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Skin Tone and Stratification in the Black Community¹

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Data from the National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA) (1979–80) are used to examine the effects of skin-tone variations of blacks on educational attainment, occupation, and income, net of such antecedent factors as parental socioeconomic status and such contemporaneous factors as sex, region of residence, urbanicity, age, and marital status. The findings are that not only does complexion have significant net effects on stratification outcomes, but it is also a more consequential predictor of occupation and income than such background characteristics as parents' socioeconomic status. Results are consistent with an interpretation that suggests that the continuing disadvantage that darker blacks experience is due to persisting discrimination against them in the contemporary United States.

INTRODUCTION

In his controversial study of the black bourgeoisie, E. Franklin Frazier (1957a) argued that mulattoes, blacks with white progenitors, led a more privileged existence when compared with their "pure black" counterparts. During slavery, these fair-skinned blacks were at times emancipated by their white fathers. After slavery, their kinship ties to whites gave them an advantage over other blacks in obtaining education, higher-status occupations, and property. Because "the majority of prominent Negroes, who were themselves mulattoes, married mulattoes"

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(Frazier 1957a, p. 257), light-complexioned blacks passed advantages on to their light children. This process of advantage maintenance by mulattoes lasted well into the 20th century (Landry 1987). So one's position in the community ultimately reflected the amounts of "white blood" in his or her ancestry, and patterns of stratification in the black community included considerations of skin tone.

Research conducted before and during the civil rights movement suggested a continuing relationship between variations in skin tone and the life chances and outlooks of black Americans (e.g., Glenn 1963; Myrdal 1944; Ransford 1970; Seeman 1946). Fair-skinned blacks had higher levels of attainment than darker blacks on virtually every dimension of stratification. During the 1960s, however, blacks experienced unprecedented social and economic progress. Racial differences in education, income, and occupational standing narrowed significantly (Farley and Allen 1987). A surge of black nationalism proclaimed that "black is beautiful," and skin tone declined in importance as a basis of prestige within the black community. Did skin tone continue to exert an influence on black stratification patterns in this climate of expanding economic opportunity and intense racial pride?

Using data from the National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA) (1979–80), we examine the degree to which variations in the skin tones of blacks are associated with their educational attainment, occupational status, and income. We examine these relationships, net of antecedent and contemporaneous factors that affect status attainment (e.g., parental socioeconomic status, sex, marital status, region of residence, and age).

SKIN TONE AND PRIVILEGE: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Skin tone played a significant role in shaping social and economic stratification patterns in the black community. Several studies (Blackwell 1975; Drake and Cayton 1945; Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1941; Dollard 1957; Frazier 1957a, 1957b, 1966; Myrdal 1944; Landry 1987) have noted that, in past generations, higher-status blacks tended to have lighter skin tones than lower-status blacks and that light skin tone was an important criterion for attaining prestige within the black community. According to these studies, the dominant white society had historically extended social and economic privileges, not available to darker blacks, to light-skinned blacks. Over successive generations these advantages had been cumulative so that the most successful blacks were disproportionately lighter in complexion.

The relationship between skin tone and privilege appears to have emerged during slavery. The historical evidence indicates that whites placed greater economic value on slaves of mixed parentage and used

skin tone or degree of visible white ancestry as a basis for the differential treatment of bondsmen. Myrdal (1944), for example, noted that mulattoes brought the highest prices on the slave market, that the white aristocracy preferred light-skinned blacks for personal service, and that white males were more likely to select fair-skinned female slaves over darker ones for sexual unions. Myrdal contended that light-skinned blacks were initially preferred because they were more aesthetically appealing to whites and because the prevailing racial ideology of that time held that blacks with white ancestry were intellectually superior to those of pure African ancestry. Over time, the kinship bonds between mulatto children and their white fathers also became an underlying reason for the extension of privileges to lighter-skinned blacks (Landry 1987).

Although much of Frazier's work is controversial, he makes a convincing case for the differential treatment of slaves on the basis of white ancestry and its significance through his (1957*b*) description of the status distinctions between field hands and house servants (see also Blackwell 1985). Field hands were disproportionately of pure African ancestry and were assigned to perform physically demanding, menial tasks. They remained largely unskilled throughout their servitude, had less contact with the custom and language of the larger society, and generally experienced the harshest aspects of slavery. House servants, in contrast, were largely mulatto offspring and descendants of white males and slave women. Slave masters assigned them to the more prestigious and socially desirable service positions (e.g., cook, butler, coachman, personal companion, and the like). Training for skilled occupations was often reserved for the children of these personal servants. Possession of a skill was not only esteemed and a source of pride among slaves, but it often conferred other privileges such as the opportunity to work as a free laborer, save money, and purchase one's freedom (Franklin 1980).

