



The History of Black Women and Hair

By Annette T.

AFN 121; BMCC

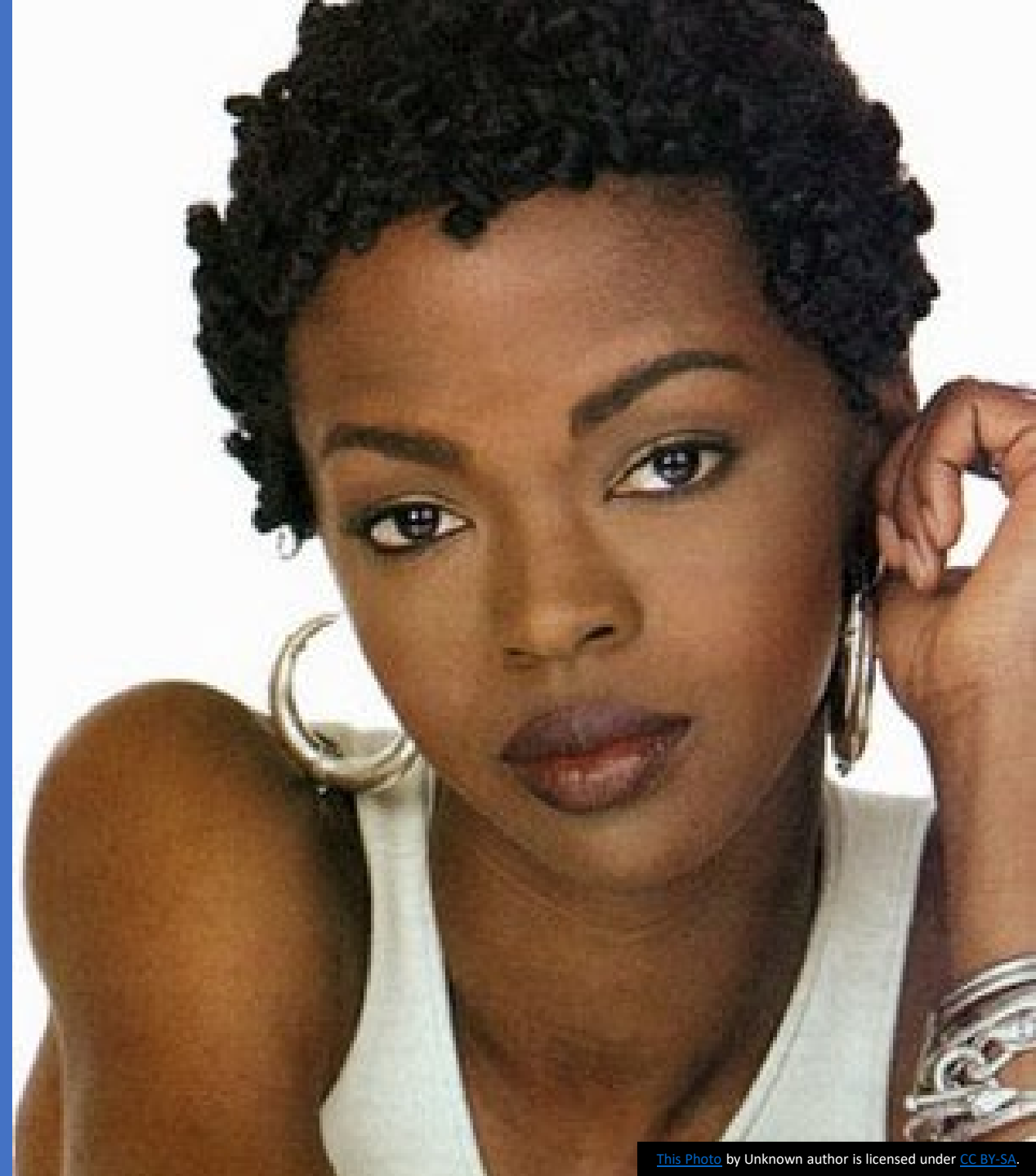
Prof. Remi Alapo

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Prologue

- Hair in african american culture has evolved throughout the years, specifically on black women. From braiding techniques such as cornrows and box braids, to more modern and recent techniques such as lace front installations and stitch braiding. But comparing this new era of black hair to the ones in the past, it's time to say we had made a long way for our hairstyles to be accepted and normalized in society, and in this presentation will depict the journey for our hairstyles to be included in modern society.





Ancient Origins in Africa

- To analyze the evolution of black women hair, we have to start off with the origins back to Africa. In african societies and civilizations, hairstyles often represent a "person's background tribe, or social status."(Jahangir 1) It taught most africans in these tribes about each other and their identities. One of the few hairstyles from these tribes includes the Fulani tribe, who's braiding hairstyle has become a "big trend in contemporary braiding." (Africa.com 1) One of the most ancient hairstyles in history, the unique hairstyle symbolizes whether a woman is married, religious or how much clout they have in society.

