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# Staging Colorism

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# STAGING COLORISM

## Abstract

Colorism is a topic not frequently discussed in the African American community. My research focuses on representations of colorism in American drama. Using this research, I am workshopping a creative performance piece about this taboo topic to educate both Ursinus students and community members of all racial backgrounds. The research involves dissecting plays that confront colorism and the everyday struggles dealing with the stereotypes that come along with lighter and darker skin. My research takes the form of an annotated bibliography of plays about colorism and/or racism, a paper about colorism in drama, and a draft of a solo performance art piece about colorism. My research includes plays by dramatist of color, folk plays about colorism and/or racism, propaganda plays addressing colorism and/or racism, solo performance art pieces, and scholarly materials addressing the history of colorism and/or racism.

Flood, Mya

The damage of colorism is embedded deeply in the black community. Colorism is defined to be prejudice or discrimination against individuals who have a dark skin tone, especially among people of the same ethnic or racial background.<sup>1</sup> Envy, fear and the use of color and shade are all key components of the damage colorism can do to the black community. This affects social interactions within the African American community and divides rather than uniting. This prejudice is illustrated in historic works as well as theatrical works. Many of these works start out using simple derogatory stereotypes but as time progresses, artists begin to write plays that open the conversation of the damaging effects of interracial conflict or begin to encourage the black community to embrace all shades. My research consists of reading and reflection of colorist themes. This paper looks strictly at the United States colorism issue although issues of colorism exist throughout many countries all over the world. I am exploring solo performance art, which is known for being intimate, out-of-the-box and usually politically or sociologically driven. This paper explores: (1) colorism throughout American playwrights works (2) solo performance artists effective tactics when discussing a cultural and political issues and (3) A final personal reflection of my findings.

To get an idea of colorism and the idea of blackness, one must look at colorism historically specifically in the United States slave trade. In an interview with Marita

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<sup>1</sup> "Colorism | colorism, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press

Golden on colorism in the African American community, the interviewer, Tavis Smiley, reads a quote from a slaveholder named Willie Lynch from 1712, "I have outlined a number of differences among the slaves, and I take these differences and make them bigger. I use fear, distrust and envy for control purpose. On top of my list is age, but it is only there because it starts with an A. The second is color and shade."<sup>2</sup> This is evidence of the blatant divide that was created by slave holders as far back as the 1700s. The slave holder's tactics of distrust and fear then is adopted into the slave community and is accepted as fact. There is also the reinforcement of keeping slaves uneducated and dehumanizing them. What emerges is the Negro stereotype, which is classified usually with people of darker skin. "This notion that dark skin meant better labor also imagined that lighter-skinned blacks were better suited for intelligent tasks, such as craftsmanship, or lighter labor" writes Audrey Kerr in her article *The Paper Bag Principle*. Kerr goes on to note that records from slave owners show that lighter men and women were offered more skilled and house jobs than darker slaves.<sup>3</sup> Darker people were seen to be more efficient for harder work all based on the color of their skin. This understandingly could instill jealousy and hatred within the slave community against lighter blacks. This separation of different slave is illustrated in another quote by Lynch: "You must use the dark skin slaves vs. the light skin slaves, and the light skin slaves vs.

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<sup>2</sup> Lynch, Willie. "The Making of a Slave." Letter to Colony of Virginia

<sup>3</sup> Kerr, Audrey *The brown paper bag principle*

the dark skin slaves”<sup>4</sup>. By separating and pitting slaves against one another, slave masters encouraged a hatred of the black communities own race.

Nicole Fleetwood talks about the effects of colorism in *Troubling Vision* and pushes further that not only is colorism present in the black community, but it is reinforced systematically. Fleetwood writes “colorism as a system of creating and maintaining racial difference produces its own failure...the US legal system historically has been and continues to be a central institution for regulating and adjudicating colorist practices”<sup>5</sup>.

All of the legal system of the United States was founded, and run by white Americans and the effects on former slaves after the reconstruction era, led people to have to identify the better of black Americans by their closeness to their own appearance.