Being a house servant also brought other advantages including better food, clothing, and shelter (Franklin 1980) and, occasionally, the opportunity to learn to read and write (Landry 1987). Through their daily contact with whites, mulatto house slaves were exposed to the cultural views and practices (e.g., speech, dress, and mannerisms) of the larger society (Frazier 1957*b*; Franklin 1980). Once emancipated, former house servants were better prepared than former field hands to negotiate with whites and to lessen attempts at exploitation by them.

According to Frazier, mulattoes were conscious of the distinctions between themselves and darker slaves and believed that their white blood did indeed make them superior. Along with color differences in occupational status, the similarities between whites and mulattoes in physical appearance, speech, dress, and customary behavior reinforced this attitude in the slave population as a whole. Mulattoes, therefore, enjoyed

prestige among the darker slaves. Because of this structure of privilege, the slaves viewed light skin color as a desirable asset and as symbolic of more humane treatment. Black skin and black physical characteristics, on the other hand, were viewed as undesirable and as signs of inferiority. For these reasons, the negative stereotypes associated with "blackness" and the value placed on "lightness" of skin by whites became widely accepted by the slaves.

White ancestry not only functioned as a basis for occupational and status distinctions among slaves; it also operated as a selection criterion in the manumission of slaves. As children of slave masters, mulattoes were more likely than other slaves to be manumitted or permitted to purchase their freedom on reasonable financial terms (Franklin 1980; Frazier 1957b). Mulattoes were, therefore, overrepresented in the free black population and underrepresented among slaves. By 1850, for example, mulattoes represented 10%–15% of the total black population, 37% of all free blacks, and 8% of all slaves (Wirth and Goldhamer 1944).

In some states such as Louisiana, over 80% of the free population was of mixed ancestry (Landry 1987). Mulattoes were not only more likely to be manumitted than other slaves but were also more economically secure than other free blacks. The occupational skills acquired as former house servants provided mulattoes with opportunities for more lucrative employment (Landry 1987). With more than a subsistence wage and with continued support from white relatives, many acquired land and other property. A surprisingly large proportion of free blacks was also literate, and a few managed to obtain a formal education (Franklin 1980). The more successful and affluent free blacks tended to be mulatto (Landry 1987).

Because of a stratification process that provided blacks of mixed parentage with opportunities for training, education, the acquisition of property, and socialization into the dominant culture, mulattoes emerged at the top of the social hierarchy in black communities following the Civil War (Frazier 1957a, 1957b). Although this varied according to geographical location, the mulatto elite generally consisted of a combination of small businessmen, skilled laborers, service workers with white clientele, and a sprinkling of professionals (Frazier 1957b; Landry 1987). Though these occupations were more prestigious and paid higher wages than those available to the largely impoverished black majority, membership in the elite depended strongly on family background, light skin color, a heritage of freedom before Emancipation, and a life-style patterned after affluent whites (Blackwell 1985; Landry 1987). Mulattoes maintained their elite position in the black community for 50 years following Emancipation by passing their advantages on to their children, continuing their close association with whites, and avoiding intermarriage with darker

blacks (Blackwell 1985; Frazier 1957*b*, 1966; Landry 1987). So, light skin color continued to be a distinctive characteristic of upper-class status and to shape the opportunity structure in the black community well into the 1920s.

SKIN TONE AND OPPORTUNITY: THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Frazier (1957*a*, 1957*b*) argued that the influence of white ancestry on social status had declined significantly by World War I and that the mulatto elite's near monopoly on the upper ranks of black society was disappearing. Access to elite status, according to Frazier, became increasingly dependent on professional standing, education, and economic success. This transformation in the basis of social status and prestige was facilitated by the gradual extension of educational opportunities to the black masses, growing competition from white immigrants for service jobs historically held by mulattoes, and mass migration of southern blacks to urban areas (Landry 1987). The last created an enormous demand for black professionals to meet the needs of a rapidly increasing black population. As darker blacks became more educated and economically successful, they began to marry into the old mulatto families, and the complexion of the black elite darkened (Landry 1987). Although research conducted in black communities throughout the 1930s found color gradations in social standing (e.g., Drake and Cayton 1945; Davis et al. 1941) and an emphasis on light complexion as a desirable characteristic (Johnson 1941), these studies concurred with Frazier's assessment.

Social and economic opportunities have improved dramatically for blacks since the major works on skin tone and stratification were published. During the 1960s, educational, occupational, and income levels increased and the black middle class expanded (Farley and Allen 1987). Cultural nationalism, which emphasized pride in being black and the distinctive contribution of black music, literature, and history, swept across black America (Blackwell 1985). Moreover, among blacks, dark skin coloring lost its negative connotations and associated stereotypes. The term "black" became a unifying description of the entire race rather than a divisive term used in a derogatory manner to devalue darker members.

