

## **White Supremacy and Internalized Racism**

**By Norm R. Allen Jr.**

Black people are still fighting battles they should have won decades ago. A case in point is the constant struggle to gain collective self-esteem. For centuries, Blacks have been conditioned by White supremacists through culture, history, science, entertainment, government and so forth, to hate themselves, their physical features, their African ancestry, and so on. It is not uncommon to hear even highly educated Black professionals say that their ancestors did not come from Africa. No, they contend, they came from the West Indies, as though Blacks from the West Indies have ancestors that never came from Africa. Such African Americans are completely deluded and dedicated to running away from themselves and their past.

However, as Malcolm X wisely observed, “you cannot hate the roots of a tree and not hate the tree. You can’t hate your own roots and not hate yourself.” In light of this fact, many African Americans have tried through the years to rescue their people from self-hatred and self-abnegation.

In 1914, Marcus Garvey organized the Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.). His organization was geared, among other things, to building the collective self-esteem of people of African descent. Responding to the White supremacist-spawned Black self-hatred he witnessed, his group created black dolls for black girls, popularized the saying “Black is Beautiful,” advocated Black pride and Black business development, rallied followers around the three-color red, black and green flag, and so forth. Garvey headed the largest mass movement of Black people in the world. However, after the U.S. government moved against him under the direction of J. Edgar Hoover, he was sent to jail, his movement died, and the collective self-esteem of Black people was deflated once again.

In the 1960s, the Black Power movement came to the fore on the heels of the civil rights movement. Again, the saying “Black is Beautiful” was embraced, Black people were asserting pride by wearing afros, Black people were referring to each other as brothers and sisters (at first, as soul brothers and soul sisters), African

Americans were identifying with Africa, the red, black and green flag made a comeback, James Brown sang “Say it Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud,” and so on. However, the feel-good movement did not last long, and eventually the afros gave way to the straight Super Fly hairstyles. Another well-intentioned fad had gone the way of the dinosaur.

In the 1980s, Afrocentrism was all the rage. Rappers were identifying with Malcolm X, the red, black and green pendants made a comeback, one rapper, Intelligent Hoodlum, issued a rap version of “Say it Loud,” Black people were learning their history, etc.

Again, however, the collective pride did not last. Despite these attempts to combat Black self-hatred, many Blacks still put their people down. They still consider dark skin to be ugly, thick lips to be unattractive, straight hair to be “good hair,” and so on. Black male entertainers continue to mainly use light-skinned women in their videos, and many Blacks still bleach their skin. (The problem is especially serious in Africa and the Caribbean. According to one report, 77% of Nigerian women use skin lighteners.) Entertainers such as Li’l Kim have pretty much destroyed their looks by trying to look like White people.

Some young Black girls do not want to play with black dolls. One grandmother from Buffalo said that she has five granddaughters, and three of them do not want to play with black dolls. One of her granddaughters cried uncontrollably when given a black doll to play with.

To try to help remedy this sad, ongoing problem, Mala Bryan has developed a doll collection with a Black-Caribbean flavor. She calls her line of dolls Malaville. She features one doll named Maisha with the “darkest skin tone.” (See #MaishaDoll or <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/MaishaDoll>.)

However, not everyone is feeling the love. Some people have actually complained that Maisha is too dark. Ms. Bryan, of course, disagrees and realizes that her critics “just don’t get it.”

All of this talk of dolls harkens back to the 1939 Clark doll experiment conducted by psychologists Kenneth Clark and his wife Mamie Phipps Clark. Black children were asked to choose between a black doll and a white doll. The dolls had the

same features except for skin color. Most of the children chose the white doll and claimed the white doll looked nicer. The test was used as evidence to bring forth the historic *Brown Versus Board of Education* ruling against segregated schools in 1954.

Many scholars have claimed that there were serious flaws in the study, and that under different circumstances black children harbor no such biases. In any case, even today, many Black children in various circumstances still identify blackness with negativity and whiteness with positivity.

As long as Black pride continues to be a mere fad, this problem will not end. Internalized racism is a problem that was created by White supremacists, but it can only be solved by concerted Black leaders, parents, teachers, siblings, friends, neighbors, entertainers and others that are steadily committed to instilling pride in their people wherever they are.