

Colorism

Colorism—also known as shadeism—is discrimination or prejudice against dark skin tones that usually comes from people within the same ethnic or racial group. While racism involves discrimination or prejudice targeted against people of a different ethnicity, colorism involves biased treatment of both people from other ethnic groups and of people within the same ethnic group.

In the United States, the roots of colorism can be traced back to the era of slavery, during which time a racial hierarchy based on differences in skin tone positioned black people as subordinate to white people. In a system that enslaved dark-skinned people, mixed-race descendants of white and black people were more likely to attain freedom and basic human rights if they appeared to be white. During the post-Civil War era of Jim Crow laws, segregation denied people of color access to "white only" public and private spaces and facilities, as well as civil rights and economic opportunities, leading some light-skinned black people to pass as white.