An historic and social example of this is the brown paper bag rule that originated around the mid-1800s according to Kerr who found some historical cases in Washington during the time period involving free black people. According to Kerr’s research, the first complexion test was directed at all African American people by white organizations to keep them out. This involved dehumanizing tests of people looking at nail beds and the roots of one’s hair.<sup>6</sup> This led the black community to attempt to conform to the standards of the tests but many couldn’t help their skin tone or appearance. It should

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<sup>4</sup> Lynch, Willie

<sup>5</sup> Fleetwood, Nicole

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

also be noted that this type of discrimination is happening up north as well as in the south. Another test came in the form of the “one drop rule” that discriminated even against black people who were able to “pass” as white. These tests moved into organizations who were keeping the black community out and evolved into the paper bag test, which allowed you into a function or organization if you were the same or lighter than the color of a paper bag. This then forms a hierarchy within the black community involving status and wealth since many of the people in these exclusive clubs were not only business owners, but also lighter skinned. These tests also assumed that blackness is something one can visibly see when that is not always the case.

Another side to this research are the effects of colorism on light-skinned African Americans. In an interview, Marita Golden, a novelist, discusses the struggle on the far side of the spectrum of darker black people. While darker skinned African Americans are considered dumb and stupid, light skinned blacks “are often also deemed not quite black enough in the eyes of other black people. They are often unfairly viewed as being objects of suspicion, people who have divided loyalties, people who don’t really know what it is to be black”.<sup>7</sup> This idea of questioning someone’s blackness can be connected to the damages of colorism. However, the term “blackness” can not only refer to someone skin, but their cultural knowledge and experience of black culture. “Once you’re on the

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<sup>7</sup> Golden, Marita

dark end of the scale, nobody questions your blackness..." says Golden.<sup>8</sup> This questioning of one's personal experience can make or break their acceptance in the black community. If you aren't black enough, you are an outsider in your own culture. In her book *Don't Play in the Sun*, Golden explores her own struggles and how colorism has affected her views on the black community. "While dark women can be rendered invisible, the objectification and hypersexualization of light women imposes a kind of invisibility on them as well"<sup>9</sup>. After reading this novel, it gives a different perspective of the black color spectrum.

Moving forward we can see that some of these derogatory stereotypes enforced socially within the black community by examining works of fiction written by black writers during the Harlem Renaissance. In Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry*, the story of Emma Lou explores themes and issues that come with colorism for a dark skinned woman. Thurman writes "She should have been born a boy, then color of skin wouldn't have mattered so much, for wasn't her mother always saying that a black boy could get along, but that a black girl would never know anything but sorrow and disappointment?" (Thurman). This sorrow and disappointment that Emma experiences is caused by this divide of dark and light skinned black people. These colorist themes are also carried, by my observation, from generation to generation. Wallace write about this idea when he

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<sup>8</sup> Golden, Marita

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

talks about Emma's family and their feelings about her complexion. "It was an acquired family characteristic, this moaning and grieving over her color of her skin...her skin, despite bleachings, scourgings, and powderings, had remained black..." Instead of teaching Emma to love her skin, she is bleached and powdered by her own family so she can be lighter. Because of colorist ideology, the character in the novel is unable to accept her own skin, and desires to be lighter to fit her community's standard of beauty.

Passing is the idea that a lighter skinned black person may choose to "pass" as white to gain the benefits that come along with having lighter skin. While there are people on the colorist spectrum that are very dark and stick out in a Eurocentric beauty setting, people that are mixed or biracial can take advantage of what comes along with having lighter skin. These benefits including being accepted into white communities and seen as less threatening, gain of status in a black community and deemed more beautiful. In Nella Larson's *Passing*, Irene Redfield struggles with what comes along with passing during the Harlem Renaissance. "It wasn't that she was ashamed of being a Negro, or even having it declared. It was the idea of being ejected from any place...That disturbed her".<sup>10</sup> This shows that even people that pass can sense the prejudice when they live their everyday life. "Suppose a woman did expect her race, she couldn't prove it".<sup>11</sup> The fact that lighter African Americans always felt they had to prove themselves to the white

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<sup>10</sup> Larson, Nella *Passing*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

majority is damaging behavior psychologically. It instills the separation and tactics used to tear down the African slaves many years before. In the play, Irene runs into an old friend, Gertrude, that is completely passing herself off as white and abandon her black culture. Throughout the novel, Irene makes observations of her friends to see what it is like to pass. Her friend Clara was a product of a secret affair between her mother, a black woman and her father, a wealthy white man. She ends up marrying a white man who does not know of her background but does not consider to be passing.<sup>12</sup> Gertrude, another friend married a white man who knew she was a black woman. “I nearly died of terror the whole nine months before Margery was born for fear she might be dark” says Gertrude about the birth of her daughter.<sup>13</sup> Even though she isn’t considered to be passing, there is an instilled fear being show that represents the upper class black community during the Harlem Renaissance that your skin tone can still make or break how others portray you. Clare continues the conversation about having darker children by saying “I do think that colored people—we—are too silly about some things”.<sup>14</sup> This is Clara choosing when to reject and allow her inclusion in the group of “colored people”. However, when her husband comes home and calls her “Nig” because she is darker than when they met her stance changes greatly. Her husband says “You can get as black as you please as far as I’m concerned, since I know you’re no nigger. I draw the line at

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<sup>12</sup> ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

that”<sup>15</sup> to which Clara becomes submissive and silent. This shows forced passing where Clara can never have her husband know her background in fear of her life and wellbeing.