Black Hair in the Slavery era

- Between the 1700s and 1800s, Black people were enslaved. On ships, the European colonizers would "shave the heads of black women and their children during the trip." (Conteh, 1) Black women were forced to wear head wear such as scarves and bonnets over their heads due to their hair being tangled and easily manipulated, and "Not have the materials to properly maintain their hair." (Rucker 20) Another reason why Black women were forced to wear scarves and head wrappings was because of the imitation they received from white women, who complained that their hair was a way to attract white men, and as a result laws, specifically in Louisiana, were set "requiring women of color to cover their hair." (Edwards 3) The outcome from the backlash received from white women and laws set that controlled how Black women wore their hair lasts to this day, as many Black women protect and veil their hair with headscarves and bonnets.



Black Hair in the Slavery Era



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- During the mid 1800s, while Slavery was still being practiced in the Americas, hairstyle techniques such as threading and cornrows were starting to be a popular hairstyle amongst Black people. These braiding techniques were not only utilized to protect Black hair, but as a way to become "symbols for freedom as braid patterns were used as guides to escape." (Boakye, 1) The hairstyles remain the most popular in the Black hair community and often the most protective hairstyle.

Black Hair in the Post Slavery 1900s-1920s

- In the early 1900s, black women's hair has evolved from wearing threads, cornrows and fulani braids to something brand new that was introduced and became popular during the time, which was the hot comb. The routine of the hot comb made black women's hair flat and straight so it can be more easier to maintain. The post slave era has also introduced a product that forever changed black women and their hair with the debut of Wonderful Hair Grower, which was invented by Madame CJ Walker. The product contained of beeswax, coconut oil and petrolatum. The goal for this product was "treat dandruff and other scalp conditions." (Kettler 1)



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Black Hair in the Post Slavery 1920s-1950s

- Also during this time, the invention of the perming cream was becoming more and more popular. Invented by Garrett A. Morgan, the product was made as a way to permanently straighten black afro textured hair. This product alongside with the hot comb became increasingly popular during the decades, and reached its peak in the 50s, with black women being able to do more "american hairstyles" than their usual cornrows and threads. This however, will cause a major problem in the black hair community.



Black Hair in the Civil Rights Era 1960s

- Throughout the 60s, black women has completely used predominantly perm creaming and hot comb ironing as part of their daily hair routines. But it quickly became oversaturated to the point where black women suffered severe heat damage and hair falling out, which led to the surge of wigs. Black women started to wear wigs not only as a way to cover up their damaged hair, but to also protect it from manipulation and oversaturation of perming creams and hot iron combs. Wigs started to become more and more prevelent during the 60s, and it was often seen in black female celebrities at the time such as the supremes and diahann caroll.

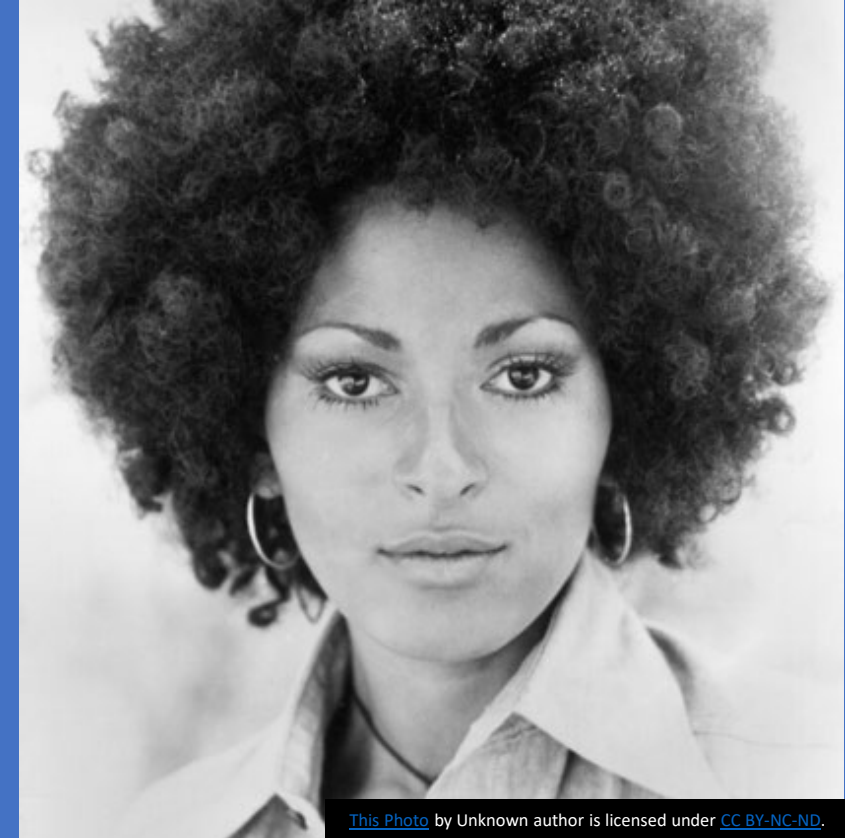




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Natural Hair Movement of the late 60s and 70s

- By the late 1960s, times were changing rapidly. With the surge of a new black civil rights movement the Black Panthers, it introduced black people to a movement that's legacy still lasts to this day: The natural hair movement. This movement, which dominantly included black women, was the anti-establishment answer to white society and pressures to constantly flat iron our hair and wear wigs all the time. It finally gave black women pride in their natural afro coily hair, and for the first time ever made them feel confident and proud with the hair they were born with. The hairstyle, the 'fro or the natural, became very popular amongst the black community and became one of the recognizable symbols of the seventies decade. The resurgence of fulani braids, cornrows, and a new surge of dreadlocks were slowly becoming acceptable in the mainstream such as blaxploitation movies and magazines targeted at a black audience such as Essence and Ebony.

