

March 6, 2021

# Colorism: the Undercover Plague to Black America

By Kennedy Torain

---



Rosa Parks



Claudette Colvins

When I learned the saying “never meet your heroes”, it made perfect sense to me. When one’s expectations meet reality, it can result in substantial disappointment. They may have a nasty attitude, dismissive natures, or they may not even capture the idealized perceptions that society has imposed on them. While I never met any of my heroes, I know that I see myself in them, or at least their facade.

---

---

## Overlooked Aspects of the Civil Rights Era

At one point in my life, Rosa Parks was my favorite woman in history. I was astonished at the amount of audacity she possessed in the face of ignorance. However, the impressions were soon changed after a life-changing discourse I engaged in. My teacher assigned my class a debate where the students performed as figures in the Civil Rights Movement. The purpose was to showcase who truly has the most impact on the era, whether it was negative or positive. With Rosa Parks as my persona, I stood tall and confident in all my debates until I met my match with the infamous Eugene Connor, one of the main adversaries of the Civil Rights Movement. Our debate consisted of powerful points from both sides; however, the end was remarkable enough to both make me lose the debate and change my perception of Rosa Parks forever. With the final statement of Bull Connor being "At the end of the day, your influence was a publicized facade. If it was not for your light skin, you would not have been able to steal the story of a young, dark-skinned teenager.", mass confusion ensued which had to be solved by our teacher. Rosa Parks' famous story was a non-coincidental, direct replica of a dark-skinned, unmarried, and pregnant teenager named Claudette Colvin. At that moment, Claudette Colvin became a name I would never forget.

### How Color Can Change Your Life

The general disregard of Claudette Colvin's story presents an underlying issue I am all too familiar with: colorism, or prejudice both within and outside of a race that is based on one's skin-tone. Colorism has deep roots in black history and currently continues to be the source of major issues within our community. Likely stemming from European beauty standards, it is clear to see the impact that colorism has had on the world since products like skin-lightening soaps and creams continue to thrive through generations. Some want to defend skin lightening as a comparison to tanning; however, the fact is that tanning does not have the same roots that skin-lightening has. Furthermore, skin lightening cannot be done as easily as a tan meaning that it can cause people to go to dangerous lengths in order to achieve a lighter skin tone. Unfortunately, one of those people was me.

---

Like Claudette Colvin, there have been times where I felt rejected because of my dark complexion, just like how her story was rejected by black publications. I use to find myself getting angry at the world because of its view on people with my skin tone. Other times it was at myself for being this color. I put my body and skin through dangerous chemicals because I thought it would make society more fond of me, but it only added fuel to the internal fight I had against myself and my heritage.

Although present-day society has been more celebratory of dark skin, the thought process behind favoring one individual over another because of the amount of melanin they possess still intrigues me. Why would individuals feel more sympathy for one's circumstances over another's? Why did society empathize more with certain complexions during the Civil Rights Era? Why does society still today?

### **Leadership Behind the Scenes**

Within this ordeal, I was able to find someone who I can relate to and who could further assist me in my journey of self-love. For a long time, I was attempting to see myself in Rosa Parks, but instead, I found my reflection in Claudette Colvin. Through life, I am genuine and speak my mind regardless of the situation. However, people tend to be more attracted to the artificial because they are easier to indulge than reality. There have been times where I have gone through life wondering why certain people do not like me, and I can not help but think Claudette Colvin has felt the same way with wondering why the public felt attracted to Rosa Parks' story but not hers. Rosa Parks is an irreplaceable face of the Civil Rights Movement due to her color, education, and of course braveness. Who knows where African-Americans would be without her? However, Claudette Colvin is the blueprint for Rosa Parks and one can not build a monument without the blueprint. For this reason, I aspire to be like Claudette Colvin and have a story so powerful that people will feel inspired by the success I will achieve. No longer do I have to face an internal battle in regards to my race and identity, but I believe it is one of my purposes on Earth to ensure no other little black girls go through the self-hatred that I once did. I will always carry the message of her story with me as I depart on the numerous journeys of life. They say never meet your hero, and I have yet to meet mine, but I know enough about her story to say I have found a woman who could not possibly disappoint me.

---

I, Kennedy Leigh Torain, express my consent for my mock blog and initial post to be shared and/or displayed by the WLI and MSU'S College of Social Science.