Given these social, economic, and attitudinal changes, it is reasonable to expect that Frazier's prediction that skin color would cease to be an important dimension of black stratification should have been realized. Two studies conducted at the height of the civil rights movement, however, do not support this expectation. Freeman et al. (1966), on the basis of interviews with black couples residing in Boston, reported a positive association between lightness of skin and wife's education, husband's

education, and husband's occupation. Ransford's (1970) study of black males in the Watts area of Los Angeles found that occupation and income were higher for light-skinned males at all levels of education below college graduation. Furthermore, among those with the lowest levels of educational attainment, the probability of being employed was lower for darker males. Among darker males, only those scoring low on subjective powerlessness were able to overcome the skin-color barrier. Ransford concluded that, because the returns to education were greater for lighter males, darker males still encountered greater discrimination in the larger society. Both studies, therefore, revealed that skin tone continued to affect socioeconomic status among blacks.

The Freeman et al. (1966) and Ransford (1970) studies were based on small, geographically specific samples, and the data were collected in the late 1960s. Perhaps the time lag had not been sufficient for the changes of the civil rights era to have made an impact. On the other hand, it is not known to what degree evaluations of black skin-tone differences have changed in the dominant society. Desegregation has increased the frequency and intensity of interracial contact. If whites, particularly in their roles as gatekeepers to jobs and education, continue to exercise color preferences, then we can expect skin color to influence black Americans' status attainment in spite of its diminished importance within the black community itself. It is also reasonable to hypothesize that to some extent the effects of past discrimination and the extension of privilege based on color are still operating. In the remainder of this article, we will examine whether, in fact, complexion continues to play a significant role in such stratification outcomes as educational attainment, occupation, and income among black Americans.

METHODS

The data used in the analysis come from the 1979–80 NSBA. The sample for the survey was drawn according to a multistage-area probability procedure that was designed to ensure that every black household in the United States had an equal probability of being selected for the study. Within each household in the sample, one person aged 18 or older was randomly selected to be interviewed from among those eligible for the study. Only self-identified black American citizens were eligible for the study. Professionally trained black interviewers carried out all interviewing. We used data from the 2,107 respondents to operationalize skin tone and four stratification measures—education, occupation, personal income, and family income. Mother's occupation, father's education, sex, marital status, region, urbanicity, and age—correlates of stratification outcomes—were introduced as controls.

Values for skin tone were based on interviewers' observations of respondents' complexions. Interviewers rated respondents' skin color on a scale from one to five, with one indicating a very dark brown skin color and five denoting a very light brown or very light skin complexion. Interviewers classified 8.5% of the respondents as having very dark brown complexion, 29.9% as having dark brown, 44.6% as having medium brown, 14.4% as having light, and 2.6% as having very light skin complexion.²

Education and father's education were scored "less than grade school" = 4; "less than high school education" = 10; "high school or equivalent" = 12; "some college" = 14; and "college graduate or more" = 18.

Occupation and mother's occupation were divided into six different types of work: (1) manual labor or personal or domestic services, (2) operative or protective services, (3) crafts, (4) clerical, (5) management or sales, and (6) professional or technical. These occupational types were rank ordered and coded from one through six, with one indicating lower ranking jobs and six representing higher ranking occupations.

Each respondent was assigned scores that corresponded to the midpoint of his or her income category for both personal income and family income. A Pareto curve estimate was used to derive midpoints for respondents whose incomes fell in the highest, open-ended income categories (see Miller 1964). Codes ranged from \$0 through \$38,946 for personal income, and from \$0 through \$43,333 for family income.

Sex was divided between males (zero) and females (one). Marital status was dichotomized between those who were currently married (one) and those who were not (zero). Region of current residence was collapsed into two categories: South (one) and non-South (zero). For the urbanicity variable, respondents were categorized as urban (one) if they lived in a self-representing urban area. And each respondent's age was coded in years and ranged from 18 through 97 (for 97 years old and over).

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Does skin tone continue to be related to stratification outcomes? Figures 1–4 provide some preliminary evidence. These bar graphs present bivariate

² To our knowledge, the 1982 General Social Survey is the only other national, representative sample of black Americans that includes observations of respondents' skin colors. The distribution of skin tones in that sample was very similar on a five-part scale: 10.1% of respondents were classified as having a very dark brown skin complexion, 25.3% as having dark brown, 47.1% as having medium brown, 14.7% as having light brown, and 2.8% as having very light skin complexion. The number of black respondents in that data set, however, precluded our using it to test the hypotheses at hand in a multivariate framework.

