rather than drive out the foreigners, which was unpalatable to the black Egyptians 'for whom the prospects of having their children come into the world with a colour distinctly different from their own was at once an insult to their watching ancestors and an offence to the Gods themselves.'9 The black Egyptians believed themselves to be the true Egyptians because of their black skin and because of their religious beliefs: 'They were "Children of the Sun" blessed with blackness by the Sun God himself and thus protected from its fiery rays. They were his children. Their very blackness, therefore, was religious, a blessing and an honour.'10 Compare this ancient, black religious belief in blackness as a positive affirmation from the Divine, to the action by European Jews and Talmudists to present blackness as a curse for wrongdoing resulting in the enslavement of the black race. The ancient Egyptians saw that the arrival of the Afro-Asians brought with it a colour-hierarchy that sought to subordinate them, but they were so grounded in their identity as black Egyptians that they stood their ground and asserted their blackness as a symbol of pride.

Whilst black skin was 'a badge of honour' for the ancient Egyptians, blackness should not be equated solely with dark skin among people of African descent but should be understood as a level of consciousness. However the term 'black' can sometimes be problematic for those with light skin. In her paper on black identity, Francoise Baylis draws attention to the dilemma posed for light skinned and mixed race individuals when it comes to blackness and black identity. She states:

> I am a Canadian of Caribbean descent; my mother is from Barbados (my father is from England). I have a white face; and truth be told, a white body too. The fact is however, that I am black. How do I know? Because my mother told me so.'11

Baylis asserts that it is lived experience that shapes racial identity through interaction and engagement with others. 'My racial identity as a black person was (and is) carefully constructed by and for me.'12 As is often the case, most black families do not conform to a uniform shade of black and this was the case with Baylis's family. Her black mother socialised her from a young age to accept her blackness and not to try and conceal it even though she could pass for white. Throughout her childhood Baylis felt the need to reveal her blackness to everyone well into her teens until a friend told her it was 'tiresome.' For Baylis 'Being a black identity is hard work when you have white skin.'13 Crucially, Baylis recalls that as a child her mother saw all of her children as black regardless of their skin tone. Baylis claims her black identity through her genetic make-up, through her culture, ties with the black community and through her experience of racism. In her paper she recalls an interesting encounter on a plane journey seated next to two white women from Zimbabwe who spoke about Africans in derogatory terms. Offended their bigotry Baylis rebuked them, telling them she was black only to have them respond in disbelief by refusing to accept that she was a black woman. Clearly what was crucial to her sense of blackness for Baylis was her socialisation, her lived experience and collective sense of belonging. For Dr Henry blackness encompasses

political, spiritual and cultural dimensions that tie individuals into traditions that are thousands of years old and to ways of being and knowing.

> It gives me an idea that I come from a section of the human family who have probably represented all [skin] shades for thousands of years, but essentially they recognise that we were created for a purpose and we must try and live in harmony, not just with each other but with the planet as well.14

Endorsing the view of the ancient Egyptians, for whom the most powerful manifestation of creation was the sun, Dr Henry believes that the sun is life-giving and energy-giving and that people of African descent are the children of the sun. Above all, blackness is a state of consciousness that is able to pierce through the barrier of whiteness in order to look at the world through different eyes. The reality of blackness is that people of African descent have comprised various skin tones for thousands of years and the reason for the wide variation is a natural diversity of African peoples rather than through miscegenation, as is sometimes offered as a reason for black people ranging from dark to light skin tones. Dr Henry believes that the best way to tackle colourism is by black people acknowledging the strategies that have been used historically to divide us, causing us to devalue who we are. 'For me that is what blackness is, a level of consciousness. It's about being aware of who you are, what you are and what you represent in this time.'15

Conclusion

> Whether we are light, yellow, black or what not, there is but one thing for us to do, and that is to get together and build up a race. God made us in His own image and He had some purpose when He thus created us. Marcus Garvey, 1923.[1]

