



Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America

By Ayana Byrd, Lori Tharps

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Two world wars, the Civil Rights movement, and a Jheri curl later, Blacks in America continue to have a complex and convoluted relationship with their hair. From the antebellum practice of shaving the head in an attempt to pass as a "free" person to the 1998 uproar over a White third-grade teacher's reading of the book *Nappy Hair*, the issues surrounding Black hair linger as we enter the twenty-first century.

Tying the personal to the political and the popular, *Hair Story* takes a chronological look at the culture behind the ever-changing state of Black hair—from fifteenth century Africa to the present-day United States. *Hair Story* is the book that Black Americans can use as a benchmark for tracing a unique aspect of their history and that people of all races will celebrate as the reference guide for understanding Black hair.

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Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America By Ayana Byrd, Lori Tarps Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Whether it's hip-hop diva Lil' Kim's "weave of the week" or activist Angela Davis's Afro, black hair evinces the power to set trends and define icons. In this entertaining and concise survey, Byrd (a research chief for Vibe) and Tharps (a reporter for Entertainment Weekly) revel in the social, cultural and economic significance of African-American hair from 1400 to the present. The opening chapter chronicles the rise of the slave trade, revealing intriguing facts about the significance of hair in African culture—such as that only royalty donned hats or hairpieces, and recently widowed Wolof women stopped maintaining their hair as a sign of their mourning. The authors contextualize issues familiar to African-Americans while explaining black hair culture to the uninformed, so readers who don't already know what "the kitchen" refers to (hair at the nape of the neck, usually the "nappiest") will soon find out. Photos and illustrations are put to effective use, though amusing charts such as "Five Famous Men with Equally Famous Hair" and the "Black Hair Glossary" are out of sync with the text. Meanwhile, significant figures, like Madame C.J. Walker and Nathaniel "The Bush Doctor" Mathis, are revisited in detail in various chapters, resulting in unnecessary repetition. But these are small quibbles with a book that successfully balances popular appeal with historical accuracy, adeptly exploring the roots of pervasive intraracial discrimination while explaining, for example, how the much-maligned Jheri Curl ever became a fad. Agent, Marie Brown. (Feb.)

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Review

"[An] entertaining and concise survey . . . A book that successfully balances popular appeal with historical accuracy."—*Publishers Weekly*

"Taps into the art and history of how Black hair is perceived in America in a way that will no doubt be relevant for generations to come."—*The Source*

"*Hair Story* presents an absorbing rendition of American history told through Black hair. In prose that is both humorous and haunting, the authors manage to bring vividly to life a subject most would consider inconsequential. After reading this comprehensive tale, people will walk away with a whole new appreciation for Black hair and all of its wonder and power."—Lloyd Boston, author of *Men of Color: Fashion, History, Fundamentals*

"From antiquity to the present day, Black hair has been both ornamentation and a medium of artistic expression. At the same time, its changing political and cultural values have often mirrored the current social climate. *Hair Story*, in documenting our natural hair's beauty and capacity for communication, brings to life and infuses with historical relevance this unique slice of Americana."—Harriette Cole, author of *Jumping the Broom* and *How to Be*

"[This book combines] keen historical insight with pop-cultural anecdotes."—*Entertainment Weekly*

"A comprehensive and colorful look at a very touchy subject."—*Essence*

-- *Review*

About the Author

Ayan D. Byrd holds a bachelors degree in political science from Barnard College. Her work has appeared in *Vibe*, *Rolling Stone*, *Honey*, and *InStyle* magazine. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Lori L. Tharps attended Smith College and received a Masters Degree from Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. She is currently a correspondent for *Entertainment Weekly* magazine. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Sandra Maes:

Now a day folks who Living in the era where everything reachable by connect to the internet and the resources within it can be true or not need people to be aware of each information they get. How individuals to be smart in receiving any information nowadays? Of course the reply is reading a book. Looking at a book can help people out of this uncertainty Information particularly this Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America book as this book offers you rich info and knowledge. Of course the info in this book hundred percent guarantees there is no doubt in it you may already know.

Nancy Ochoa:

Playing with family in a very park, coming to see the marine world or hanging out with close friends is thing that usually you might have done when you have spare time, after that why you don't try issue that really opposite from that. Just one activity that make you not feeling tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition associated with. Even you love Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America, you may enjoy both. It is very good combination right, you still desire to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh seriously its mind hangout people. What? Still don't get it, oh come on its identified as reading friends.

Kelly Breedlove:

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