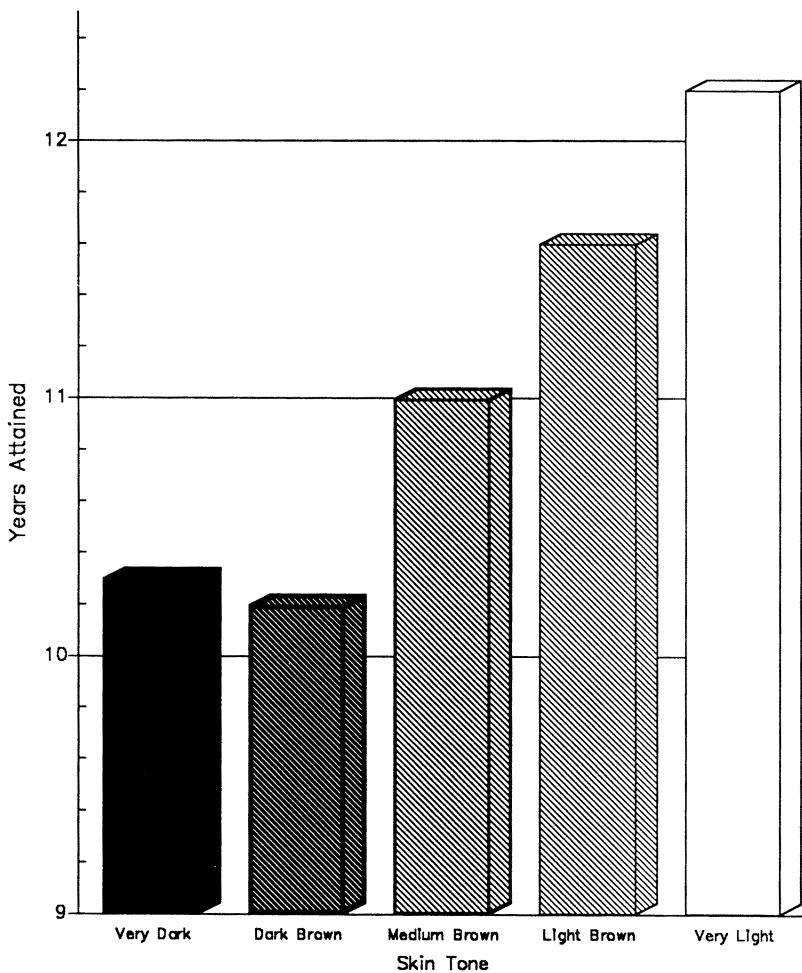


FIG. 1.—Educational attainment (in years) by skin tone: very dark = 10.3; dark brown = 10.2; medium brown = 11.0; light brown = 11.6; very light = 12.2.

ate relationships between skin color and stratification results. Figure 1, for example, presents mean levels of educational attainment by skin tone. We show in this graph that educational attainment does increase as skin color becomes lighter. Each unit of lighter skin color corresponds to about half an additional year of education. As we show in the figure, very light respondents attain on average more than two additional years of education than their dark brethren. These differences are statistically significant at $P < .01$.

