



“The Color Black”

In the course of her novel, *The Color Purple*, Pulitzer Prize Winning author Alice Walker successfully transforms the meaning of purple from pain to pleasure. It prompts me to ask, “Can we perform a living transformation of the meaning of the color black?”

Black Americans continue to be schizophrenic about blackness. We build on the late great James Brown who crooned in the 1960s, “Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud.” At the same time, we continue to disparage blackness. We should ask why many of us prefer “African-American” over “black American”—a term of reference that Elijah Muhammad initiated in the 1930s? Why don’t we have more heroes with dark skin tones, flat noses, thick lips, and kinky hair in fields other than sports and entertainment? Have you taken the time to ask, “How do I feel about blackness?” and “Why do I feel this way?”

In Western world vernacular blackness is hated and despised as evil or worse. The English language is filled with expressions that equate black or brown with the unwanted. For example, white is pure and clean, while black is dirty. In food, white is associated with “angel,” while black or brown is associated with “devil”. A white horse is gallant and a symbol of triumph, while a dark (black) horse has little chance of winning. The ideal or joyous day of Christmas occurs when it is “white” with snow, while an adverse economic outcome, as in a stock market crash, is known as a black day—viz., the “Black Monday” that saw the stock market tumble on October 19, 1987. Interestingly, the latter spin on blackness is reversed when entrepreneurs use “black” to indicate profitability as in “Black Friday,” the day after Thanksgiving when shopkeepers often transition from “being in the red” to “being in the black.”

The act of stamping bad or evil with “black” extends beyond the Western world as Chinese prisons that hold prisoners indefinitely without trials are called “black prisons.” Moreover, the use of whitening creams is widespread in Asia—from Japan to India—as males and females seek the “benefits” of whiteness.

This negative spin on blackness is quite interesting, and shows how European culture superimposed itself on black and brown cultures of the world, and inverted what is righteous and positive--transforming it into that which is evil and negative.

Consider blackness in its essence. For Christians who accept the Old Testament Genesis account of creation recognize that God spoke the origins of the creation from a point of Blackness. Good came out of darkness. Going further, God created man from the dust of the ground—making black and brown people the original inhabitants of the

Garden of Eden. Conception of every naturally originating fetus occurs in the darkness of female's inner reproductive organs. Our offspring come from darkness into the light.

In fact, we place a great deal of emphasis on the importance of lightness, but light can only be discerned in the context of darkness.

Going back to the color of foods, increasingly we find that that which is dark is healthier than that which has been bleached to whiteness. Brown sugar is healthier than white sugar; brown rice is better than white rice; and dark colored fruits and vegetables have more antioxidants than light-colored fruits and vegetables. For similar reasons, the ladies in my childhood neighborhood would often exclaim, "the blacker the berry the sweeter the juice."

If the symbols in creation are beneficial, then we cannot deny that the blackness of a healing bruise is welcomed much more so than white puss, which signals infection.

A systematic whitening of much of the world occurred over the past five-to-six hundred years—since the European began to explore his unknown world. Somehow, brown and black people of the world have come to believe that whiteness is better than blackness. Ideally, the world should be color neutral. However, in order to return to balance, it may be necessary to overshoot toward favoring blackness—at least for a while.

We should ask, for example, "Would blacks and whites alike have voted for a politically identical Barack Obama with dark skin and kinky hair?" This brings us to the point that we must be careful to not reject blackness, because within it may lie the source of direly needed solutions—our salvation. How many black boys and girls never become scientists and mathematicians because they do not receive proper encouragement from instructors who are biased against blackness?

There are more darker- than lighter-skinned black Americans. Therefore, the majority of the Black Americans suffer disproportionately from this bias against blackness—losing innumerable opportunities and billions of dollars in income over time. Consequently, most black Americans have great incentives (economic and otherwise) to reverse negative associations with the color black. Hence, like the transformation of the meaning of purple in *The Color Purple* we should strive to realize and enable others to see that there is great goodness in the color black.

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