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## “Colorism and Leadership”

In BlackEconomics.org’s December 13, 2025, release entitled “Reasons for Black American Leadership Failures,” we mentioned in a more than passing fashion the importance of **colorism** and its connection to Black elitism, “elite capture,” and “nepotism.” We believe that the subtle, yet persistent importance of **colorism** in Black Americans’ (Afrodescendants’) lives should not be ignored, overlooked, or minimized. Through its polity, the American society has adopted numerous strategies for addressing inherent injurious phenomena; e.g., effort to address racism, which yields discrimination and is evidenced by economic inequality. Scholars and laypersons have identified and tackled to various extents an important result of racism: Economic inequality and some of its precursor causes (unequal education, compensation, access to capital, etc.). To our knowledge, however, little effort has been directed at addressing an important upstream cause of racism.

As you know, racism is a process of differentiating based on race. But race can only be recognized when one can identify a different race. We do so by observing different phenotypes. Arguably, the most important human phenotype is skin tone/shade. Therefore, Whites can easily identify non-Whites and operationalize their racist and White Supremacist practices against non-Whites. Interestingly, even in their racism and hatred Whites display favoritism. Because they are closer in skin tone/shade, and because of the genetic reasons for this closeness in skin tone/shade, Whites typically reflect more acceptance and affinity to light-skinned (**LS**) non-Whites. The irony is that after observing Whites acceptance and affinity of LS non-whites, Black Americans learn to replicate White’s behavior and engage in similar expressions of “favoritism” for LS Black Americans—hence the **colorism** problem. Should this realization then not precipitate/motivate just as strenuous and focused efforts to mitigate this underlying cause of racism as are undertaken to reduce underlying causes of economic inequality?

For completeness, it is important to go beyond skin tone/shade to identify further bases for the White Supremacist mentality and schema that fuels racism by identifying selected underlying and subtle **linguistic triggers** that enable learning and reinforcement (the latter two jointly equals “programming”) of injurious **colorism**. Consider the following:

“The English language is fraught with cases where black or brown is associated with the unwanted: 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 US Stock Market tumble on October 19, 1987.”<sup>1</sup>

Recently, we recognized another, related, important linguistic trigger: A very important athletic or sports challenge is to scale mountains and, obviously/subtly, the higher and the more whitely capped with snow is the mountain, the more impressive the feat; viz. Mt. Everest, which is eternally capped with white snow. Are you aware of any “important” mountain challenges that are not snow-capped. Recognize that this is important because the words that are written based on the “picture of a snow-capped mountain” is that Whites are “at the top” and “on top.”

As an exercise and to comprehend the brutal nature of colorism, Table 1 (next page) shows five selected and important areas of socioeconomic life and identifies today’s most notable (famous/popular) Black American personalities in those areas and indicates their skin tone/shade and gender. Our “Bayesian Prior” is that notable/famous/popular LS Black Americans outnumber Light Brown- (LBrS), Brown- (BrS) Dark Brown-skinned (DBrS) Black Americans; especially for those areas of socioeconomic life that Whites have historically reserve for themselves.

The five selected areas of socioeconomic life that Table 1 presents are: (1) Politics; (2) Economics and business; (3) Scholarship and learning; (4) Artistic expression; and (5) Athletics. The most notable/famous/popular 37 Black Americans (Afrodescendants) in these socioeconomic areas are identified. The final two rows of the table (Rows 27 and 28) reveal that 15 (40.5% of the total) LS Black Americans occupy these positions. This is an extraordinarily high proportion of LS Black Americans when compared with the findings of a range of scholarly research that find that LS Black Americans typically constitute between 15-to-25 percent of the population.<sup>2</sup>

These results should cause all of America to recognize the remaining subtle bias that persists in the favorable treatment extended to LS versus non-LS Black Americans. As in the case of “elite capture” by Black American “leadership” when expressed as “nepotism,” colorism “limits the pool of Black Americans who become prepared to lead, it restricts the quality of our leaders, and it constrains the body of ideas and methods available to solve our problems.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks Robinson (2007). “Chapter One.” *Black Americans and the Media: An Economic Perspective*. BlackEconomics.org. <https://www.blackeconomics.org/BEMedia/chapterone.pdf>, p. 1, Footnote 2. (Ret. 121925). This is one chapter in a nine-chapter **unpublished manuscript**.