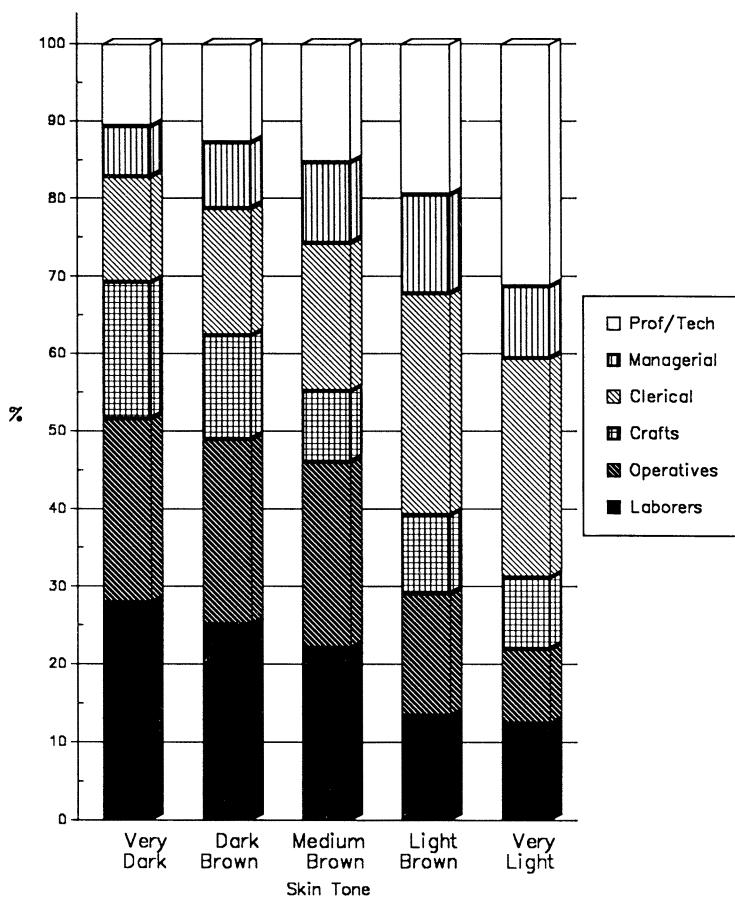


FIG. 2.—Occupational distribution by skin tone

In figure 2 we present the occupational distribution of blacks by skin tone. Again, it is evident that there are substantial differences in the kinds of jobs held by respondents with various skin tones. For example, very light respondents are substantially more likely to be employed as professional and technical workers than are those with darker complexions. In contrast, those with very dark complexions are more likely than all others to be laborers. Occupational differences by skin tone are also statistically significant at $P < .01$.

In figures 3 and 4, we show that similar patterns emerge with respect to color-related income distributions. Both personal and family income increase significantly with lighter complexion. On the family-income dimension, this relationship yields incomes for very light respondents

Skin Tone and Stratification

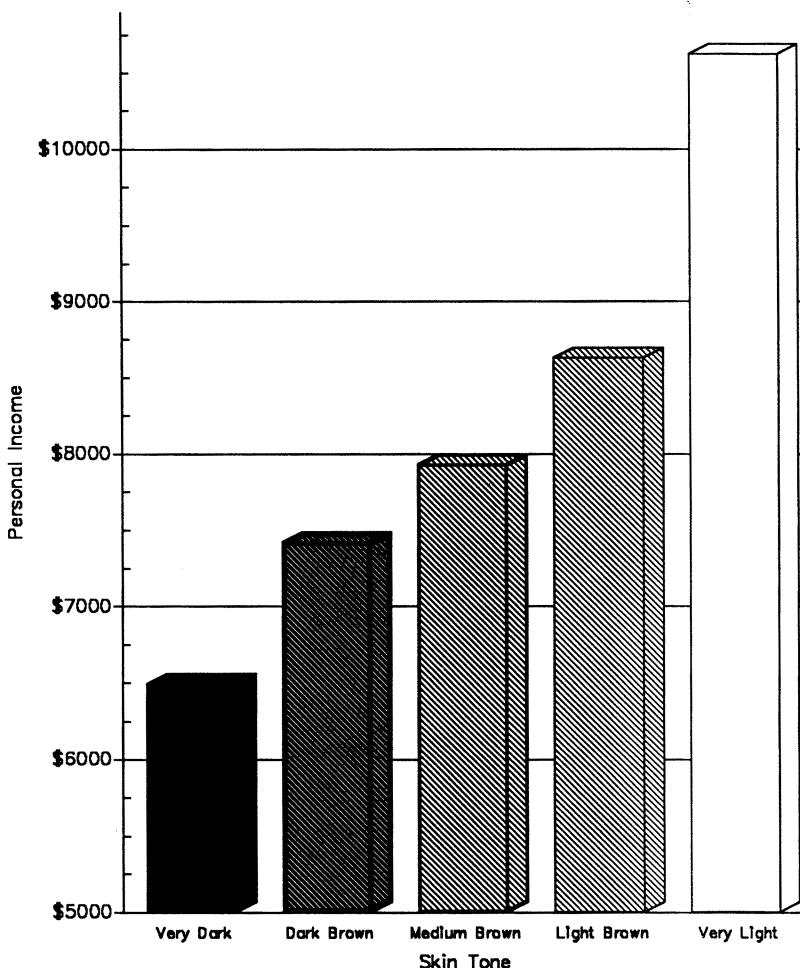


FIG. 3.—Personal income by skin tone: very dark = \$6,503; dark brown = \$7,427; medium brown = \$7,938; light brown = \$8,632; very light = \$10,627.

that are more than 50% greater than those for very dark respondents. When it comes to personal income, the differences are even greater, as incomes for very light respondents are nearly 65% higher than those of their very dark counterparts.

Although these results are telling and indicative of the magnitude of the discrepancies among blacks, they do not give us a complete picture of the relationship of skin tone to stratification outcomes. The preceding analysis provided us with only a glimpse of the gross differences that occur along the color spectrum. It did not take into account the interrela-

