

Publication: Abendzeitung
Author: Michael Heinrich (Editor at Abendzeitung)
Publishing Date: November 5th, 2008
Circulation print version: 148,000 sold copies, 290,000 readers
Circulation online version: not known
Circulation areas: mainly Munich and Nuremberg

The Mystery of Skin Colour

In the past, all people were black. The fact that at one point they turned white, red or yellow, is due to the duration of sunshine

Barack Obama's victory means that for the first time a Coloured has been elected into the highest office of the US. His frizzy black hair, negroid lips and dark complexion stem from his parentage: his father is a black African from Kenya, his mother is white. A good occasion to pose the question: Why is it, actually, that people have such diverse skin complexions?

In the past we were all black. The undisputed scholarly opinion is that humans originated in Eastern Africa - and this region had massive sun exposures already millions of years ago. "In that region those humans had better chances of survival whose strong pigmentation protected them from harmful ultraviolet rays", Wulf Schiefenhövel told Abendzeitung. Schiefenhövel is a Munich based Professor of Anthropology. During the course of thousands of years skins turned ever darker until they were black. Until today, the populations of some parts of Africa and also Melanesia are nearly inky.

In the long run, people with dark skin tones have little chances of survival under Northern conditions. Also, their birth rates drop. The reason for this lies in the weather's impact on their bones. Says Professor Schiefenhövel: "Their bones quickly become soft and warped. The womens' pelvises become distorted which eventually renders child-birth impossible for them."

All other skin complexions are hybrid forms of black and white. Schiefenhövel explains: "People always call the Chinese yellow, and the Native Americans Redskins. Obviously, that is wrong." Both these groups have simply developed skin complexions that had the "right" mixing ratio for their respective habitats. I.e., their skins would sufficiently protect them from the ultraviolet rays while at the same time absorbing just the right amount of sunlight.

By the way, the skin shade only plays a minor role in the definition of human "races" or "populations". Decisive factors are, amongst others, the shape of the head and the body height.