



**NATURAL HAIR
THROUGH
BLACK
MOVEMENTS**

Table of content

What is the Natural Hair Movement.....1
Discrimination Against natural hair.....2
Colonialism and Postcolonialism.....3
Black is Beautiful.....8
The Black Panthers.....15
2000's and beyond.....17
Controversies.....21
Conclusion.....22

“Don’t remove the kinks from your hair!
Remove them from your brain!”

-Marcus Garvey, Jamaican Activiist. 1920s

What is the Natural Hair Movement?

Originating in the United States during the 1960s, The Natural Hair movement is a movement dedicated to encouraging people of the african diaspora to wear and embrace their natural afro or curly-kinky hair texture.

Those who decide to go “natural” give up chemically straightening or “Relaxing” their hair through “big chopping” or “transitioning”,and adopting hairstyles such as braids, twists, dreads, or wearing out in an afro style.

Going natural is not strictly tied to any political or social belief, many people do decide to go natural to redefine what it means to be beautiful both in the black and mainstream context.



Terminology

Natural: To have one’s hair worn in it’s curly-kinky texture.

Relaxing: The process of permanently straightening hair using a strong chemical agent such as lye or sodium hydroxide.

Big chop: Cutting all of the chemically straightened hair and letting the natural texture grow.

Transitioning: Slowly cutting chemically straightened hair while the natural hair grows at the same time.

Discrimination based on hair

Discrimination based on hair is a type of injustice that targets Black and Indigenous people around the world for having textured hair. For a long time natural hair has had the connotation of being unattractive, wild, and needing to be tamed.



This negative connotation has spread across the world. Leading adults and children to be kicked out of school or work because of their hair. This often becomes the driving force for many people to permanently straighten their hair to conform to the mainstream beauty standard.

Colonialism and Postcolonialism

Hair was a significant part of culture and identity for people in west Africa before colonizations often worn in elaborate braids, twists, and plaits, signifying tribal identity, age, marital status, and many other identities. When west Africans were captured during the Atlantic slave trade during 15th and 16th century, their hair was cut off as a part of erasing their culture.



Serpa Pinto, Alexandre Alberto Da Rocha De, 1846-1900, artist

Head-wraps were given, exclusively to women at certain points, to cover their hair from harsh weather and lice. In some places in the south, it was required by law for black women to cover their hair.



Horatio Seymour Squyer, 1848 - 18 Dec 1905 - National Portrait Gallery

Head-wraps became a symbol for the poor slave but also became a source of communal and personal identity. The style of head-wraps differed from place to place, worn uniquely by the individual to fit their sense of fashion, in a sense, becoming liberty and empowerment for slave women.



Portrait of Betsy by François Fleischbein (1801/1803–1868), oil on canvas.

In the 18th century, Black, mixed, Louisiana creole women were required by law in New Orleans to cover their hair, also referred to as the Tignon Law. The Tignon Law prohibited women of color from “displaying excessive attention to dress” in the street of New Orleans. Forcing them to wear a Tignon, a type of head-wrap, signifying that they are a part of the slave class even if they were freed.

In response to this law, many women wore their head-wraps with intricate fabrics and jewels becoming a symbol of style. Continuing even after the law was abolished symbolising their resistance to white colonialism.



Free Women of Color with their Children and Servants, oil painting by Agostino Brunias, Dominica, c. 1764–1796

By time slavery was abolished in the 19th century, many Black women began straightening their hair in order to blend into eurocentric ideas of beauty. Straight hair was considered “good hair”. Often using hot combs or mixture of lye that could burn the skin.



Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Co., Shampoo tin and original box, ca. 1910–1920.

Madam C.J Walker, the first African-American woman to become a self-made millionaire, invented the commercial formula of straightening natural hair. Madam C.J Walker went door to door in the United States and Caribbean, teaching women how to groom and style their hair. Walker’s system of products included a shampoo, pomade, and arduous amount of bruising, and her improved hot comb design.

Black women used Walkers products to meet western beauty standards. Natural Hair would see it’s come back in the 20th century.

Black is Beautiful

Black is Beautiful is a cultural movement started around the height of the Black civil rights movement in the 1960s in the United States, rooted from Nègritude, a literary theory from the 1930s made its way into the Black community.



