

Methylene¹² blue³⁴⁵ [an organic chloride salt known for its deep blue color] was identified by Paul Ehrlich about 1891 as a possible treatment for malaria.⁶ It disappeared as an anti-malarial during the Pacific War⁷ in the tropics, since American and Allied soldiers⁸ disliked its two prominent, but reversible side effects: turning the urine blue or green, and the sclera (the whites of the eyes) blue.⁹¹⁰

¹ When I was a little girl in Montreal, my mother often used Methylene blue as an antiseptic to treat minor wounds. I remember stained blue skin peeking out from under my band aids. I used to think bleu de methylene (as it is called in French) was pronounced med-si-laine.

² Methylene blue is an organic chloride salt having 3,7-bis(dimethylamino)phenothiazin-5-ium as the counterion. A commonly used dye that also exhibits antioxidant, antimalarial, antidepressant and cardioprotective properties. A compound consisting of dark green crystals or crystalline powder. Solutions in water or alcohol have a deep blue color.¹

³ Blue has been an important colour in art and decoration since ancient times. The semi-precious stone lapis lazuli was used in the Renaissance to make the pigment ultramarine, the most expensive of all pigments.² Ultramarine is a deep blue color pigment which was originally made by grinding lapis lazuli into a powder. Its lengthy grinding and washing process makes the natural pigment quite valuable—roughly ten times more expensive than the stone it comes from and as expensive as gold. It remained an extremely expensive pigment until a synthetic ultramarine was invented.³⁴

⁴ The term “indigo” can include various shades of blue, ultramarine, and green-blue. Since the web era, the term has also been used for various purple and violet hues identified as “indigo”, based on use of the term “indigo” in HTML web page specifications. The color identified as “indigo” was not the color indigo (as generally understood at the time), but was actually a dark purple hue.⁵⁶

⁵ Blue blood is an English idiom for noble birth or descent. The idiom originates from ancient and medieval societies of Europe and distinguishes an upper class (whose superficial veins appeared blue through their untanned skin) from a working class of the time. The latter consisted mainly of agricultural peasants who spent most of their time working outdoors and thus had tanned skin, through which superficial veins appear less prominently.⁷

⁶ Europeans brought new infectious diseases, including among others smallpox, bubonic plague, chickenpox, cholera, the common cold, diphtheria, influenza, malaria, measles, scarlet fever, sexually transmitted diseases (syphilis), typhoid, typhus, tuberculosis, and pertussis. Each of these resulted in sweeping epidemics among Native Americans, who had disability, illness, and a high mortality rate.⁸

⁷ The Pacific War, sometimes called the Asia–Pacific War or the Pacific Theater, was the theater of World War II that was fought in eastern Asia, the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean, and Oceania. The Pacific War saw the Allies pitted against Japan, the latter aided by Thailand and to a lesser extent by the Axis powers, Germany and Italy.⁹

⁸ The Allies were an international military coalition formed during World War II to oppose the Axis powers. Its principal members by the end of 1941 were the United Kingdom, United States, Soviet Union, and China. It is also often called the “Strange Alliance”, because it united the leaders of the world’s greatest capitalist state (the United States), the greatest socialist state (the Soviet Union) and the greatest colonial power (the United Kingdom).¹⁰

⁹ Soaphead was reflecting once again on these thoughts one late hot afternoon when he heard a tap on his door. Opening it, he saw a little girl, quite unknown to him. She was about twelve or so, he thought, and seemed to him pitifully unattractive. When he asked her what she wanted, she did not answer, but held out to him one of his cards advertising his gifts and services: “If you are overcome with trouble and conditions that are not natural, I can remove them; Overcome Spells, Bad Luck, and Evil Influences. Remember, I am a true Spiritualist and Psychic Reader, born with power, and I will help you. Satisfaction in one visit...”

Soaphead Church told her to come in.

“What can I do for you, my child?”

She stood there, her hands folded across her stomach, a little protruding pot of tummy.

“Maybe. Maybe you can do it for me.”

“Do what for you?”

“I can’t go to school no more. And I thought maybe you could help me.”

“Help you how? Tell me. Don’t be frightened.”

“My eyes.”

“What about your eyes?”

“I want them blue.”¹¹

Soaphead pursed his lips, and let his tongue stroke a gold inlay. He thought it was at once the most fantastic and the most logical petition he had ever received. Here was an ugly little girl asking for beauty. A surge of love and understanding swept through him, but was quickly replaced by anger. Anger that he was powerless to help her. Of all the wishes people had brought him—money, love, revenge—this seemed to him the most poignant and the one most deserving of fulfillment. A little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes. His outrage grew and felt like power. For the first time he honestly wished he could work miracles.¹²

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methylene_blue

¹<https://pubchem.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/compound/Methylene-Blue>

²<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue>

³<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ultramarine>

⁴Prussian blue was created in the early 18th century and is the first modern synthetic pigment, probably synthesized for the first time by the paint maker Joahann Jacob Diesbach in Berlin around 1706. Also known as Berlin blue, Brandenburg blue, Parisian and Paris blue, it is a dark pigment produced by oxidation of ferrous ferrocyanide salts. Prussian blue lent its name to prussic acid (hydrogen cyanide) derived from it. In medicine, orally administered Prussian blue is used as an antidote for certain kinds of heavy metal poisoning.¹²

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigo>

⁶ IBM is nicknamed *Big Blue* partly due to its blue logo and color scheme, and also in reference to its former *de facto* dress code of white shirts with blue suits. IBM was founded in 1911 as the Computing-Tabulating-Recording Company (CTR), a holding company of manufacturers of record-keeping and measuring systems. IBM built the Automatic Sequence Controlled Calculator, an electromechanical computer, during World War II.³⁴⁵

⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobility>

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Native_American_disease_and_epidemics

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_War

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allies_of_World_War_II

¹¹ I was the only Black kid in my environment. I had to really sit back, not having permissions to interact with them according to their standard rules. I was threatened the first day of school: ‘We’re going to kill you if you touch us.’ So I gathered right away: if you’re Black you don’t touch, or you don’t get touched, or you better not be touched. So I stayed away from people. I stayed away from touching.⁵⁶

¹² *The Bluest Eye* Toni Morrison

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prussian_blue

² Holocaust deniers claim that Zyklon B gas was not used in gas chambers, relying for evidence on the discredited research of Fred A. Leuchter, who found low levels of Prussian blue in samples of the gas chamber walls and ceilings.¹

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IBM>

⁴ IBM was, at the request of the government, the subcontractor of the punched card project for the internment camps of Japanese Americans. In February 2001, an Alien Tort Claims Act claim was filed in U.S. federal court on behalf of concentration camp survivors against IBM. The suit accused IBM of allegedly providing the punched card technology that facilitated the Holocaust.²

⁵ *From her world*, audio composition by Yaniya Lee in conversation with her parents Grace Channer and Dzian, 2022.

⁶ Black people were viewed as a contagion.³⁴

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zyklon_B

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IBM_and_World_War_II

³“The Case for Reparations” Ta-Nehisi Coates

⁴Social contagion involves behaviour, emotions, or conditions spreading spontaneously through a group or network. The phenomenon has been discussed by social scientists since the late 19th century. Some scholars include the unplanned spread of ideas through a population as social contagion, though others prefer to class that as memetics.¹

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_contagion