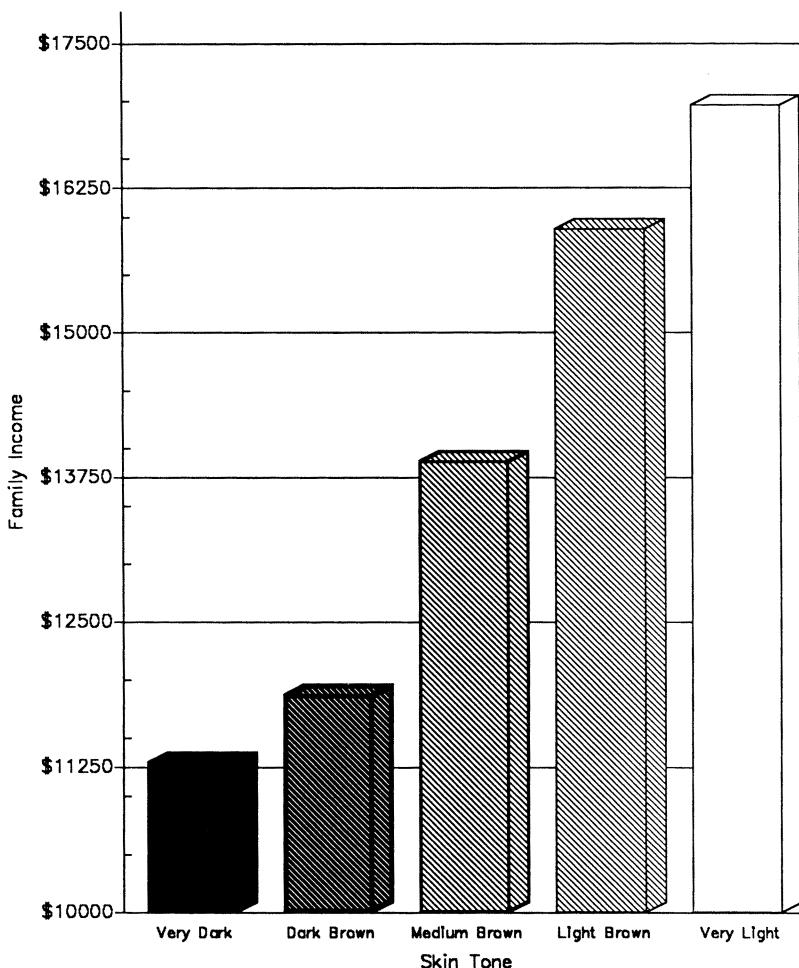


FIG. 4.—Family income by skin tone: very dark = \$11,303; dark brown = \$11,888; medium brown = \$13,900; light brown = \$15,907; very light = \$16,977.

tionships among these stratification variables. It also did not provide statistical controls for factors that mediate the effects of skin tone.

In order to assess the interrelationships of these variables, we used path analysis. Path analysis enables us to measure the direct and indirect effects of skin tone on the stratification outcomes. In addition, this technique allows us to examine the causal processes underlying the observed relationships. And finally, it allows us to determine the relative importance of alternative paths of influence.

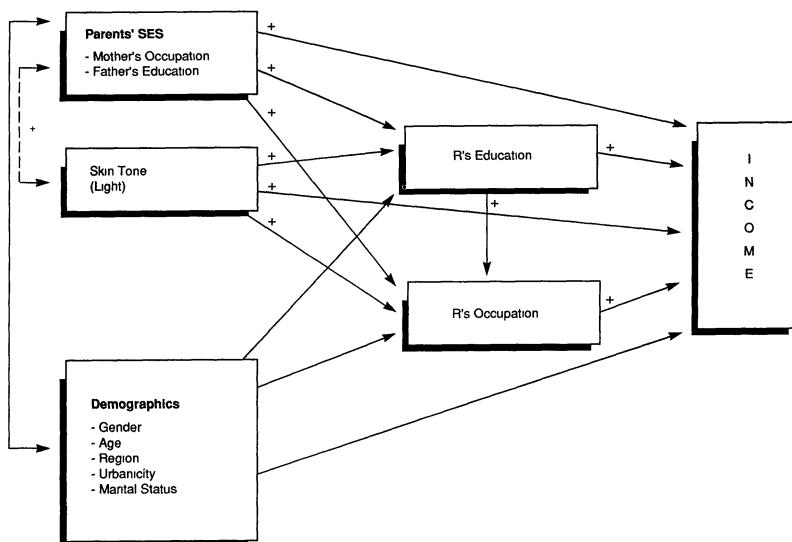


FIG. 5.—A conceptual model of the stratification outcomes of skin-tone variations among black Americans.

Figure 5 presents a conceptual diagram that illustrates the direct and indirect effects of skin tone on income (as well as education and occupation). Consistent with our discussion above, this conceptual model suggests that one's skin tone will (1) have a direct bearing on one's personal and family income, (2) affect one's personal and family income through the effect it has on educational attainment, and (3) influence one's personal and family income through the consequences it has on occupation (both directly and indirectly through the education-occupation nexus). These relationships are posited to exist net of the direct and indirect effects of parents' socioeconomic status and one's own sociodemographic characteristics.

