

MSU Professor Ronald E. Hall on *Racism in the 21st Century*

Skin color has come to replace race as an important cause of discrimination, Ronald E. Hall, Michigan State University professor of social work, says in his book *Racism in the 21st Century*, published by Springer.¹

Contrary to the belief of many Americans, racism remains one of the nation's most pressing social problems – albeit in a different form, according to *Racism in the 21st Century*, co-written and edited by this Michigan State University scholar.

Hall and his fellow authors argue that lighter-skinned blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and other minorities often receive preferential treatment over their darker-skinned counterparts in everything from education to employment to housing. For example, immigrant workers with lighter skin color make more money on average than those with darker complexions, according to Joni Hersch, a research of contributor and Vanderbilt University professor.

“Racism is no longer an issue of black and white,” says Hall, who has researched skin color discrimination for 25 years.

He says discrimination based on skin color – which some call “colorism” – is a centuries-old product of Western colonialism. But it has long remained a taboo subject, Hall says, even as the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s dominated public discourse and ultimately led to significant gains.

“The civil rights movement was successful because we knew who the enemy was,” Hall says. “This is very covert. I think it’s a huge problem because it’s so insidious and so subtle. It’s kind of like that music in a doctor’s office: It’s there but no one really notices it.”

Hall predicts the complex problem won’t see significant improvement for at least another generation or two.

“As we move further into the 21st century, with increased levels of interracial marriage, we won’t be able to make racial differentiations,” he says. “You’re going to have people, for example, with Asian facial features, African hair texture and Caucasian skin tones – and that’s unprecedented. But the way we’ll continue to assess one another, unfortunately, is going to be based on the manifestations of skin color.”

¹ Ronald E. Hall (2008), (Ed.). *Racism in the 21st Century: An Empirical Analysis of Skin Color*. New York: Springer