
Chapter 7

Skin Tone, Class, and Racial Attitudes Among African Americans

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As we begin the 21st century, the relationship between skin tone, socioeconomic status and racial attitudes among African Americans remains a complex and controversial issue (e.g., Allen, Telles, and Hunter, 2000; Hill, 2000; and Hunter, 2002). Despite the popularity of “color-blind” rhetoric, what W.E.B Du Bois observed as the significance of the color line during the past century appears to be equally true for the 21st century (Massey and Denton, 1993; and Zuberi, 2001). Driven by new global arrangements, the “color line” continues to evolve with shifting relationships across western and non-western nations as well as across and within changing racial or ethnic categories at the national level (e.g., Cornell and Hartman, 1998; Hollinger, 2000; Jackson, 2000; Omi and Winant, 1994; and Reid, 2002). Historically, the “one drop rule” has made gradations in skin tone less a demarcation of racial stratification within the

Bowman, Muhammad, and Ifatunji

United States than in the Caribbean, Mexico and other parts of Central and South Americas (Rodriguez and Cordero-Guzman, 1999; and Wright, 1999). However, skin tone effects have continued to operate in the socioeconomic status, quality of life and social relationships among African Americans in the U.S. despite shifting systems of racial stratification.

Researchers such as Rodriguez and Cordero-Guzman (1999) show how European colonizers often designed elaborate color-caste systems that legally sanctioned differential opportunity based on multiple skin tone gradations from white to black (i.e., White vs. Mestizo, Sambo, Mulatto, Quadroon, and Black). In contrast, English settlers in the United States institutionalized a White-Black caste system based on the one drop rule that defined a person as “Black” if they had one drop of African blood (e.g., Omi and Winant, 1994; Wright, 1999; and Zuberi, 2001). This unique White-Black system was enforced throughout the U.S. (with the possible exception of Louisiana and a few other isolated places with strong Spanish and/or French colonial legacies) and afforded those of African ancestry with lighter skin color less formal privileges than their counterparts in other parts of the New World. However, despite the pivotal force of the one drop rule in the U.S., skin tone has been used both formally and informally to demarcate African Americans throughout the nation’s history.

It is important to highlight historical trends in skin tone considerations within official racial categories in the U.S. decennial census especially with the new mixed-race categories in the 2000 census (e.g., Anderson and Fineberg, 1999; Rodriguez and Cordero-Guzman, 1999; and Zuberi, 2001). Skin tone-related racial categories were added to the U.S. census for the first time in 1870. These categories replaced the original Constitutional “Enumeration” which was only concerned with slave status—slave or free. At the founding of the U.S., the Constitution mandated an Enumeration “by adding the whole Number of Free Persons, including those bound to service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three-fifths of all other Persons.” A set of more explicit skin tone-

related categories were officially utilized between 1870 and 1890 in an attempt to gather information about "the new free man of color." Based on interviewer observation rather than self-reports, those with three-fourths African descent were classified as "Black." Those with three-eighths to one-half African ancestry were designated as "Mulatto." Those with one-fourth to three-eighths African heritage were called "quadroon." And those with one-eighth or less African ancestry were known as "octoroon." The mixed-race categories were dropped in 1900, but the Mulatto category was re-introduced in the 1910 and 1920 census counts. Hence, from 1930 to the 2000 Census, any offspring of Native American Indians, Europeans or Asians with detectable African ancestry would be counted simply as Negro, Black or African American.

Even with the one drop rule in the U.S., residuals of earlier mixed-race categories based on skin tone can still be observed in the tendency for African Americans with darker skin color (phenotypically more African) to receive less privilege and face more oppression than those with lighter skin color (phenotypically more racially mixed). Indeed, there is growing evidence that skin tone (dark vs. light) effects on socioeconomic status continue to operate in the U.S. among both African Americans and Latinos (e.g., Allen, Telles, and Hunter, 2000; Arce, 1987; Hughes and Hertel, 1990; and Keith and Herring, 1991). However, the specific mechanisms for these continuing skin tone effects remain unclear. In addition to formal mixed race demarcations, informal familial and social processes may have initially provided privileges to those with lighter over darker skin tone (e.g., mixed race children being provided freedom during slavery, or passing for White, or being assigned better jobs and educational opportunities). In turn, familial socioeconomic advantages among African Americans with lighter skin tone may be transferred across generations and reinforced by the socialization of related racial attitudes. A better understanding of such skin tone effects has become even more critical as the 2000 U.S. Census officially counts not only biracial but also a wide range of multi-racial

identifications among African Americans and other racial/ethnic groups for the first time in history (Hollinger, 2000; and Zuberi, 2001).

Skin Tone and Socioeconomic Attainment

A growing number of studies among African Americans has consistently found skin tone to be a significant predictor of multiple indicators of socioeconomic attainment, including education, occupational status and income (Allen, Telles, and Hunter, 2000; Keith and Herring, 1991; Hughes and Hertel, 1990; and Hill, 2000). For example, based on multivariate analysis, Keith and Herring (1991) found that skin tone was an even more powerful predictor of status attainment than traditional predictors such as parental socioeconomic status in a national sample of African Americans. Despite such persistent patterns, the legacy of the one drop rule may combine with more recent post-civil rights and post industrial changes to further moderate the magnitude of skin tone effects on socioeconomic mobility as well as race-related attitudes (Billingsley, 1992; Hill, 1997; and Morris and Herring, 1996).