But how accurate is this diagram? Does it capture the effects of skin tone on these stratification outcomes? Who, if anyone, does this sketch depict? Table 1 provides us with some answers to these questions. It presents skin tone as a predictor of such outcomes as educational attainment, occupation, and personal and family income. In each case, the coefficients are standardized and presented as beta weights that statistically control for the effects of the other correlates of stratification. For example, the table shows that skin tone has a statistically significant effect on educational attainment ($P < .05$). In particular, net of the effects of parental socioeconomic status, sex, region, urbanicity, age, and marital status, educational attainment increases along with lightness of

TABLE 1

EFFECTS OF SKIN TONE ON STRATIFICATION OUTCOMES, NET OF OTHER DETERMINANTS OF INEQUALITY

Independent Variables	Education	Occupation	Personal Income	Family Income
Skin tone .....	.078**	.096***	.066**	.072**
Mother's occupation .....	.082**	-.013	-.038	.043
Father's education .....	.209***	.001	-.031	.033
Sex (female) .....	.040	-.065**	-.322***	-.177***
Region (South)	-.015	.039	-.126***	-.130***
Urbanicity (urban) .....	.018	.081**	.053*	.040
Age	-.256***	-.008	.219***	.037
Marital status (married) .....	.126***	.066**	.138***	.246***
Education .....		.504***	.307***	.225***
Occupation .....			.248***	.229***
R ² .....	.180***	.299***	.442***	.341***
N	621	621	621	604

* $P < .10$ ** $P < .05$ *** $P < .01$

complexion. The overall model explains 18% of the variance in educational attainment.

Similar results with respect to the effects of skin tone on occupation are displayed in table 1. Again, the results are consistent with expectations that lighter complexions would produce more favorable stratification results. Net of education, parental socioeconomic status, sex, region, urbanicity, age, and marital status, the fairer one's pigmentation, the higher his or her occupational standing ($P < .01$). Though education is a much more important variable, skin tone proves to be more consequential than either of the indicators of parental socioeconomic status and all of the sociodemographic variables. The overall model accounts for about 30% of the variance in occupation.

We also show in table 1 that skin tone has significant effects on personal income, net of education, occupation, parental socioeconomic status, and such sociodemographic characteristics as sex, region, urbanicity, age, and marital status. While skin tone is again a more powerful predictor than urbanicity and parental socioeconomic status, it is not in this case as important as such attributes as sex, age, marital status, education, and occupation. The total model explains 44% of the variance in personal income.

The information in table 1 also suggests that family income is significantly related to skin color. In particular, the lighter the skin tone, the higher the family's income. This relationship is statistically significant

($P < .05$) and is net of parental socioeconomic status, education, occupation, and the sociodemographic variables. The overall model accounts for 34% of the variance in family income.

In sum, it appears that skin tone has bona fide effects on such stratification outcomes as education, occupation, and income. In all cases, these effects are consistent with the idea that lighter skin complexions are associated with more favorable stratification consequences over and above those conferred by parental background and sociodemographic attributes.

But are skin tone and stratification outcomes related in the same manner for all blacks? Drake and Cayton (1945) argued that skin tone is more important for women than men. In order to address this issue, we examined the effects of skin tone on education, occupation, and personal and family income, net of parental socioeconomic status, region, urbanicity, age, marital status, and stratified by sex.

In table 2 we report the net effects of skin tone on the dependent outcomes for men versus women. Again, coefficients are presented as beta weights that statistically control for the effects of the other correlates of stratification. There appear to be some important similarities and differences by sex. Skin color acts as a significant stratifying agent in determining education, occupation, and family income for women only ($P < .05$). It is a marginal factor in determining personal income for both men and women ($.05 < P < .1$). The differential effects for family income are consistent with Drake and Cayton's belief that skin tone is more consequential for women than for men because of the role it has played in mate selection—that is, "successful Negro men . . . put a premium on marrying a woman who is not black or very dark brown. . . . Male partiality to [fair skin] color constitutes a social handicap for the very dark woman" (Drake and Cayton 1945, p. 498). (Lack of data concerning the skin tone of respondents' spouses precludes a direct test of this claim.)

We also carried out a multivariate analysis that examined the stratification effects of skin tone, stratified by region, by age, and by urbanicity. (Space limitations do not permit a full presentation of these results.) For the most part, our results (not presented here) indicated that not only did skin tone affect outcomes among blacks in general, but it also had differential consequences within the black community. Different skin color results occurred by such characteristics as sex, region, urbanicity, and age. In all instances of significant effects, however, lighter skin was associated with more positive stratification outcomes.