Kwame Brathwaite, Touring exhibition, Philip Martin Gallery, LA. 1968

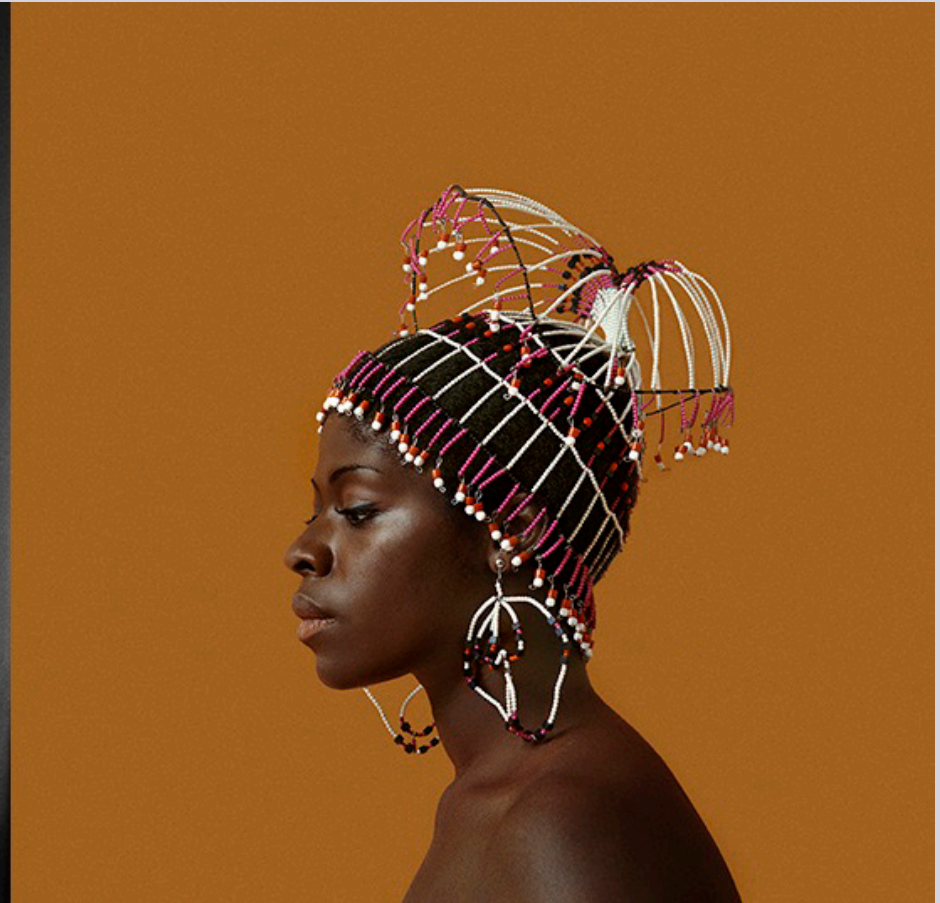
The Black is Beautiful Movement aimed to eliminate the racist idea that Black features, skin color and hair are inherently ugly. Encouraging Black men and women to stop bleaching their skin and straightening their hair. And destroying the internal racism that has its way into the Black community.

A fashion show was taking place at a nightclub called the Purple Manor in Harlem, New York City in 1962. The show was called Naturally '62 and was organized by African Jazz-Art Society and Studio (AJASS), and two African-American photographers, Kwame Brathwaite and Elombe Brath.



Kwame Brathwaite, a self-portrait, 1964.

The show features Black women who chose to move away from white beauty standards, walking the catwalk that night with afro hair, clothes inspired by west african designs, and skin darker than what was typically seen in fashion magazines.



Kwame Brathwaite, Sikolo Brathwaite wearing a headpiece designed by Carolee Prince, African Jazz-Art Society & Studios (AJASS), Harlem, ca. 1968;

The women were known as the Grandassa Models, taking from the term Grandassaland in reference to Africa that Kwame Brathwaite would use.



Untitled (Pat on Car), 1968 c.. Kwame Brathwaite

This kick started the Black is Beautiful Movement that would span from the 60's to the 70's. Through that span, Brathwaite would continue to propel the message of empowerment, being self-sufficient, and supporting your community. As well as pushing the progressive term "Black" into the lexicon of Americans because "Colored" and "Negro" was still widely used.



American vocalist Nina Simone n. 1969. Jack Robinson

Musicians such as Nina Simone and Stevie Wonder were seen in styles similar to the Grandassa models, normalising the afro. However, there were still many struggles for people who choose to wear their afros

Terminology

Nègritude: Negritude is a literary theory developed by francophone writers of the african diaspora in the 1930s hoping to revitalize black consciousness across african and it's diaspora. Arguing for the importance of a Pan-African sense among the people of african descent. Inspiring the birth of many movements such as Afro-surrealism and Black is Beautiful.

Grandassaland: In reference to Africa, coined by Black Nationalist Carlos Cooks.

AY IT SAY IT
LOUD LOUD
SAY IT
LOUD
SAY IT SAY
LOUD LOU
SAY IT SAY
LOUD LOU

“Say it loud! I’m black and I’m proud
Say it louder! I’m black and I’m proud
Some people say we got a lot of malice,
some say it’s a lotta nerve
But I say we won’t quit movin’ until we get
what we deserve”

- James Brown’s *Say It Loud*. 1968

The Black Panthers

The Black Panthers Party, or simply Black Panthers, was a Black power political group founded and led by Huey P. Newton in 1966. Originally starting in Oakland, California and soon spread to major cities across the United States. They were founded during the wake of assassination of Black activist Malcolm X, and after an unarmed black teenager was shot but the San Francisco police.