Whatever one's religious or spiritual beliefs may be, one cannot argue against the validity of Garvey's words for people of African descent. His clarion call for black people across the world to unite to defeat the common enemy of white supremacy has been influential in my view of the world and my place within it as a member of the global African community. It is from this perspective in the Pan African tradition that the idea for this book was conceived; to examine the issue of colourism as it impacts the African Diaspora. Rather than focus solely on the UK, as other writers have focused on the countries in which they were born and raised, I have chosen to focus on the African Diaspora, of which I am a part. At the beginning of this book, the foundations were laid for an examination of colourism as a legacy of enslavement and colonisation and as an internalised form of racism. It is internalised because the individual absorbs the dehumanising nature of enslavement as well as the stigma towards blackness that occurs through a collaborative denigration of blackness and black identity entrenched in religion, science, literature, media and popular culture. That in itself provides some measure of the deep psychological damage that has been perpetuated through the generations, reinforcing the message that blackness is inferior to whiteness. It was

necessary to establish the foundations of colourism by delving as far back as possible into our historical past to establish how it is that as a global black community we still bear the scars of a traumatic past. In recent years there has been a preoccupation within the mainstream media with colour issues, particularly skin bleaching, but on the whole the treatment has been more sensational than constructive and informative. There is never any attempt at explaining what drives non-white people to burn their skin with chemicals other than subtle attempts to suggest it is borne of a desire to be white, thereby reinforcing the concept of the white beauty ideal. Whilst this book has focused on European enslavement and colonisation in its examination of certain black communities within the African Diaspora, it also aimed to demonstrate in the first chapter the role that Arab enslavement played in the destabilisation of African communities on the continent, which paved the way for European chattel enslavement. The chapters on North America, Jamaica and Latin America demonstrate a consistent pattern of the diversity of skin tone among Africans being used as a divisive tool to foster disunity, mistrust and suspicion and to minimise resistance to the social order. That these colour-coded patterns remained intact following emancipation bear testimony to the evolutionary strategies used to maintain white supremacy. Just because white European hegemonies stopped transporting enslaved Africans to the New World did not mean that notions of white superiority had been discarded, nor that there was any intention of relinquishing social and economic power over people of colour. If we examine the history of racism in Britain as demonstrated in chapter four, the denigration of people of African descent was most intense during the 18th and 19th centuries when scientific racism emerged, both to

justify slavery and to lobby against abolition. Britain passed the Abolition Act after it had already set its sights on the colonisation of the African and Asian continents which occurred with as much brutality as did chattel enslavement. Colonisation in many ways replicated the colour stratification that characterised the governance of slave colonies as was evidenced by the creation of Apartheid in South Africa and Jim Crow laws in the USA. In other colonised societies, whilst colour stratification may not have been embedded in laws and customs it nonetheless maintained a de facto existence. In Latin America white hegemonies chose the lure of white privilege and the opportunity for membership of the white elite as a superficial means of maintaining a white majority and safeguarding the interests of what is in reality a white minority. Allowing certain members of the black and Indian population, notably the mestizos, to cross over the colour line essentially ensured that the system of white supremacy was defended and supported by a large number of blacks, who might otherwise form part of a challenge to the system of oppression. Examining human evolution and skin colour was included as a reminder of the fact that contrary to the theories espoused during the explosion of scientific racism, that there is a wide consensus today amongst anthropologists and geneticists that point to the black African origins of mankind. It was also intend to reinforce the message that regardless of our skin colour or facial features all peoples whether African, Asian or European are members of one human family, which is the human race. As Garvey states in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, the Creator made us – black-skinned people of African descent in His own image and had a purpose for doing so. This is not emphasised to confer any claim to superiority by virtue of this reality, just that it

had its purpose; it is part of black African ancestral history and is something to be acknowledged as a source of pride. The chapter on whiteness and white supremacy is central to understanding the concept of colourism as without it colourism would not exist. The purpose of this chapter was to deconstruct the subtle and latent manner in which whiteness functions as a means of explaining how people of African descent can succumb to the subordinating values of white supremacy by devaluing blackness without realising that they are endorsing white supremacy. Whiteness and the privilege and social advantage that it confers upon people racialised as white is not only invisible to the white group but also to many blacks who are the very ones being disadvantaged by its discriminatory nature. If white supremacy is to be effectively exposed, challenged and destabilised, then people need to be aware of how it operates in the first instance. But at the same time people of African descent have to wake up and take stock of the immense disadvantage and discrimination that is robbing them and other non-white peoples of equality of opportunity and the right to an equitable share of the world's resources. As Garvey urged: 'Whether we are light, yellow, black or what not, there is but one thing for us to do, and that is to get together and build up a race.' The chapter on whiteness and white supremacy also serves as a warning to those who succumb to the naïve notion that we are living in times where colour is unimportant. Nothing could be further from the truth. The fact that race exists merely as a construct rather than of any biological reality does not change the reality of the social disadvantage, exclusion and discrimination that globally, dark-skinned and black people live with every day of their lives. Under these oppressive circumstances as people of African descent we have no alternative but to fight for