These caricatures and themes of colorist views can be found in theater work as early the 1800s. This could involve blatant interpretations of different tones of black characters, as well as subtle cast descriptions written by the authors. For example, many playwrights are sure to define characters by their skin tone in the cast descriptions. This exists in George Aiken’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* from 1858. The play follows Tom, a slave, in his journey to freedom. In the play, Topsy, a young enslaved child is shown to be a nuisance to Eva, the slave master’s young daughter. She asks her why she is so “wicked” to her friend Jane to which she replies “She called me little black imp, and turned up her pretty nose at me because she is whiter than I am”.<sup>16</sup> The term of imp intended to belittle and offend slaves. You can also look at the character of Tom, who relentlessly took care of Eva and fits into the stereotype of a giant, gentle but still ignorant slave.

Works written by people of color during moving into the early 1900s, the goal was to uplift black people as a race. Black playwrights began to emerge and get published

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Stowe, Harriet. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

thanks to the founding of the NAACP in 1909.<sup>17</sup> The organization began funding for the education and the employment of African Americans. The founder W.E.B. DuBois also started a magazine that featured black playwrights and their work called *Crisis*.<sup>18</sup> Most of the plays I have looked at are made after this moment in time. These theatrical works begin to illustrate everyday life like folk plays and others took an approach that was more like propaganda to uplift the African American community.

*Color Struck* by Zora Neale Hurston directly combats colorism in a traditional theatric style. Hurston's character, Emma in *ColorStruck*, is more proactive in voicing her opinion of lighter women. While Emma and her boyfriend Johnny get on a train to attend a dance, Emma openly shows her jealousy of Effie, who is written to be "a mulatto girl"<sup>19</sup>. This outcry of jealousy is a more effective presentation by Hurston of the irrational fear and jealousy that colorism provokes. "What makes you always pick a fuss with me over some yaller girl? What makes you so jealous nohow?"<sup>20</sup> Johnny asks after Emma's aggressive comments over Effie's superiority to her. The term yaller refers to lighter skinned people to be "high yellow" which carries connotations of privileged and pretentious behavior. The play was written in 1925 prior to the work of Marita Bonner whose play that tackles race and colorism but in a format that was unexpected from a black playwright in the late 1920s.

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<sup>17</sup> Find source

<sup>18</sup> "NAACP History: W.E.B. Dubois". Naacp.org

<sup>19</sup> Perkins, Kathy/Hurston

<sup>20</sup> Perkins , Kathy/ Hurston

In Marita Bonner's *The Purple Flower*, Bonner writes a type of propaganda folklore that revolves around the "white devils" and "the Us's" which are described to be, "As white as white devils, as brown as the earth, and as black as the center of a poppy"<sup>21</sup>. This is one of the first examples of a playwright intentionally trying to be inclusive of all skin tones and commenting on the interracial issues black American's face in the findings of my research. Their goal is to break free from the oppression of the "white devils" who represent the white majority of society in 1928. In 1929, Marita Bonner writes *Exit: An Illusion* Which showcases a man committing murder over internal struggles with colorist social issues. This is a more traditional approach because the play takes place in a more realistic setting. However, Bonner is still able to add a surreal twist that is ahead of her times. In the first few lines of this one act play, we meet buddy, a "blackly brown" man in bed with his "pale as the sheets" lover, Dot. The character description is intentional to distinguish so that their skin tone is relevant to the plot that follows and the reader can imply what stereotypes go along with these characters. We see automatically his need to control her when he comments on her preparing to go on a date. "You aren't going, I say"<sup>22</sup> says buddy but dot continues to prep for her date with Exit, an old childhood friend. Kennedy adds subtle hints of colorist actions in the play.

