The Hidden Impact of Colorism on African-American Society

(By Waminja Marekia-Cleaveland)

This presentation argues that the impact of colorism is damaging to people’s self-confidence and their life opportunities. Colorism is discrimination against people of a darker skin complexion by individuals from the same race, but of a lighter skin tone. This form of prejudice is a reflection of racism; the people of color with lighter complexions resemble more of the European standard of beauty. As a result, they are treated better and tensions within racial groups are created. These tensions could lead to the loss of self-esteem, especially among young people. When children constantly watch films and television shows with cast members who have predominantly or exclusively light skin tones, they could feel as if their appearance is not beautiful. Self-hatred could occur and lead individuals into thinking that in order to be successful or loved, they must look a certain way. For example, skin bleaching is a large business feeding off the insecurities of dark-skinned men and women. Even though the standards of beauty are broadening, it is up to our society to embrace those with deeper complexions in order to fight colorism. For centuries, groups of people have been divided based on their amount of melanin and belittled for their natural beauty. Ultimately, I conclude that diversity must be celebrated and reflected in our communities because it is evident that excluding certain people is damaging for not only those individuals, but for all.