The Black Panthers wanted to challenge the police brutality happening against African-Americans in their community during the civil rights movement of the 60s. They created a number of social programs and engaged in political activity, growing popular in cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Black in general was an important symbol to the Black Panther, their most notable features they wore were black leather jacket, black berets, and afros.



Members of the Black Panthers line up at a rally at DeFremery Park in Oakland, Calif. Stephen Shames. 1966



Davis introduces her autobiography. Sophie Bassouls. 1975

Angel Davis, Black queer feminist and political activity to this day, was a member of the Black Panthers known for her powerful speeches and iconic fro.

She wanted to show the importance of the afro, that it's not just a hairdo reminiscent of the 60s and 70s, but that it's an important symbol of Black power and Black struggle. A 1972 study of black teens living in St. Louis revealed that 90 percent of young men and 40 percent of young women in the city sported their natural kinks.

Afros were a symbol of the blackness and opposition of white oppression because natural hair has been discriminated against in favor of straight hair for centuries.

Natural Hair Movement, 2000's and beyond

Through the 80s, the Natural hair movement began to die down. The afro became mainstream with many non-black people taking on the style, losing its original meaning. Styles like Jheri curls and Wave Nouveau became popular among African Americans during the 80s and early 90s

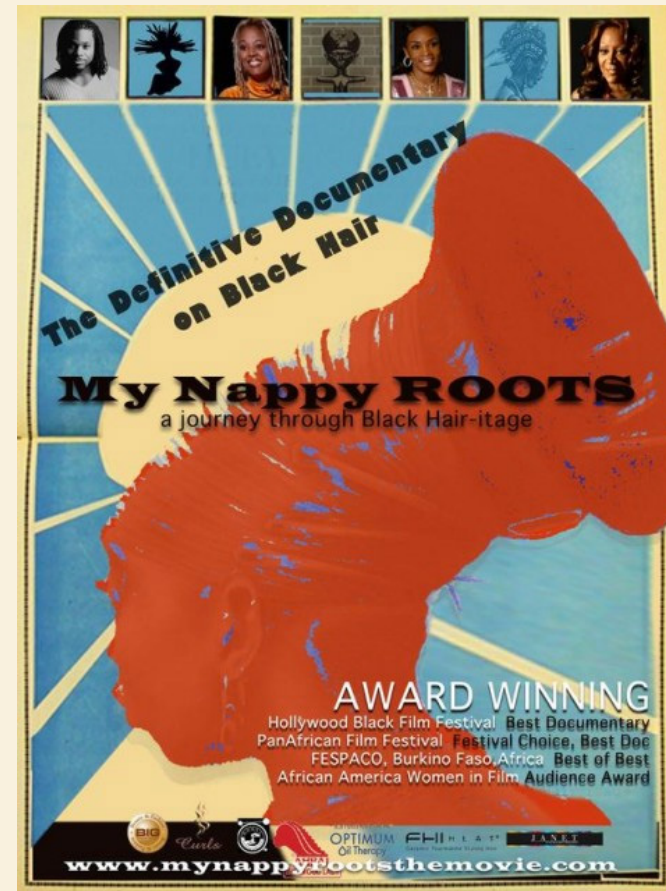
While men stayed natural, most women had pressed and permed hair. Magazine and television ads encouraging women to alter their hair texture.



Olive oil no-lye Relaxer.

While dreadlocks rose in popularity because of Rastafarianism and the popularity of Reggae music, many natural hairstyles like braids, cornrows, and dreads still had negative connotations among mainstream American and were not accepted into the workplace.

In the 2000s, the Natural Hair Movement started to gain momentum. Dubbed the second wave of the Natural Hair Movement started by films and social media, leading many Black women to abandon their relaxers and hot combs.



My Nappy Roots: A Journey Through Black Hair-itage directed by Regina Kimbell featured the history and politics surrounding Black natural hair in the United States.

Her film raised consciousness about natural hair in the African American community. A year later, comedian Chris Rock released the film *Good Hair* that focused on the economics and industries of weave and hair relaxers. These films prompted Black women to raise awareness and shift the cultural understanding around black hair.



Chris Rock. *Good Hair*. 2009

Sales of relaxers and other permanent straighteners decreased, and an industry around natural hair care began to rise. Notable celebrities such as Erykah Badu, Solange Knowles, and Lupita Nyong'o became prominent figures in the Natural Hair Movement. The Natural Hair Movement became significant because it signifies a healthier lifestyle and an authentic redefinition of beauty that is female-led.

Terminology

Jheri curls: A permanent wave hairstyle characterized by its glossy, loose curl look. Popular among African Americans in the 80s and 90s

Good hair: A phrase used in African American communities to describe straight or loose curled hair in contrast to afro-textured hair.

Nappy: A historically derogatory term used to describe afro-textured hair. Has been reappropriated in modern day by Black people as a positive word.

“If your hair is relaxed, they are relaxed.
If your hair is nappy, they are not happy.”

-Comedian Paul Mooney. *Good Hair*. 2009

Don't touch my hair, when it's the feelings I wear.

-Solange Knowles. *Don't Touch My Hair*. 2016

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