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<sup>21</sup> Bonner, Marita. *The Purple Flower*

<sup>22</sup> Perkins, Kathy A. *Black Female Playwrights: An Anthology of Plays before 1950*

However these points are overshadowed by the conflict between the two lovers that escalates quickly in the play. While Dot gets ready, a stage direction reads "begins to powder heavily with white powder" which makes buddy ask "you ain't fixin' to go out passing are you?" The "passing" line relates back to people of color lighten them to look more white than they actually were. This illustrates the issues pertaining to Dot's rejection of her black heritage. Buddy points out her insecurities in the following lines: "yousa a nigger yourself for your entire white hide... ya'd like to think ya were white! You'd have never lived with niggers if you had been white and had a crack at a white man!"<sup>23</sup> Dot, instead of responding to the accusations of being ashamed, takes a passive route of changing her mind instead of speaking out. The underlying issues are never vocalized in Kennedy's characters and the audience does not get a clear statement on the issues of colorism. A stage direction reads "Buddy answers in an inarticulate wild roar"<sup>24</sup> which dehumanizes Buddy and makes his actions powerful but lacking thought and purpose. The only thing that matters is his anger rather than what he is angry about. This is a direct stereotype once again of the angry black man. The final moments of Dot's life in this one act are her fighting for her life against the insanity of Buddy. Because of intra-racism, Buddy is driven to kill his lover in a fit of rage. In this action Bonner is showing an over dramatized consequence to the damage colorism can effect in a relationship and in a more general sense, the black community.

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<sup>23</sup> Perkins, Kathy/ Kennedy

<sup>24</sup> Perkins, Kathy A. *Black Female Playwrights: An Anthology of Plays before 1950*.

Langston Hughes also wrote a play that explored a different approach to play writing that includes a mulatto character. *Don't You Want to be Free?* Was produced in Harlem in 1937 and travels with the audience through the history of black people from slavery up to the respective time of the piece. However, Langston Hughes is a prolific writer, his representation of the mulatto female character. She is seen powdering her face as she recites a poem: "But if I ever cursed my white old man, / I take the curses back".<sup>25</sup> The character is not spiteful toward her white father, even though he possibly raped her mother who was under his enslavement in the context of the time period Hughes is reflecting on. This fits in with typical stereotypes of lighter skin women being proud of their whiteness rather than their blackness. The character mulatto girl ends by saying, "My old man died in a fine big house. / My ma died in a shack. / I wonder where I'm gonna die, / Being neither white or black".<sup>26</sup> This is something that is contradictory to Bonners inclusive approach to the idea of "blackness". After this poem, Hughes does not make any other commentary of the color struck barriers mulattos' face. The discussion falls short and unlike Hurston, fails to further talks of the negative influence of colorism.

These works from the past illustrated stereotypes and stigmas that come with intra-racial conflict that the black community faces. Moving to the 1960s, Sonia Sanchez writes a piece that delves more into the struggle of being a black woman in a general

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<sup>25</sup> Hughes, Langston. *Don't You Want to be Free?*

<sup>26</sup> Hughes, Langston

sense. In her 1968 play *The Bronx is Next*, the character “Black Bitch” sends a message of uplifting black women. The character is still degraded and belittled by the black male characters. “Yeah you still a bitch.”<sup>27</sup> Says jimmy even after she makes a remark to how she would want to teach her children how to love black women the right way. “They will know what a woman is for...Hold them in your arms—love them—love your black women always”<sup>28</sup>. The theme of teachers and how colorism is taught from generation to generation begins to emerge in the more recent black works. I also noticed that the writing not only directly commented on colorism but also what it means to be a black woman in general in a modern setting. Not only were author’s writing about being dark or lighter, but also about what it means to be a woman.

In *Flying West* by Pearl Cleage, female characters in the play struggle with keeping their plot of land from being sold to white businessmen in 1898. It is noted in the character list that there is one mualatto character. It is also significant to know that these characters were born into slavery.<sup>29</sup> Frank, the mualatto character, struggles with his new found freedom and how he is seen to the people around him. This leads him to abuse his fiancé Minnie and force her to conform to European beauty standards. “You look like a piccaninny!” he yells out after Minnie wears her natural hair in braids.<sup>30</sup> The term picaninny is a degrading slang word referring to black people. This is encouraging

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<sup>27</sup> Sanchez, Sonia. *The Bronx is Next*

<sup>28</sup> Sanchez, Sonia

<sup>29</sup> Cleage, Pearl *Flying West*

<sup>30</sup> Cleage, Pearl

colorist separation and the rejection of Frank's own origins. He continues this abuse by saying "you're too black to bring me any good luck. All you give is misery".<sup>31</sup> Even Minnie gives in to the acceptance of lighter skin by saying "I want all my babies to look just like him!"<sup>32</sup> He is a man that also uses passing to his advantage or as he puts it "letting people draw their own conclusions"<sup>33</sup>. Later in the play the land that the sisters own is in danger of gentrification. Frank argues this point to Minnie's sister: "You ever see a group of colored people who didn't put the lightest in charge?"<sup>34</sup> Walter not only is giving in to the social hierarchy but he is glad to use it to use it to his advantage even if it means degrading his own people. Even though this play is based in the late 1800s, the themes of calling dark women names and passing are still relevant to write about in the 1990s.

