

# Students Taunted for Having Light Skin

Contributed by Jernai Ellis, Chassidy Hinton -- Black College Wire  
Tuesday, 03 February 2009

SC State women say they're tired of negative comments

"Light Bright," "White Girl," "High-lighter," "High Yellow," "Red Bone," "Mulatto," "Light-skinned-ed," "See Through," and "Transparent;" these are names one would think were heard 50 or more years ago, or even on a playground. But they are names that we have both been called since we started our matriculation at South Carolina State University. Neither one of us knew the extent to which we would be singled out just for the color of our skin, especially at a historically black university. One would assume that being at an HBCU, students of African-American descent would unite because of a common ancestry. Instead, people seem to look at the smaller things that divide us, rather than the much larger things that unite us.

Jernai Ellis:

I am from farther north, from the suburbs of Bowie, Maryland, and I have never had to deal with what is being called a "Color Complex." When I first got here, I did not really enjoy being referred to as a "high-lighter" or "light-bright." It was annoying, because there is so much more to people than what they look like.

Chassidy Hinton:

Coming from Raleigh, N.C., I have had more encounters with this complex, but never to the extent that I have experienced it here at SC State. It definitely agitates me when people, specifically those whom I am not well acquainted with, begin conversations with, "What's up, white girl?" Even though I may have been called these names before, I will never grow accustomed to it. Neither of these nicknames have any positive attributes. I will never acknowledge them as being comical.

One could look no further than the history books than to see where the dividing factor between African-Americans of a light complexion and those of a brown or darker complexion began. In an article written by Hazel Trice Edney, in the Louisiana Weekly about prejudice against light skinned persons, the author discusses the source of this divide.

"The white slave master showed preference to light-skin slaves, giving them jobs as 'House Negroes' while their dark-skin counterparts labored in the fields. And more often than many people would like to admit, slave owners and their sons would take sexual liberties with defenseless black women, producing near-white off springs that were neither acknowledged nor accepted by the slave owner's family."

Julia Hare, a psychologist and executive director of the Black Think Tank, a web resource to discuss black issues in San Francisco, notes that the issue of color is still very prevalent. "You would have thought that this thing would have ended after the so-called free movement and slavery supposedly was over," Hare writes. "But black people have taken on the same patterns as the slave master. Wherever you go, I don't care if it's in the church, I don't care if it's in the bar, I don't care if it's in the corporate rooms, I don't care if it's on a cruise, color still comes up among black people."

Through our experiences and observations, we find it ironic that light-skinned males seem to not experience as much negativity as light-skinned females. Females are often deemed as "stuck-up" or "snobbish." Unfortunately, going to a school in the South, [we see] this idea permeated much further than either one of us had imagined.

It is a common notion that people often judge others as a method to "save" the time that it would take to get to know the individual. When one chooses to judge an individual, specifically in the black community, solely on the basis of skin color, they show that they are unaware of the progress that black society must continue to make. As black Americans, we must strive towards success, instead of continuously looking for means of improperly judging and holding each other back.

[Related story: [Click here.](#)]

{moshaloscan}

Jernai Ellis and Chassidy Hinton are students at South Carolina State University. They wrote this article for The Collegian, the SC State student newspaper, which originally published it.