In contrast to earlier periods, Blackwell (1985) and others noted how the modern civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s provided unprecedented opportunities for socioeconomic mobility among African Americans regardless of skin tone. Moreover, skin tone effects may be further moderated by the post-industrial dislocation of many African Americans into an unprecedented type of structural joblessness during the last quarter of the 21st century (e.g., Bowman, 1988; 1991a; 1991b; and Wilson, 1978; 1987; 1996). Hence, skin tone may not operate the same way among more affluent African Americans who benefited most from the civil rights movement as among those who continue to face persistent underclass poverty.

Skin Tone and Race-Related Attitudes

In addition to status attainment, skin tone may also differentiate

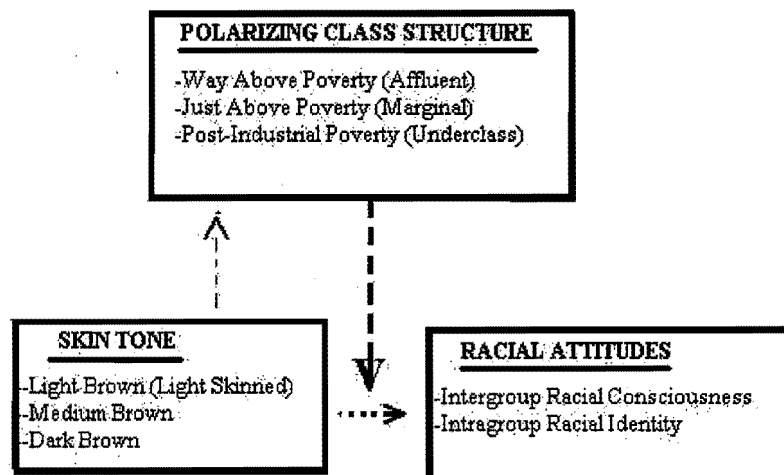
racial attitudes and ideology among African Americans. Historically, with deep roots in European colonization and enslavement of people of color, both elaborate color-caste categories as well as the one drop rule helped to structure systems of institutionalized racism (Drake, 1987; Ernst, 1980; Jordon, 1968; and Memmi, 1965). Indeed, these racialized social systems have been reinforced through the socialization of racist ideology and internalized racism at all levels to enable European masters to effectively control and exploit their subjects in America and other parts of the world (Fanon, 1967; Fields, 1982; Frazier, 1957; and Woodson, 1993). This literature suggests that both light skin tone and related class advantages among African Americans have historically been associated with assimilationist themes, including interracial docility, ingroup contempt, and a sense of superiority over those with darker skin and lower status.

Other studies suggest that the Black power movement of the 1960s and 1970s may have reduced, but not eliminated, the relationship between skin tone and race-related attitudes, perceptions and ideology (Hall, 1995; Hunter, 1998; 2002; and Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992). It is especially critical to better understand possible relationships between skin tone and a range of racial attitudes, including intergroup consciousness as well as intragroup identity (Bond and Cash, 1992; Edwards, 1972; Hughes and Hertel, 1990; and Ransford, 1970). In the context of the 21st century, it is also crucial to explore how such skin tone and racial attitude relationships might vary by economic status given the profound polarization in the class structure among African Americans since the 1970s. Hence, skin tone may have a distinct relationship to race-related attitudes among African Americans who face persistent poverty, those modestly above poverty and the more economically affluent.

A Polarizing Class Structure: Potential Moderating Influence

As illustrated in Figure 7.1, the present study explores the potential moderating role of a polarizing class structure among African Americans

Figure 7.1
Polarizing Class Structure as a Moderator
of the Relationship Between Skin tone and Racial Attitudes



on the relationship between skin tone and racial attitudes. Since the 1970s, there has been a continuing polarization of the class structure among African Americans characterized by: (1) increasing numbers who live in families well above the poverty line, where members often have both high levels of education and high paying jobs; (2) those who live in families just above the poverty line who often have more than one member working for pay; and (3) increasing numbers who live in families below the poverty line, where members have suffer from post-industrial job displacement, labor market dislocation, chronic joblessness, and underclass stigma (e.g., Bowman, 1991a; 1991b; Farley, 2000; Jaynes and Williams, 1989; and Wilson, 1978; 1987; 1996).

Despite the fact that the White-Black income and wealth gap continues, Farley (2000: 28) noted that between the 1970s and 1990s there had been a clear “increase in both the number of Black millionaires as well

Skin Tone, Class, and Racial Attitudes

as persistent Black poverty.” This more polarized class structure among African Americans continues to be forged by two concurrent sets of forces—post-civil rights opportunities and post-industrial economic dislocation. Driven by the racial unrest and collective action struggles of the 1960s, much has been written about the expanded civil rights opportunities that provided significant numbers of African Americans unprecedented access to higher education, high status jobs and a family economic status well above the poverty line (e.g., Bowman, 1991a; Collins, 1998; Landry, 1987; Morris and Herring, 1996; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; and Wilson, 1978). On the other end of the new class structure, a significant number of African Americans suffer disproportionately from global economic restructuring that has continued to dislocate families into persistent, post-industrial poverty from the 1970s to the present (Billingsley, 1992; Bowman, 1991b; 1988; Bowman and Forman, 1997; and Wilson, 1987; 1996).