In the play *Combination Skin* by Lisa Jones, The whole premise of the play is to find the most "tragic mulatto" in a game show.<sup>35</sup> This play reflects on ideas of blackness and the variety of women on the 'black" spectrum. The first contestant wrote a book that encourages colorist separation, even though she is "strictly a member of the human family".<sup>36</sup> The book according to her subconscious monologue is about "THE black experience".<sup>37</sup> A queen figure appears and says that her work does not help advance the

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<sup>31</sup> ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Jones, Lisa *Combination Skin* is

<sup>36</sup> ibid

<sup>37</sup> ibid

struggle of racial issues.<sup>38</sup> This scene reflects on a part of the colorism spectrum where someone who does not consider himself or herself black and rejects their background. The second contestant is more accepting than the first, but is not seen as well as being black enough even though she encourages the inclusion of all tones of brown. “We are all a part of the African rainbow” she says after her blackness is questioned by the host.<sup>39</sup> However, her downfall is in her insecurity of looking black, but not belonging because she is also biracial. In her subconscious she says “you’ll never know what it’s like. Stop reading the books. Your blood is too thin”.<sup>40</sup> These two contestants, though tragic, do not win the contest. The final contestant who is described to be “A brown skin Diana Ross Clone...”<sup>41</sup> Her subconscious fears show that all she truly wants to be is surrounded in white. Not only that, but she wanted her dreams to be fulfilled. “And the white bed will rock and he’ll fulfill my great white dreams...”<sup>42</sup> This idea of her dream being to have sex with a white man speaks volumes to the image of the mulatto character. The third contestant is the strongest example of the negative connotations of mixed race people. The playwright used these examples of these women are a reflection of not only how the black community sees biracial women, but also how Eurocentric standards effects the egos of these women.

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<sup>38</sup> ibid

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

Solo performance is an excellent form of performance when one wants to comment on politics or mainstream culture. RoseLee Goldberg, a solo artist defines solo art to be “ a volatile form that artist use to respond to change—whether political in the broadest sense, or cultural, or dealing with issues of current concern—and bring about change...”<sup>43</sup>. I really enjoy how this art form is about call and response in a way. When an artist sees something that they want to draw attention to, they create art to make a statement. An example of this comes from one of the NEA four, Holly Hughes. In her solo piece titled *Clit Notes* Hughes seamlessly adds humor and heart into her work. Hughes discusses her relationship with her father but also this idea of being represented in a way that isn't her genuine self. “I've become a symbol. I've been buried alive under meanings other people have attached to me”<sup>44</sup>. She then goes on to give antidotes and share memories about her interactions with the world around her. This theme of personal stories continues all throughout the work of the NEA Four. Dael Orlandersmith has written many works that are solo performance based. These performances draw from fictional characters but comment on issues that are important to her. In her solo piece, *The Gimmick* follows the story of Alexis, and her life story. You follow her childhood and adulthood through a type of poetic prose. It has a beginning, middle and end and is very linear in its format. This is contrasting to Hughes and her

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<sup>43</sup> Goldberg, RoseLee

<sup>44</sup> Hughes, Holly Clit notes

more intimate approach. The Gimmick also shows some of the insecurities black women face. “The world does not like big/ black/girls at all/ not at all”.<sup>45</sup> The format is in a style that feels like stream of consciousness. I really enjoyed how she was able to go back and forth between two different character voices and it did not feel as if you were passively watching the scene. I was unable to find footage of her performance besides her one in *Yellowman* which had two characters. Finally I found a combination of the two in Whoopi Goldberg solo performances. Goldberg creates fictional characters, but through those characters, comments on pop culture or politics. Her valley girl is a comedic caricature of the valley stereotype, but then ends with talking about a teen pregnancy, and abortion.<sup>46</sup> Goldberg is able to move between serious content and comedic bits in a way that does not take away from the serious parts of the performance. I also enjoyed watching her interaction with the audience. She asks the audience questions, talks with them, and plays off their reactions. I think being interactive with the audience is a great tactic to keep things interesting but if it goes off track, you can lose control of the performance. Danitra Vance uses comedy as well to get her messages across as well as references to popular culture. Her intro to *Live and in Color* is a great testament to how she approached her work. “My comedy comes out of looking up from the bottom...if you have something to say or do, you can do it.”<sup>47</sup> Her approach comes from not being a

