

Black no Longer Beautiful? What Is Happening To Our Children?

“Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds” one of the most prophetic statement by the late reggae superstar Bob Marley. Albeit this statement was most likely intended for the international community, for our purpose, let’s assign it to Marley’s native country Jamaica

What signs and symptoms were apparent in the Jamaican culture as manifested by Jamaicans to warrant such a quote?

Well, one can only speculate as Mr. Marley is not around to define or elaborate on his quote. Suffice it to say, he wasn’t referring to the institution of slavery in which blacks were enslaved by whites. Additionally, self hate amongst blacks might have been an issue but nonetheless ambiguous and therefore these signs and symptoms could not directly be attributed this common and dangerous plight of self despise within our country and among our black brothers and sisters.

But what about the blatant and overt sign of self hate as manifested by certain behaviors such as skin bleaching? Was this even a concern when Marley made the quote? Well, it might not have been an issue back then, but undoubtedly has been wreaking havoc in Jamaica and other parts of the world over the past few years.

What is self hate? More specifically, what is black self hate? According to Webster Universal College Dictionary: Self hate is self despise, self loathing, dislike of oneself, auto phobia……………. Black self hate is hating oneself because of the color of one’s skin, hair texture and facial features such as broader nose and thicker/ fuller lips. How could this be? Black heroes and pioneers fought relentlessly for us to gain acceptance, respectability and equality by and within our black communities and as well by mainstream. Well, we couldn’t say that our heroes: Marcus Garvey, Dr. Marten Luther King, Nanny, Paul Bogle…………… fought in vain. No, that would be slanted. Let’s face it, for the majority of blacks, they have a healthy self esteem and self concept but as Montel Williams stated, “self hate is a problem in most all cultures, but appears to be more prominent in the black community”. The problem is compounded by the fact that it is “misunderstood, unaddressed, underestimated and pervasive.” Black self hate is extremely insidious. This is partly due to the fact that many blacks would not actually share with others that they are self haters. This silent destroyer of our people manifests itself in variety of ways and sadly, it appears to cling to and afflict the young and vulnerable among us.

This pervasive demon and destroyer of souls come in varying forms: substance abuse, self mutilation, self sabotage, self deprecation, violence against self, violence against others, disregard for societal laws and the most insidious and most widely accepted behavior of all, self bleaching.

The problem of bleaching has become almost an epidemic in certain parts of the world in recent times. Take Jamaica, for example, the problem has become so widespread that they even sometimes have bleaching contest. Because the issues is national, Ministry of health and other health authorities are warning of the health hazards that can result from bleaching one’s skin. For example, Blindness, skin cancer and extreme sensitivity to the sun.

The most troublesome aspect of this issue though, is the fact that some mothers in Jamaica are using this toxic concoction not only on themselves but on their young powerless and vulnerable underage children. This is tantamount to severe child abuse and neglect.

Skin bleaching is not new to Jamaica but has become more national following the revelation by dancehall artist Vibz Kartel that he has been bleaching his skin. Kartel is very proud of his fairer skin secondary to bleaching. It is not a surprise that music is an excellent medium to communicate a message. Equally effective is the artist stance on certain issues. From its inception in the 1960s reggae has been used to effect change: politics, racism and poverty to name a few. Some reggae artiste are seen as role models, the young and gullible mimic and model certain behaviors exhibited by these artistes. It doesn’t matter the message: positive or negative, violence, drugs, and just about any form of undesirable behaviors practiced by the so called “role model”.

Not intending on delving blame, most of these young people who can afford to purchase bleaching cream, they are usually of a maturity level that allow them to decipher right from wrong. Therefore, it’s a choice, albeit a poor and dangerous one. Just like choosing to go to college or break the law or going to church etc. But as an article in the Washington post states, a lot of these girls who are bleaching claim a fairer skin allow for more opportunity. “The browning have more blys than the blackies” (more opportunities are available to lighter skin blacks than their darker counter paths) This is sad, sad, sad. Such a departure from the wisdom and self empowerment messages imparted to us by our freedom fighters and heroes. Marcus Garvey said it most eloquently when he stated, “God and Nature first made us what we are, and then out of our own created genius we make ourselves what we want to be…” So in this powerful statement, Garvey reminded Blacks that they are responsible for their destiny. The

question is, how did we as a people evolve to be such self haters? Is it a spinoff from slavery where the mixed slaves would get more opportunities than the pure black slaves? But wait a minute! Slavery has been abolished over two hundred years ago. The act of enslavement has been abolished but the mental slavery Bob Marley sang about is still very much alive and kicking.

The contributing factors are varied. One of the most salient contributing factors is ones upbringing and the values imparted from parents to children. When children are taught to love and respect themselves, they inevitably grow into adulthood with a strong sense of self and a healthy self esteem. The opposite is also true. The parents are the first and most influential teachers. A friend once shared a very disturbing story with me. I will call him Jeff in the name of privacy. Jeff's mom continuously praised whites whose eyes were blue and commented that it's a pity her children didn't have blue eyes as they would be more beautiful than they were with their brown eyes. So, just imagine growing up in an environment where you are told you are not as beautiful as whites because your eyes are brown. How disturbing! And yet, we wonder why so many young blacks feel inferior. Peers, television and other outside influences also play a major roll in how we perceive ourselves as a people. A handsome, intelligent young man, John (not his real name) shared one of the saddest stories I have heard. He said during his teenage years in Jamaica, he was dating a class mate Madge (not her real name.) he was quite fond of her. He said they got on very well and he thought she would have become his wife. However, she looked at him one day and told him that he was too dark and she preferred his friend who was light skinned. Madge and John eventually parted ways. Nonetheless John's self esteem took a nose dive. He said this impacted him so much that at one time he thought about marrying someone from another more 'desirable race' such as a Caucasian person. John eventually rebuilds his confidence. He left Jamaica and attended University in the US. While he was there he started studying the Rastafarian doctrine with the strong message of self love and acceptance. This way his children would be light skinned and would not be exposed to the kind of rejection such as he has experienced because he is a black male. How does one even attempt to rectify this problem? One thing is crystal clear, the problem of self hate didn't occur over night and it will take a lot of hard work over an extended period of time to identify, define and eradicate this double edged sword.

In the mean time, how can we attempt to start dealing with this very serious problem? For starters we can remind our kids, grand kids, niece, nephews, brother, sister, granny and just about anyone we can share the message with 'Black is Beautiful'! Remember what the great one Marcus Garvey said, 'The Black skin is not a badge of shame, but rather a glorious symbol of national greatness.'

Oh! And by the way, Jamaica is home to some of the most beautiful people in the world. If in doubt, look at how many times Jamaica has won Miss World and Miss Universe in the international beauty pageant. It's also home to the fastest runners in the world and some of the brightest minds. We as Jamaican have so much to be proud of. And one more thing, Jamaica made history as the first (and only) tropical climate country to enter a bobsled race.

So let's remind our young people to be proud of themselves, proud of their heritage and most importantly, love themselves. If the freedom fighters: Nanny, Dr. King, Sam Sharpe, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X were self haters, we would still be an enslaved people to this day.

So come on people, make our fore parents and our freedom fighters proud!By: Audrey Reeves