African Americans continue to be at alarming risk for post industrial poverty for two major reasons: (1) the historical tracking of African American males into the most vulnerable manufacturing jobs which continue to be eliminated by automation, global restructuring, and deindustrialization, and (b) systematic race-related barriers including racial discrimination, metropolitan spatial isolation from expanding labor markets and poor quality urban schools—all of which exacerbate their chronic joblessness and obsolescence within the post industrial economy (Bowman, 1988; 1991b; Massey and Denton, 1993; Jaynes and Williams, 1989; and Wilson, 1987; 1996). In a review of related literature, Bowman (1988) noted that the impact of post industrial economic restructuring tends to ripple within the African American family from “jobless fathers,” to “unmarried mothers” to “children in poverty” all of whom must struggle to maintain a livelihood in stressful urban ecologies.

After declining from 1939 to 1973, African American family poverty rates began to rise, especially in northern and western urban areas

Bowman, Muhammad, and Ifatunji

which were hardest hit by post industrial economic restructuring. Between 1970 and 1985, chronic poverty among African American families escalated dramatically along with the number of jobless fathers and unmarried mothers. By 1985, 44 percent of Black children lived in poor households compared to only 16 percent of White children. A full 75 percent of these Black children in poverty lived in female headed households where their fathers were absent (compared to only 42 percent for Whites). By March 1995, Current Population Survey data revealed two-parent households accounted for only 12.9% of all African American families with children in poverty while single-parent households represented a full 87.1% (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).¹

Perhaps the most critical findings in research on race and poverty has been that African American families not only have a higher rate of poverty, but also remain in poverty for longer periods than White families who increasingly escape poverty through the employment of both mothers and fathers (Bowman, 1991b; Jaynes and Williams, 1989; and Wilson, 1987; 1996). Unfortunately, existing welfare reform provisions focus more on moving unmarried, unskilled and often vulnerable mothers from welfare to work than on the systematic reduction of African American family poverty by removing post industrial employment barriers faced by both mothers and fathers—married and non-custodial (e.g., Bowman, 1988; Bowman and Forman, 1997; Siefert, Bowman, Heflin, Bowman, and Williams, 2000; and Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan, 1995).

Research Questions and Methods

Guided by the related literature, the present study focuses on four central questions to explore the complex relationship between skin tone, class and racial attitudes among African Americans. Particular emphasis is placed on the potential moderating role of the polarizing class structure among African Americans on the relationship between skin tone and a range of racial attitudes:

Skin Tone, Class, and Racial Attitudes

(1) Is there a relationship between African Americans' skin tone and their location in the polarizing class structure—post industrial poverty, just above poverty, and way above poverty?

(2) Are there substantial numbers of African Americans with different skin tones within each of the three major strata of the new class structure—post industrial poverty, just above poverty, and way above poverty?

(3) Does the relationship between African Americans' skin tone and various intergroup racial attitudes—racial consciousness and affinity—depend on their location in the three distinct class structure categories?

(4) Does the relationship between African Americans' skin tone and various intragroup racial/ethnic attitudes—common fate, subethnic closeness or stereotypes—differ across the three class structure locations?

The data analyzed to explore these central research questions were collected from a national cross-sectional sample of the African American adult population living in the continental United States. Details of the methods for this study can be found in several methodological publications (Bowman, 1983; Caldwell, Jackson, Tucker, and Bowman, 1999; Jackson, 1991; and Jackson, Tucker, and Bowman, 1982).

Based on their observations, all interviewers were asked to rate each respondent's complexion on a five point scale immediately following the interview. The respondent's skin color is coded as: (1) very dark brown; (2) dark brown; (3) medium brown; (4) light brown (light skinned); or (5) very light brown (very light skinned). Based on the interviewer observations, 8.5% were rated as very dark brown, 29.9% as dark brown, 44.6% as medium brown, 14.4% as light brown, and only 2.6% as very light brown.

To tap the complexity of racial attitudes among African Americans, two sets of intragroup racial attitude items were selected as indicators of: (1) intergroup consciousness or attitudes about the nature and causes of White-Black inequalities as well as related collective action strategies, and

Bowman, Muhammad, and Ifatunji

(2) intragroup affinity or feelings of closeness to Blacks outside the U.S. as well as other racial and ethnic groups within the U.S. In addition, three sets of intergroup racial attitude items were selected to assess: (1) a common fate belief that one's life chances are tied to what happens to other Blacks; (2) subethnic identity including the extent to which one feels a closeness toward or feels alienated from a range of African American subgroups; and (3) subethnic stereotypes including the extent to which one endorses a range of positive and negative stereotypical beliefs about African Americans in general.