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<sup>45</sup> Orlandersmith, Dael The Gimmick

<sup>46</sup> Goldberg, Whoopi Direct From Broadway

<sup>47</sup> Vance, Danitra Live and in Color

part of the majority or mainstream culture. Solo performance in itself is about hearing from voices that are not always heard.

After working all summer, I enjoyed all of the work I read. Each piece did have some discussion of colorist issues but many did not offer up solutions or ways to make or provoke change. Performance art felt like the perfect medium because I want audiences to have an intimate discussion about how colorism effects all types of women. Also since only a few of the plays I read have been produced recently, I would like to add a take that is relatable to my generation. Based on my readings I can also comment that Colorism is something that is taught and passed down from families. Colorism is also fairly universal and is a tactic that was used by European slave owners in America to separate and tear down the black community. Wherever there are people who have darker skin they are deemed unattractive and are marketed to change how they look. Many of the characters in these plays had people tell them that they were not worth anything, when if they were given the confidence, it may have changed their narrative. I hope to write a piece that is uplifting and shows people that all shades of black, and your amount of "blackness" should not be weighed and tested. Maybe then the black community can begin to love every piece of themselves and start to make change in racial profiling, beauty standards and institutionalized colorism. Healing inward and recognizing a dehumanizing prejudice is a step toward self-love.

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The following is an excerpt from my creative performance piece that is still being workshopped

Conditioning, I have heard guys actually say this.

Women say this

All ages.

It's bad enough that as black women we are under appreciated and stepped all over. But you are going to separate and rate us.

Now, my mom is a teacher. She works with tiny kids all day.

She's incredible all mothers are teachers you know.

When I was in school I wanted to shed my skin.

Peel it off like brown paper bag wrappings.  
I didn't want to be lighter per say  
I wanted to fit in  
And I stood out  
I wanted to look like the girls in my class

I remember looking for my shade in the crayon box  
And hating how I looked on paper  
Smudged and muddy  
And turning to my mom and asking her what her favorite color was  
I liked pink  
Fleshy and femme  
her favorite color was brown  
brown  
Raisinettes on wooden tables  
Brown like a strong tree  
Tall tree  
Brown like my hair the most  
No my  
Almond eyes  
No  
Brown like my skin  
Like  
My skin?

Hearing my mother call my skin beautiful, was my conditioning. My conditioning was changed right then. And ever since she has told me my skin is beautiful. That my hair is unique and can be anything I want it to be. That I am worthy of love. I have loved brown since, I have loved black since.

What mother would say otherwise?  
Lights down, Another song transition, lights up  
A woman on the phone, she is scrambling to get ready as she speaks  
2. (Dark)  
So I'm trying to get ready for work  
And this guy calls me in the middle of my morning that I met at lunch  
And he's pulling out all the stops  
When are you free?  
Want to meet up for lunch?  
(aside)

I mean if your gonna ask me out don't call early in the morning that's just damn rude  
Now im getting irritated. I just wanna put down the phone or turn on mute and go on about my  
day.

So he's talking my ear off

I can't get in a word in

(Aside)

Which lets me know that the date will not go well

(back on the phone)

So then I've had it

Are you done?

(beat)

I said are you done

You are calling me early in the morning

Im in the middle--

Well im sorry but I have better things to do--

Calm down?

(aside) rule number one with me, DON'T tell me to calm down.

As a black woman anytime I voice my opinion it is taken

As me going on a rampage when really

Im just stating my opinion

(back on the phone)

I'm just saying im in the middle of getting to work

You are not the center of my universe okay I have shit to do

Excuse me?

And then he said It:

Excuse me black bitch,

No body wants your

ugly

Dark ass anyway

Then he hangs up.

I was speechless

Livid

But speechless

Who leaves with that?

And the way he said it

Dark Ass

As if my skin tone is the reason, he isn't getting a date

So here I am

Pretending my ego isn't bruised

Late for work

Have you ever been deemed ugly before you even leave your home?

(Fade out black)