

In recent months I have been asked the same question by African-Americans, whites, Hispanics, Africans, Haitians, Jamaicans etc. And the question is: "Do you think Obama will become president?" My answer usually is: "It seems as if he has a good chance." But I always get the same reaction, "A Black man will never be president of the United States." When I argue that neither color nor gender are requirements to serve in the highest office in the land. I get the same old trite response, "But, he is a black man, his father is African, he has a Muslim name, his wife is too black." Not only am I appalled at such a reply, I am deeply ashamed because I am a woman of color.

This article is not about what party you belong to or who you should vote for. The issue I want to draw your attention to goes much deeper than these.

It is: do you love yourself? Obama being a black man should never be a determinant for people not to vote for him. What happened to Martin Luther King's dream for us arriving at the point, in America, where we judge a man by the content of his character and not by the color of his skin?

What we are actually doing, (i.e. those who use Obama's blackness as an excuse), is judging a man's capacity to be the president of the United States solely on the color of his skin. We have totally obviated his leadership skills, his intellectual abilities, his capacity to understand national and world issues and sympathize with the oppressed and less fortunate. We have not seen any of those very important elements because we cannot get past the color of his skin. If after you have listened to him and read about him and feel that you know what his politics are about, and he does not seem to fulfill your expectations of what a president should be, then please do not vote for him. But as long as you insist in using Obama's blackness as an excuse, as an immigrant (and most immigrants in this nation are of color) you doom the future for your children. You are saying that in America, the land of opportunity, your children will only go so far. You might as well lose all hope of ever seeing your children achieve anything and they might as well just give up now. Perhaps this is the reason why so many of our children have already given up and they drop out of school only to end up in jail.

In no way am I ignoring the history of pain and disallowance that we have experienced as a people – all over the world. As a little girl I grew up in a world where my skin color was unacceptable. My dark skin, my hips, my lips, my hair – were not seen as signs of success. I remember that as a child my father would set apart a monthly sum from his scanty minister's salary to purchase Ebony magazine. As the father of two black girls he

understood the importance of developing a healthy self-concept, particularly in the times we lived in. Thus, he made sure that we were exposed to identifiable and positive images of success.

My sister and I would spend hours flipping through the pages of the magazine, captivated by the beautiful pictures of brown-skinned people. The pictures of the men and women were really not new to our reality; they looked like our Daddy, Mommy, our aunties, and uncles, the people at church. Nevertheless, they were people whose success we very rarely saw “positively” displayed on TV and in other magazines.

Thirty-something years later, in the 21st century, when images are supposedly more global, I find it disturbing that little children of color still experience the same type of rejection. There are only a few images of successful black men and women on TV, billboards, or magazines. Ok there's Oprah. But have you ever wondered why the only two arenas where successful black men in America can be showcased in the media are in sports or hip hop? What happened to our black scholars such as engineers and scientists? Yet, in this reality I find it even more disturbing that our young children will hear their parents say that a man is being foolhardy, and will never fulfill his dreams simply because of the color of his skin.

Something is wrong when people find the need to constantly define their achievement according to the prejudiced standards of an ailing society. Something is wrong when people do not know how to celebrate the successes and achievements of people like themselves, but seek to pull them back down in the barrel.

Something is wrong when people of the same race and background cannot separate their theoretical differences in religion or politics and instead hunt for ways to tear each other down. Something is wrong when people of the same color would scorn a man's chances for success because of the color of his skin. Something is desperately wrong when children learn from watching and listening to grown ups that the color of their skin determines the extent of their success.

Perhaps this is a good time for each of us to take a hard look at our personal definitions of success within our own race. Are we using our own low-level definitions and our low-self concept to tell ourselves that we can't make it? And are we telling God, “You made a mistake with my color. Therefore I will live my life by this

low perception that I have of myself.”

It is time to teach our children that they cannot hear stories and watch movies about the Civil Rights movement, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks and still believe that it has nothing to do with them. The issues are very real today and even more destructive because they are within our minds. It is time to teach our children to understand the greatness of the powers that lie within them. That it is our compassion for others, our intellectual abilities, our inventiveness and leadership that will make us successful in life, not whether we look white or can pass for white. God's word is clear, He made us “fearfully and wonderfully” (Psalms139:14). If we were to just believe, then we would see that we are indeed powerful and beautiful, and we would transmit this to our children. As a result they would become fearless and then perhaps one day when they grow up they will decide to run for president too.

Norka Blackman-Richards, is an adjunct lecturer for CUNY, a writer, a minister's wife, and an empowerment speaker on women, education, family and cultural issues. Norka is also the president of 4 Real Women International, Inc. You may visit her site at www.4realwomen.com