Natural Hair Movement slows down and the 80s



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- In the 70s, it seemed like black women were at their prime with their hair slowly getting accepted to society and finally being seen in movies and tv shows. By the late 70s, a new perming hair styling gel called Soul Glo and it introduced a new hair style which would later be very popular in the 80s known as the jheri curl. It would be a popular hair trend amongst black women and men, but it ultimately brought the end to the natural hair movement, and by the 80s, most black women were back to perming their hair with the newly advanced curl activator and the resurgence of hot combs and flat iron came along.

Black Women Hair of the 80s

- By the 80s, the natural hair movement started to evaporate and curl activators, wigs and flat iron was back being popular among the black community again. In the 80s, popular hairstyles that contained the usage of flat iron and perm became prevalent in society. Also during this time, black people started to wear more loosely curly hairstyles that was seen in black female celebrities such as Whitney Houston and Janet Jackson.



Black Women Hair in the 90s

- By the early 90s, curly hair and flat ironed hairstyles were the popular hair trends amongst black women. It wasn't until the mid 90s we saw a new hairstyle that had become a staple on the black hair community and till this day is very popular amongst black females: the box braids. It was the popular hairstyle that was worn in movies such as Poetic Justice and Clueless and TV shows such as Martin and Moesha. This hairstyle is very protective and can be styled in many different ways. Although it takes hours to finish, this is often looked at as one of the most protective hairstyles in the black hair community and can last for a long time.





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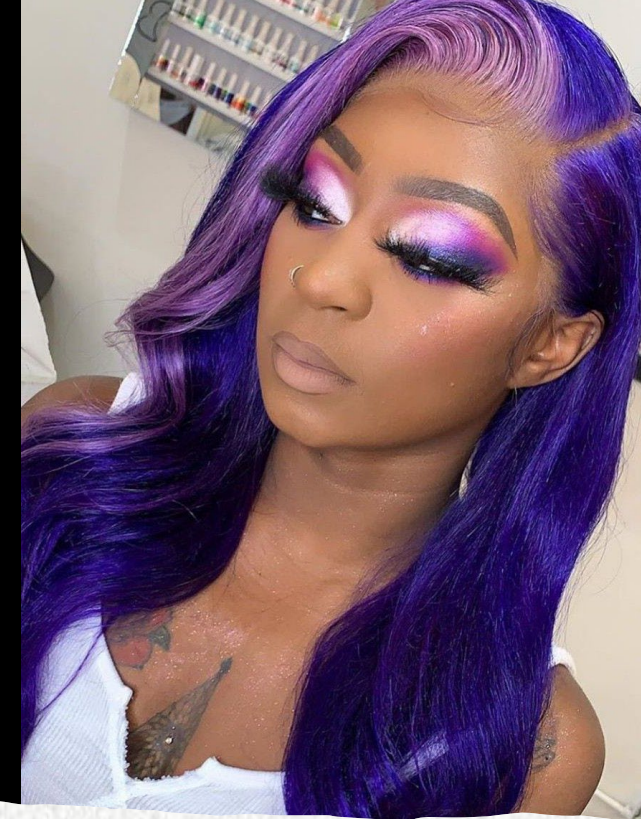


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Black Women Hair in the late 90s and early 2000s

- When the 90s was coming to an end, the most popular hairstyles for black women around that time was cornrows and microbraids. We also saw the growth of swoop gel hairstyles, which was prevalent in movies such as BAPS and music videos.



2010s and the evolution of wigs

- In recent years, we've seen a modern evolution of wigs, that has been taken to another level with the introduction of lace front closure wigs. Not only it's a protective hairstyle but it also looks realistic and black women can wear any hair color they want with these wigs without dyeing their real hair or constantly perming and damaging it. Also, with the reintroduction of fulani braids cornrows and box braids, the style immediately placed itself as one of the most unique and protective hairstyles of black hair community.



In Conclusion

- Black hair although it's more acceptable and more seen in our society, we still have to go through struggles just for our hair to be accepted in our society. From cultural appropriation from white people who are ignorant about the history of our hair, to being discriminated and often abstracted by society just because of our hairstyles. Aside from this, our hair has become a major paramount for black women and it's very important for everyone to understand that these hairstyles depict who we are as people, our identities and having pride with our hair. Whether its natural or permed or flat ironed or under a lace front wig, it doesn't erase our uniqueness as black women and all types of hairstyles and textures prove how versatile and creative black women can be.

Citations

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