But what do relationships between skin tone and stratification outcomes mean? Explanations of the relationship between pigmentation and stratification are to be found in either contemporaneous structural and ideological factors (e.g., continuing disadvantage due to discrimination

TABLE 2
EFFECTS OF SKIN TONE ON STRATIFICATION OUTCOMES OF MALES VERSUS FEMALES, NET OF OTHER DETERMINANTS OF INEQUALITY

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	EDUCATION		OCCUPATION		PERSONAL INCOME		FAMILY INCOME	
			Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
	Males	Females						
Skin tone	.063	.109**	.048	.079**	.085*	.067*	.060	.095**
Mother's occupation	.024	.095**	.077	-.062*	-.163***	-.007	-.046	.109***
Father's education	.209***	.206***	-.089	.020	.100*	-.091**	.119*	-.011
Region (South)	-.105*	.034	-.045	.075*	-.028	-.160***	-.063	-.153***
Urbanicity (urban)	.003	.015	.107*	.071*	.127**	.082**	.100*	.028
Age	-.295***	-.237***	-.045	-.016	.320***	.181***	.182***	-.006
Marital status (married)	.082	.130***	.161**	.010	.201***	.049	.115*	.304***
Education			.456***	.533***	.335***	.271***	.263***	.215***
Occupation			.186***	.268***	.322***	.290***	.388***	.284***
R ²							.374***	.312***
N	192	377	192	377	192	377	189	367

* P < .10

** P < .05

*** P < .01

against and superexploitation of darker blacks) or antecedent factors (e.g., disadvantages derived from parents because of past discrimination against darker blacks). While our analysis cannot resolve such issues, it does provide some clues.

To the degree that parental socioeconomic status variables are correlated with stratification outcomes and skin tone, they may act as present-day proxies for the transmission of advantages and disadvantages from the past. In table 3 we show that, with the exception of the relationship between personal income and mother's occupation, parental socioeconomic status does have significant ($P < .01$) zero-order correlations with all stratification outcomes in the predicted (positive) directions. However, these data also suggest that skin tone is not highly correlated with mother's occupation (.033) or father's education (.120). Moreover, when the effects of parental socioeconomic status on stratification outcomes are examined in a multivariate framework, the relationships are attenuated. As tables 1 and 2 indicated, these relationships change (often dramatically with significant sign reversals) when skin tone and sociodemographic factors are taken into account. Such results do not lend much support to the idea that it is primarily historical factors (by themselves) that produce disadvantage and unequal outcomes for people with differing pigmentations.

The results in tables 1 and 2, however, suggested that skin tone was consistently a more powerful determinant of such stratification outcomes as occupation and personal and family income than was parental socioeconomic status. Also, darker-skinned respondents in the NSBA were about twice as likely to report that they had been the victims of discrimination within the last month than were those with light skin complexions. Moreover, net of skin tone, other contemporaneous factors were consistently more powerful determinants of stratification outcomes than were background (i.e., parental socioeconomic status) variables. These facts support the view that differential treatment (i.e., greater discrimination against darker blacks) by whites as well as by other blacks continues to occur within this era; thus, it is clear that intraracial inequality has been perpetuated and created anew within the last quarter of the 20th century.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We began this article by observing that skin tone has historically played a significant role in the social and economic standing of black Americans. During slavery, advantages went to mulattoes and other fair-skinned blacks. Through the years, the offspring of these lighter-skinned blacks have also realized relative advantage. With the rise of the modern civil rights movement and the black nationalism that accompanied it, how-

TABLE 3
ZERO-ORDER CORRELATIONS OF SKIN TONE, PARENTAL SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, AND STRATIFICATION-OUTCOME VARIABLES

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Skin tone	1.000**	.033	.120**	.127**	.117**	.090**	.130**
2. Mother's occupation		1.000**	.254**	.122**	.082**	-.002	.077**
3. Father's education			1.000**	.338**	.209**	.105**	.194**
4. Education				1.000**	.494**	.389**	.408**
5. Occupation					1.000**	.476**	.434**
6. Personal income .....						.684**	
7. Family income							1.000**

* $P < .05$
** $P < .01$

ever, evaluations of “blackness” ostensibly changed among black Americans in such a fashion that being dark no longer carried stigma or penalty. White standards were to be rejected in favor of those that incorporated pride in blackness.

To say that blacks started thinking differently about their blackness, however, is not the same as saying that the consequences of having a particular skin shade disappeared. Indeed, this study found that complexion continued to be a significant predictor of such outcomes as educational attainment, occupation, and income among black Americans. Moreover, our analysis showed that skin tone and other contemporaneous factors were more strongly related to stratification outcomes than were such background characteristics as parental socioeconomic status. Virtually all of our findings parallel those that occurred before the civil rights movement. These facts suggest that the effects of skin tone are not only historical curiosities from a legacy of slavery and racism, but present-day mechanisms that influence who gets what in America. Future research will need to specify the reasons and processes by which skin-tone variations continue to affect stratification outcomes among black Americans and whether these patterns exist for other racial and ethnic groups.

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