National Findings

Skin Tone and Location in the Class Structure

Is there a relationship between African Americans' skin tone and their location in the polarizing class structure—post industrial poverty, just above poverty, and way above poverty? To explore this question, Figure 7.2 presents findings on the proportion of African Americans with different

Figure 7.2: Relationship Between Skin Tone and Class Structure Location



skin tones who were in post industrial poverty, just above poverty and way above poverty. These findings reveal a relationship where the proportions of those with the darkest skin tone were most likely to be in post industrial poverty while those with lightest skin tone were most likely to be way above poverty. For example, 37% of those with dark skin tone were in post-industrial poverty compared to only 23% of those with light skin tone. By contrast, a full 40% of those with light skin tone were located way above poverty compared to 31% with medium skin tone and only 25% of those with dark skin tone.

Are there substantial numbers of African Americans with different skin tones within each of the three major strata of the new class structure—post industrial poverty, just above poverty, and way above poverty? Despite the statistically significant skin tone and class structure relationship, substantial wide skin tone variability remains within each of the three class structure contexts. As illustrated in Figure 7.2, substantial numbers of African Americans with different skin tones can be found among those in post industrial poverty, just above poverty and as well as those way above poverty. Hence, in this national sample, there are substantial numbers of African Americans with dark skin tone who are way above poverty and substantial numbers with light skin in post industrial poverty. This skin tone variability within each of the three class categories provides an opportunity to explore the moderating impact of class structure on the relationship between skin tone and racial attitudes as well as other outcomes. As suggested by Babbie (1991) and others, such analysis of class structure as a moderator variable can help: (1) to specify more clearly class conditions under which skin tone may have unique effects on racial attitudes; and (2) to clarify the manner in which class structure might mediate skin tone effects on race-related attitudes.

Skin Tone and Intergroup Racial Attitudes

Does the relationship between African Americans' skin tone and

various intergroup racial attitudes—racial consciousness and affinity—depend on their location in the class structure? To address this question, Tables 7.1-7.4 present findings on the relationship between skin tone and the selected intergroup racial attitudes. First, relevant findings are presented for the total sample and then under the three class structure conditions—post industrial poverty, just above poverty, and way above poverty. Overall, African Americans with different skin tones were strikingly similar on the various intergroup attitude measures of both racial/ethnic consciousness and affinity—regardless of class structure location. However, some skin tone differences did emerge on specific intergroup consciousness and affinity measures under particular class structure conditions.

Tables 7.1 shows findings on intergroup consciousness that reveal statistically significant differences on both beliefs about Whites' orientation toward Blacks and system blame beliefs about the causes of White-Black inequality. Specifically, to tap beliefs about Whites' orientation, respondents were asked: "On the whole, do you think most White people want to see Blacks get a better break, or do they want to keep Blacks down or don't they care one way or the other?" Only in the post industrial poverty condition, were African Americans with darker skin tone significantly more likely (49%) than those with either medium (28%) or light (27%) skin tones to believe that Whites want to keep Blacks down. Among those way above poverty, a similar trend emerged where African Americans with dark skin (34%) were more likely than those with light skin (20%) to perceive that Whites want to keep Blacks down rather than see them get a better break. By contrast, among those just above poverty, the opposite trend emerged—African Americans with lighter (46%) rather than darker (33%) skin tone were the most likely to perceive that Whites want to keep Blacks down.

As shown in Table 7.2, to tap system blame beliefs respondents were asked: "In the United States, if Blacks don't do well in life, it is because: (a) they are kept back because of their race, or (b) they do not

Table 7.2: Distribution of Intergroup Racial Attitudes by Skin Tone and Poverty Status

Table 7.2	Total sample			Poverty and below			Just above poverty			Way above poverty		
	Dark	Med.	Light	Dark	Med.	Light	Dark	Med.	Light	Dark	Med.	Light
In the United States, if black people don't do well in life, it is because . . .												
System keeps Blacks back	55	51	53	55	52	61	61	51	54	56	54	56
Blacks don't work hard	40	44	42	55	42	39	39	49	46	44	46	44
To have power and improve their position in the United States . . .												
Work as a group	88	88	87	90	89	87	92	91	85	91	89	93
Get ahead individually	18	18	11	10	11	13	8	9	15	8	11	7
Indicate whether you feel (very) close to . . .												
Blacks in Africa	60	53	51	62	55	51	60	57	55	59	51	47
West Indians	47	40	42	45	38	42	48	41	45	52	41	41
American Indians	41	38	44	41	35	33	41	39	50	46	41	37
Spanish-speaking Americans	34	33	34	36	27	25	31	39	35	35	37	34
Asian Americans	22	22	22	25	26	16	19	22	28	24	22	16

Table 7.1: Distribution of Intergroup Racial Attitudes by Skin Tone and Poverty Status

Table 7.1	Total sample			Poverty and below			Just above poverty			Way above poverty		
	Dark	Medium	Light	Dark	Medium	Light	Dark	Medium	Light	Dark	Medium	Light
How true do you think each of these words is in describing most black people?												
Are ashamed of selves	6	6	5	9	8	12	3	5	4	7	5	3
Neglect their families	11	10	9	15	12	15	10	11	12	8	7	4
Are lazy	16	12	10	21	16	15	14	14	12	10	7	7
Give up easily	12	10	12	15	12	16	12	10	12	10	8	7
Are selfish	13	11	10	15	14	13	12	8	10	11	9	5
Are weak	13	10	10	17	10	17	13	10	9	10	8	8
Are lying or trifling	13	11	9	16	14	12	13	11	10	8	8	7
Do most white people want to see blacks get a break or keep them down?												
Keep Blacks down	39	38	39	49	28	27	33	41	46	34	32	20
Give Blacks a better break	23	20	20	51	72	73	67	59	54	66	68	80

