

Why Do We Hate Ourselves?

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The moment the first Africans were brought as slaves to America, the founding fathers of this land had to grapple with the immorality of calling themselves Christians and seekers of liberty and justice while holding other humans as slaves. Thus, they had to find a way of justifying their dissonant actions. They used the Bible as support for the institution of slavery. However, the circumstances and the treatment of slaves in America is never comparable to that of slaves in Biblical times.

Africans all over the Americas and the Caribbean were chattel; their destinies subject to the capricious wills of their masters. Enduring some of the most cruel and inhuman treatment in history slaves were treated as beasts of labor. In order to justify this subhuman treatment, their owners had to operate on a mindset that viewed slaves as inferior. Burrell in his book "Brainwashed" notes the following, "It's as though the original colonial elites hired a PR agency to sell the concept that Africans were innately inferior and it was indeed completely justifiable to treat them as subhuman beasts."

Even more insidious were the side-effects of this mindset, formed by the systematic structure of ideologies that justified this treatment. This consistent and insidious brainwashing had to occur in both races. European descendants had to convince themselves that African descendants were inferior in order to not treat them as equals, and African descendants had to come to believe that they were inferior in order to remain subservient. For the latter, remaining in this mindset would mean a loss of self that could prove detrimental to not only the psyche of the slave enduring the ill treatment but of his generations to come.

This brainwashing was so profound that even today it continues to cause an emotional chasm in the American society. Some whites continue to hold the assumptions that blacks are inferior while claiming that they are really not prejudiced. It is demonstrated when they believe that blacks do not have the intellectual capability or the fortitude of character to be successful. We see it when they create systems to intentionally keep people of color out. It is evident when they vote for policies that directly affect access to opportunities for minorities. It is obvious in a sense of arrogant entitlement to all the wealth and the power in America. It is further manifested when they honestly believe that it is a God-given mandate to reject policies or programs that will in some way alleviate the plights of the poor and disenfranchised. One does not have to look further than the current debate in this presidential election to see remnants of this brainwashing rearing its ugly head.

Nevertheless for blacks, while the many years of struggle for justice and freedom has granted

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them an often unshakeable grasp on their right to self-determination, systematic brainwashing has also left its menacing traces with psychologically devastating consequences. One major after effect is that way back in the depths of their psyche often lurk levels of self-hatred. Burrell further states, "In our efforts to prove our equality, we unconsciously chased the master's dream, adopted his values, and danced to his tune." The assimilation and acculturation of the black race, while many debate were necessary to prove equality, has come with a high price. Our men have been systematically taught that euro-centric female beauty is superior. For Black women recognizing that their beauty is being measured by these inequitable standards has forced them to want to assimilate and try to transform themselves to fit this scale.

This is why for some it may just be another way of expressing beauty, but for the majority the donning of wigs or weaves, the excessive use of hair straightening chemicals and hair color calms their insecurities by allowing them to feel closer to the Eurocentric beauty ideal. In addition, the resurgence of skin bleaching crèmes and the popularity of rhinoplasty amongst women of color, send the clear message that Afrocentric characteristics of beauty are to be avoided. The result is that too many black girls and young women completely discount and even hate their God given beauty. Thus, wide noses, thick lips, dark skin, and kinky hair are not equated to beauty traits.

Yet, the new resurgence of black women choosing to wear their hair natural seems to be making a strong social statement against the above. This natural hair revolution has prompted social observers to feel that the vestiges of self-hatred are perhaps being slowly decimated from our collective psyches. However, the cyber attacks on Olympic gymnast Gaby Douglas' hair prompt us to step back and take a deeper look.

During the 2012 30th Olympiad Games, sixteen-year old Gabrielle Douglas, stole the heart of the world as she propelled herself into history as the first woman of African descent to win a gold medal as an all-around gymnastics powerhouse. Instead of a universal celebration, black women took to social networking sites to disparage Gabby's hair: "Gabby Douglas is cute and all but that hair", "Gabby Douglas shouldn't be the standout in those commercials until she gets her hair done", "Gabby Douglas needs to tame the beady beads in the back of her head"; "She needs some gel and a brush"; "Someone needs to give her a hair intervention."

It is at this point that we must stop to consider that self-hatred may still run deep within our race and nowhere is it more evident than in the views our women have of themselves. When Black women are quick to pour scorn on another Black woman for her natural African traits: her hair, the color of her skin, her figure, this is self-hatred still running deep. When mothers describe their daughters' hair using moral terms such as "good" or "bad" self-hatred is still running deep.

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When black girls deride each other because of skin color self-hatred is running deep. As women, it is time to look at ourselves in the mirror of our psyche. We need to ask ourselves: In what ways do I hate myself? The historical weight of Gabby Douglas's accomplishments is reason for all her sisters to join in jubilation. However, until as black women we look in the mirror and work on changing our mindsets about our beauty; self-hatred will continue to run deep.

Copyright © 2012 by Norka Blackman-Richards, is an educator, a writer and an empowerment speaker on women, education, diversity and generational issues. She is the Chief Editor of *Empowerment 4 Real Women* and the Founder of *4 Real Women International, Inc*. Norka is an Assistant Director and the Academic Coordinator for the Percy Ellis Sutton SEEK Program of the City University of New York at Queens College.