social justice and to liberate ourselves and the rest of humanity from the immoral and violent clutches of white supremacy. That involves a move away from the individualistic and self-obsessed attitudes that pervade black communities across the world as a result of western influence, to one that is altogether more in keeping with our cultural heritage as a people of a collective and community-oriented nature. The last chapter on blackness and black identity was specifically intended to focus on blackness from an African perspective, that is not to suggest a homogenous concept of blackness from what is by all accounts the most diverse continent on the planet - ethnically, linguistically and in terms of skin colour; but in examining a few examples of how Africans saw themselves prior to their enslavement by Arabs and Europeans. This chapter intentionally avoids definitions of blackness that result from externally imposed concepts and definitions and instead focuses on how we have seen and understood our blackness both historically and in contemporary times. In order to resist the destructive nature of white supremacy and the negativity and inferiority it aims to impose on people of African descent, individuals need to be well grounded in their sense of identity and to have reached a level of consciousness where they are able to accept their blackness and wear it with a sense of pride – not to seek to mask their black identity under bleaching creams, cosmetic powders that lighten the appearance of the skin, or weaves and chemical straighteners that disguise natural hair. I am by no means suggesting that all women who opt to straighten their hair or to wear wigs or weaves are trying to be white. As one who has worn hair weaves in the past I am in no position to cast stones. However, I am conscious of the fact we are hardly emulating blackness when we do so. It is more honest to accept that we are

still locked into European standards of beauty and need to work at appreciating beauty in our own image – because as long as we are worshipping images of other people we will never worship ourselves. The concept of blackness to the ancient Egyptians was inextricably linked to the belief that their blackness was a blessing from the Sun God and was therefore a source of great of pride. In recent years following the tireless work of past great scholars such as Dr Chancellor Williams and Cheikh Anta Diop, the ancient Egyptians have come to symbolise a great period in history that denotes the contribution of African peoples to the history of humanity. The ancient Egyptians have inspired several contemporary scholars and Afro-centric enthusiasts to use their history as an ego booster in a reactionary manner to Eurocentric dogma by professing that we are worth something as African peoples as we once ruled ancient civilisations. But as Amos Wilson, another great scholar once wrote, history is important for the lessons that it teaches us. My inclusion of the ancient Egyptians in this book was for that specific purpose - to give us some perspective about our black skin. The ancients knew that to be black is not to be ugly, inferior or cursed, but to be black is to be blessed – blessed with the blackness that gave rise to creation – for all human life began with the black skin of Africans as did the ancient civilisations that we so revere today.

As globalisation continues to dominate the social, cultural, economic and political landscape in the 21st century, there is an urgent need for people of African descent scattered across the globe to draw upon our common history and ancestry as a source of collective strength in order to overcome the disparities and inequalities that pervade the lives of the global African community. Howev-

er, organising collective resistance on a global scale requires an understanding and acceptance of the great diversity among African peoples that is of language, ethnicity and culture as well as of skin tone. The damaging legacy of chattel enslavement for which Europeans utilised divisive strategies to control and subordinate enslaved Africans still persists within black communities today throughout the world, as studies on the impact of colourism have shown. It is important therefore, that in examining colourism, which has clearly arisen from a shared experience of slavery, colonisation, neo-colonialism and white supremacy, that as people of African descent, we look beyond the respective nationalities of our geographical locations and seek solutions as global African citizens, which is vital to ensure our survival as a people.

Taking the Debate Forward

I hope that you have enjoyed reading Layers of Blackness: Colourism in the African Diaspora and that you have opinions and views on points raised in the book. But don't keep them to yourself! You can submit your feedback on my website at this URL: http://deborahgabriel.com/books/

Alternatively if you want to write a longer article about the issues raised you can submit a commentary or feature on People with Voices at this URL:

http://peoplewithvoices.com/submit-article-form/

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