Skin Tone, Class, and Racial Attitudes

work hard enough to get ahead." Only in the just above poverty condition were African Americans with dark skin tone significantly more likely (61%) than those with either medium (51%) or light skin (54%) to blame the system, rather than Black deficits, for racial inequalities. By contrast, under post industrial poverty, there is a greater tendency for those with lighter (61%) rather than darker (55%) skin tone to endorse such system blame beliefs. Among African Americans way above poverty, slightly over half blamed the system rather than individual deficits, regardless of skin tone. Moreover, regardless of skin tone, the great majority of African Americans (85%-93%) endorsed collective action over individual mobility strategies to cope with racial inequalities when asked: "To improve their condition the U.S.: (a) Black people should work together as a group, or (b) each Black person should work to get ahead on his or her own."

Table 7.2 also presents findings on the relationship between skin tone and intergroup affinity—or feelings of closeness to Black groups outside the U.S. (Africa and West Indies) as well as other non-White groups in the U.S. (American Indians, Spanish-Speaking Americans, and Asian Americans). Skin tone differentiated feelings of closeness with Blacks in Africa most clearly for those way above poverty—although a similar trend emerged for those just above and in post industrial poverty. African Americans with darker skin were slightly more likely (55%) than those with light (47%) skin tone to feel either "very or fairly" close in their ideas and feelings about things to Blacks in Africa. Among African Americans way above poverty, there is also a similar tendency for those with darker skin (59%) to feel closer to West Indians than those with either medium (51%) or lighter (47%) skin tone. No significant relationship emerged between skin tone and feelings of closeness to American Indians, Spanish-Speaking Americans or Asian Americans. However, under the just above poverty condition, a general tendency for African Americans with darker skin tone to feel closer to other racial/ethnic groups of color appears to reverse. Only in this "in between" class category did those with darker

Bowman, Muhammad, and Ifatunji

skin feel less close to other groups of color than those with lighter skin tone.

Skin Tone and Intragroup Racial Attitudes

Does the location of African Americans in the polarizing class structure moderate the relationship between their skin tone and various intragroup racial or ethnic attitudes? To address this question, Tables 7.3 and 7.4 present findings on the relationship between skin tone and the selected intragroup racial attitudes under each of the three class structure conditions—post industrial poverty, just above poverty and way above poverty. Under each class structure condition, African Americans with different skin tones are compared on several intragroup attitudes—common fate beliefs, subethnic closeness (identity and alienation) and subethnic stereotypes (positive and negative). Overall, regardless of class structure, African Americans with different skin tones were very similar on most of the measures of intragroup racial or ethnic attitudes. However, class structure did appear to moderate the relationship of skin tone to common fate beliefs, closeness to "Black people who rioted," and positive the subethnic stereotype that "most Blacks do for others."

Among African Americans just above poverty, those with darker skin were significantly more likely to endorse the common fate belief that their "chances in life depend on what happens to Black people as a group" rather than on what they do themselves. Such common fate beliefs were expressed by 45% with dark skin, 36% with medium brown skin, and 32% with light skin tone. A similar trend emerged for those way above poverty, but the pattern among those in post industrial poverty appear more complex. Among these poorest respondents, those with the lightest and darkest skin tone were equally likely to express common fate beliefs (46% and 45% respectively) while those with medium skin tone perceived less common fate (33%).

African Americans with different skin tones were extremely similar in their subethnic closeness or tendency to feel "most close to" certain

Table 7.4: Distribution of Intergroup Racial Attitudes by Skin Tone and Poverty Status

Table 7.4	Total sample			Poverty and below			Just above poverty			Way above poverty		
	Dark	Medium	Light	Dark	Medium	Light	Dark	Medium	Light	Dark	Medium	Light
For each group, indicate whether you do not feel close(at all) to them in your ideas and feelings about things.												
Blacks against the law	41	42	46	40	39	38	41	42	50	50	50	52
Blacks who rioted	30	30	21	29	31	26	36	34	19	24	22	18
Black elected officials	8	9	9	8	9	9	7	9	14	11	7	7
Black professionals	4	4	3	4	5	4	4	3	4	6	5	2
How true do you think each of these words is in describing most black people?												
Are proud of selves	56	54	56	59	60	59	59	52	57	49	52	43
Love their families	65	68	66	69	66	70	65	68	67	62	68	65
Are hard working	57	56	55	62	63	62	57	51	60	57	53	45
Keep trying	57	56	57	64	58	59	54	55	54	51	53	60
Do for others	30	28	25	39	28	33	25	27	23	28	31	18
Are strong	51	51	51	49	52	58	53	47	50	52	52	49
Are honest	24	20	23	27	18	20	23	20	23	21	22	21

Table 7.3: Distribution of Intergroup Racial Attitudes by Skin Tone and Poverty Status