<sup>2</sup> According to Google’s LLM AI BOT (Gemini), a range of academic studies on colorism produced statistical results concerning the percentage of LS persons in the Black American population found that the percentage was in the 15-to-25 percent range. [https://www.google.com/search?q=Is+there+a+scholarly+research+statistics+concerning+the+proportion+of+Black+Americans+who+are+%22light+skinned%22%3F&rlz=1C1ONGR\\_enUS971US971&oq=Is+there+a+scholarly+research+statistics+concerning+the+proportion+of+Black+Americans+who+are+%22light+skinned%22%3F&gs\\_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHC\\_AEQIRiPAjIHCAIQIRiPAiIBCTIwNTJqMGoxNagCCLACAfEF6bYJn4HWBszxBem2CZ-B1gbM&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=Is+there+a+scholarly+research+statistics+concerning+the+proportion+of+Black+Americans+who+are+%22light+skinned%22%3F&rlz=1C1ONGR_enUS971US971&oq=Is+there+a+scholarly+research+statistics+concerning+the+proportion+of+Black+Americans+who+are+%22light+skinned%22%3F&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHC_AEQIRiPAjIHCAIQIRiPAiIBCTIwNTJqMGoxNagCCLACAfEF6bYJn4HWBszxBem2CZ-B1gbM&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8) (Ret. 122025).

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.* (Robinson, footnote 1, p. 6).

We should ask ourselves: “Will the latter outcomes aid Black and/or all Americans reach our stated goal of serving in the world’s future leadership?” To excel, we must be excellent. The reality is that selecting on **colorism** alone in no way guarantees excellence!

**Table 1.—Colorism: Skin Tone/Shade and Gender of Today’s Most Notable Black Americans for Selected Areas of the Socioeconomic Life**

Line No.	Five Selected Area of US Socioeconomic Life	Today's Most Notable Black American Personalities' Names and Skin Tones/Shades							
		Males		Females		LS	LBrS	BrS	DBrS
<b>1</b>	<b>Politics*</b>					<b>6</b>		<b>3</b>	
2	US President	Pres. Barack Obama (LS)	NA						
3	US Vice-President	NA	Kamala Harris (LS)						
4	US Senator	Corey Booker (LS)	Angela Alsobrooks (LS)						
5	US Representative	Hakeem Jeffries (LS)	Maxine Waters (BrS)						
6	State Governor	Wes Moore (BrS)	NA						
7	City Mayor	Eric Adams (BrS)	Karen Bass (LS)						
<b>8</b>	<b>Economics and Business</b>					<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
9	Wealthiest Black American	Alexander Karp (LS)	Oprah Winfrey (BrS)						
10	Most Famous Black Entrepreneur	Jay-Z (BrS)	Rihanna (LBrS)						
11	Most Famous Black Inventor	Mark Dean (LBrS)	Marion Rogers Croak (DBrS)						
<b>12</b>	<b>Scholars and Learning</b>					<b>4</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
13	Educator	Edmund Gordon (DBrS)	Angela Davis (LS)						
14	Physical Science	Neil de-Grasse Tyson (LS)	Shirley Jackson (LS)						
15	Social Sciences	David Williams (BrS)	Patricia Collins (LS)						
<b>16</b>	<b>Artistic Expression</b>					<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>
17	Musician	Kendrick Lamar (BrS)	Beyoncé (LBrS)						
18	Author	Colson Whitehead (BrS)	Jesmyn Ward (LS)						
19	Actor/Actress	Denzel Washington (BrS)	Viola Davis (DBrS)						
20	Cinema Director	Jordan Peele (BrS)	Ava DuVernay (LS)						
<b>21</b>	<b>Athletics</b>					<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>
22	Football	Patrick Mahomes (LS)	NA						
23	Basketball	LeBron James (BrS)	Angel Reese (LBrS)						
24	Baseball	Mookie Betts (LS)	NA						
25	Boxing	Gervonta Davis (BrS)	Claressa Shields (BrS)						
26	Track	Noah Lyles(DBrS)	Sha'Carri Richardson (BrS)						
<b>27</b>	<b>SUMMARY</b>					<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>28</b>	<b>RATIOS</b>					<b>40.5%</b>	<b>10.8%</b>	<b>37.8%</b>	<b>10.8%</b>

Sources: Google's LLM AI BOT (Gemini); visualization by BlackEconomics.org. \*-In the case of multiple politicians in office, politicians from governments with the largest populations were selected. Key: LS (light skinned); LBrS (light brown skinned); BrS (brown skinned); and DBrS (dark brown skinned).

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