Table 7.3	Total sample			Poverty and below			Just above poverty			Way above poverty		
	Dark	Medium	Light	Dark	Medium	Light	Dark	Medium	Light	Dark	Medium	Light
Do your chances in life depend more on what happens to black people as a group, or does it depend more on what you do yourself?												
What happens to Blacks	44	36	35	46	33	45*	45	36	32*	40	35	35
What you do yourself	56	64	65	54	67	55	55	69	68	60	65	65
For each group, indicate whether you feel (very) close to them in your ideas and feelings about things.												
Poor Blacks	29	27	28	32	33	29	33	28	35	22	21	23
Working class Blacks	13	15	19	10	89	12	15	17	15	17	21	25
Middle class Blacks	4	6	4	3	3	1	3	5	2	9	10	8
Young Blacks	12	11	13	15	10	13	10	11	12	12	12	12
Older Blacks	14	15	10	18	17	16	14	15	11	8	11	9
Religious Blacks	21	21	20	15	22	20	21	21	21	23	19	18

subgroups of Black people (identity) and "least close to" to other subgroups (alienation). Regardless of class, African Americans with different skin tones identified most closely with poor Blacks, religious Blacks, older Blacks, and young Blacks. Similarly, regardless of class, those with different skin tones also felt alienated from or least close to Black people "who have made it by getting around the law" or "who rioted in the streets." However, among those just above poverty, it is interesting to note that only 19% with light skin felt least close to Black people who rioted compared to 30% with medium and 36% with dark skin tone.

With respect to subethnic stereotypes, African Americans with different skin tones were also very similar in their tendency to endorse positive stereotypes about their own group while rejecting negative stereotypes. To tap stereotypical beliefs, all respondents were asked to identify positive and negative traits that they believed were "very" true for "most" Black people: "Many different words have been used to describe Black people in general. Some of these words describe good points and some of these words describe bad points. How true do you think each of these words is in describing most Black people?" Only in the way above poverty condition were African Americans with light skin significantly less likely (18%) to believe that "most Black people do for others" compared to those with medium (31%) or dark (28%) skin tone. Regardless of skin tone or class, over half of all African Americans endorsed the positive stereotypes that (it is "very" true that "most") Black people "love their families," "are hard working," "keep trying," are proud of themselves" and "are strong." Moreover, regardless of skin tone and class, well over 80% of Black people rejected the negative subethnic stereotypes that Black people "are ashamed of themselves," "neglect their families," "are selfish," "are lying or trifling," "give up easily," "are weak," or "are lazy."

Summary and Conclusions

This study supports the importance of national data analysis in

providing unique insight into the complex relationship between skin tone, socioeconomic status and racial attitudes among African Americans. First, findings reveal a clear relationship between African Americans' skin tone and their location in the polarizing class structure—post industrial poverty, just above poverty, and way above poverty. These findings extend past research that shows consistent relationships between skin tone and other measures of socioeconomic attainment such as education, occupational status and personal income (Allen, Telles, and Hunter, 2000; Keith and Herring, 1991; Hughes and Hertel, 1990; and Hill, 2000). Hence, African Americans' skin tone is not only related to traditional measures of socioeconomic attainment, but it also differentiates their location in a polarizing class structure that continues to widen as we move further into the 21st century (e.g., Farley, 2000; Jaynes and Williams, 1989; and Wilson, 1978; 1987).

Going beyond past research, this study also highlights the substantial skin tone variability among African Americans within each of the three class categories—post-industrial poverty, just above poverty, and way above poverty. Large numbers African Americans with lighter skin remain among the post-industrial poor while large numbers of those with darker skin have moved well beyond poverty. Such skin tone variability within class groups may reflect residual effects of the one drop rule as well as the impact of both post-civil rights opportunities and post industrial economic dislocation—none of which is explicitly stratified by skin tone (Farley and Allen, 1987; Jackson, 2000; Jaynes and Williams, 1989; Morris and Herring, 1996; and Wilson, 1978).

Despite the skin tone variance within each class category, the relationship between skin tone and various racial attitudes was only modestly moderated by location in the class structure.

Within each class category, African Americans with different skin tones were quite similar in both their intergroup and intragroup racial attitudes. African Americans with different skin tones were strikingly

Skin Tone, Class, and Racial Attitudes

similar on several measures of both intergroup consciousness and affinity—regardless of class structure location. For example, the great majority of African Americans across class categories endorsed collective action over individual mobility strategies to cope with White-Black inequalities. Such findings may reflect the powerful effects of the 1960s civil rights era on the convergence of Black consciousness and related racial attitudes among African Americans regardless of skin color (Gurin and Epps, 1974; Jackson, McCullough, Gurin, and Broman, 1991; and Morris and Herring, 1996). Regardless of class, no clear relationship emerged between skin tone and feelings of closeness to American Indians, Spanish-Speaking Americans or Asian Americans. Despite the fact that skin tone variance among African Americans may sometimes reflect a shared ancestry with these other groups of color, feelings of closeness to them may be moderated by the powerful residuals of the one drop rule and the Black consciousness movement which both accentuate African identity. This salience of African identity over all others was supported by stronger feelings of closeness toward both Blacks in Africa and West Indians, especially among African Americans with darker skin tone.

African Americans with different skin tones were also similar in their subethnic closeness—regardless of location in the class structure. Specifically, they expressed a strong sense of identity with poor Blacks, religious Blacks, older Blacks, and young Blacks—but alienation from Black people “who have made it by getting around the law” or who rioted in the streets.” Regardless of class, African Americans also strongly endorsed positive stereotypes that Black people “love their families,” “are hard working,” “keep trying,” “are proud of themselves” and “are strong.” Moreover, they strongly rejected negative stereotypes that Black people “are ashamed of themselves,” “neglect their families,” “are selfish,” “are lying or trifling,” “give up easily,” “are weak,” or “are lazy.” Regardless of skin color, these findings reflect a strong tendency among African Americans to affirm a positive ingroup cultural identity and to reject anti-

Bowman, Muhammad, and Ifatunji

Black stereotypes which have long been endorsed by the larger society (Katz and Braly, 1933; Brigham, 1971; Dovidio, Evans, and Tyler, 1986; Jackman and Senter, 1983; and Katz and Taylor, 1988).

A rather complex set of findings reveals that class structure does sometimes moderate the relationship between skin tone and particular race-related feelings, beliefs and perceptions. Under specific class conditions, skin tone had a unique relationship to three intergroup racial attitudes (Whites orientation beliefs, system blame beliefs, and affinity toward Blacks in Africa) as well as two intragroup racial attitudes (common fate beliefs, and positive stereotype that most Blacks “do for others”). Some of the findings reflect themes in past research, while others raise more questions than they answer and call for future inquiry. One set of findings is consistent with traditional themes that associate light skin tone and affluence with more assimilationist attitudes—and darker skin and poverty with stronger Black consciousness or identity (Fanon, 1967; Frazier, 1957; Hall, 1995; Russell, Wilson, and Hall, 1992). For example, the most affluent African Americans (way above poverty) who also had light skin tone felt least close to Blacks in Africa. Similarly, the most affluent Blacks with the lightest skin tone were least likely to endorse the positive stereotype that “Blacks do for others.” Among those in extreme post industrial poverty, darker skin tone was associated with stronger racial consciousness beliefs that Whites want to keep Blacks down. Moreover, among those on the margins of poverty, darker skin tone was associated with both stronger system blame and common fate beliefs. By contrast, in this “in between” class group, African Americans’ with lighter skin tone tend to blame deficits in Blacks themselves for racial inequalities, and they believe that their fate is not dependent on what happens to Blacks in general.

Several other findings are less explicable in terms of themes from past research and raise questions for future research. For example, findings on racial consciousness reveal that African Americans with light rather than

Skin Tone, Class, and Racial Attitudes

dark skin tone are more conscious of White opposition to Black progress only when they are just above poverty (caught between the polarizing post industrial poor and more affluent). Among the post industrial poor, why were both lightest and darkest skin tones associated with stronger common fate beliefs than medium skin tone? Why is system blame strongest among darker skin Blacks just above poverty, but strongest for lighter skin Blacks caught in more extreme post industrial poverty?

In conclusion, this study provides unique insight into the complex relationship between skin tone, class and racial attitudes as we have moved into the 21st century. Generally, it appears that African American's skin tone has a clearer relationship to their position in the polarizing class structure than to their racial attitudes. Future inquiry must better clarify mechanisms such as race-related socialization through which skin tone might differentiate class outcomes as well as racial attitudes (Bowman and Howard, 1985). Race-related socialization may not only be a direct source of racial attitudes, but may also mediate the relationships between both skin tone and class on proactive racial attitudes. A focus on race-related socialization may help to explain how color and class lines interact to promote progressive racial attitudes and collective action strategies.

Although we found that class sometimes moderated the relationship between skin tone and racial attitudes, future research should also explore possible mediating relationships. For example, rather than a moderating role, class structure may actually mediate the relationship between skin tone and class structure. That is, skin tone may have direct effects on class structure, which in turn, affects racial attitudes.

Historically, those with light skin tone may have been provided class advantages over those with darker skin, and these advantages may continue to be transferred to new generations. As suggested in the present study, these historical skin tone disparities may increasingly manifest themselves in a polarizing class structure. In turn, growing disparities between the post industrial poor and the most affluent may increasingly

Bowman, Muhammad, and Ifatunji

differentiate their racial attitudes. A better understanding of such issues among African Americans is especially crucial as their class structure continues to polarize, their relationships with other racial/ethnic groups grow more complex, and post-civil rights conservatism continues to increase opposition to race-targeted public policies.

Appendix

A national sample was drawn according to a multistage, area probability sampling procedure designed to ensure that every Black household in the United States had the same chance of being selected for an interview. Specialized screening techniques were developed to produce a sample that more accurately represented all noninstitutionalized Black adults than in past national studies. Highly trained interviewers, with the same racial background as respondents, completed 2,107 face-to-face interviews during 1979-1980 for a response rate of 67.1%. The majority of the sample resided in the south (53%) followed by the north central (22%), northeast (19%), and western (6%) regions. Twenty percent lived in rural areas while a full 80% were urban residents. The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 101 years old, 1,310 were females and 797 were males.

Measures

Data were collected using a carefully designed, two-hour interview schedule that provided a wide range of measures in several substantive areas including interviewer observations and a wide range of self-report indicators of socioeconomic status and racial attitudes. Special focus group techniques and extensive pre-testing increased the cultural sensitivity and quality of each measure. The specific independent, moderator and dependent variables used in this investigation are operationalized below.

Moderator Variable

Class Structure Location: This three category measure of class

Skin Tone, Class, and Racial Attitudes

structure distinguishes between African Americans who are in post industrial poverty, just above poverty and way above poverty. As noted earlier, these three levels reflect a polarizing trend where the gap between the upper more and lower strata has continued to expand over the past 25 years (e.g., Farley, 2000; Wilson, 1978). Rather than family income, these three class categories were derived from a more detailed ratio of total family income to a poverty need standard (equated to family size and composition). The specific income-to-needs ratio used to develop this class structure classification was the Panel Study for Income Dynamics' food costs.

Dependent Variables

The specific measures in the present study focus on both "intergroup" and "intragroup" feelings, beliefs or perceptions (Gurin and Epps, 1974; Jackson, 2001; Jackson, McCullough, Gurin, and Broman, 1991). These measures are discussed in greater detail along with the specific empirical findings from the statistical analysis of national data to explore the central research questions.

Endnote

1. African American single mother households represent 82.2% of all African American families with children in poverty, single father households represent 4.9%.

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Chapter 8

Toward a Critical Demography of Neo-Mulattoes: Structural Change and Diversity Within the Black Population

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There has been an explosion of research on the mixed-race or biracial population in the United States (Allen et al., 2000; Hunter, 2002; Thompson and Keith, 2001). The impetus for the renewed interest can be attributed to related issues. First, the political debates surrounding the mixed-race population, which ultimately led to historic changes being made to Census 2000 is one explanation. Another plausible explanation is the increase in the influence of White women, specifically White women who have mixed-race children. They are leading the charge by resisting efforts to place their children in the Black category. In some regards, they are also in a fight for their own identities (Horton, forthcoming). For whatever the reason, sociologists are again directing their attention to the social construction of race as it applies to a population unwilling to identify with conventional monolithic notions about race and racial identity.



To Marsha, Ray, and Darlene



Skin Deep




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*How Race and Complexion Matter in the
"Color-Blind" Era*

**Cedric Herring
Verna Keith
Hayward Derrick Horton**

Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy
University of Illinois at Chicago

University of Illinois Press
2004



Chapter 7	Page 128
<i>Skin Tone, Class, and Racial Attitudes Among African Americans</i>	
Phillip J. Bowman, Ray Muhammad, and Mosi Ifatunji	
Chapter 8	Page 159
<i>Toward a Critical Demography of Neo-Mulattoes: Structural Change and Diversity Within the Black Population</i>	
Hayward Derrick Horton and Lori Latrice Sykes	
Chapter 9	Page 174
<i>Demystifying Color-Blind Ideology: Denying Race, Ignoring Racial Inequalities</i>	
Kimberly L. Ebert	
Chapter 10	Page 197
<i>Race South of the Equator: Reexamining the Intersection of Color and Class in Brazil</i>	
Vânia Penha-Lopes	
Chapter 11	Page 224
<i>From Biracial to Tri-Racial: The Emergence of a New Racial Stratification System in the United States</i>	
Eduardo Bonilla-Silva	
Index	Page 240
About the Contributors	Page 246



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Co-published by:
Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy
University of Illinois at Chicago

University of Illinois Press
Urbana and Chicago

Printed in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Herring, Cedric.

Skin deep : how race and complexion matter in the "color-blind" era /
Cedric Herring, Verna Keith, Hayward Derrick Horton.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-929011-26-1 (alk. paper)

1. Racism. 2. Human skin color--Social aspects. 3. Human skin
color--Psychological aspects. 4. Racism--United States. 5. United
States--Race relations. I. Keith, Verna. II. Horton, Hayward Derrick.

III. Title.

HT1521 .H43 2004

305.8--dc21

2003010648 305.8 H567s

Herring, Cedric.

Skin deep

Contents

Chapter 1	Page 1
<i>Skin Deep: Race and Complexion in the "Color-Blind" Era</i>	
Cedric Herring	
Chapter 2	Page 22
<i>Light, Bright, and Almost White: The Advantages and Disadvantages of Light Skin</i>	
Margaret Hunter	
Chapter 3	Page 45
<i>Copper Brown and Blue Black: Colorism and Self Evaluation</i>	
Maxine S. Thompson and Verna M. Keith	
Chapter 4	Page 65
<i>For Richer, For Poorer, Whether Dark or Light: Skin Tone, Marital Status, and Spouse's Earnings</i>	
Korie Edwards, Katrina Carter-Tellison, and Cedric Herring	
Chapter 5	Page 82
<i>"Mama, Are You Brown?": Multiracial Families and the Color Line</i>	
Heather M. Dalmage	
Chapter 6	Page 99
<i>Beyond Black?: The Reflexivity of Appearances in Racial Identification Among Black/White Biracials</i>	
Kerry Ann Rockquemore and David L. Brunnsma	