

# See if I care, good or bad hair!

## The relationship between Black girls and their hair



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The division of good and bad hair in the Black community is something that has been seen since colonization.

In America, a lot of the animosity and hatred was

birthed during slavery and the Reconstruction Era.

“House slaves” were typically fairer skinned, sometimes biracial slaves who were allowed to work and stay in the master’s house. These slaves tended to have a looser hair pattern, unlike the “field slaves.”

“Field slaves” were typically darker skinned slaves who had very thick, coarse and kinky hair

that was normally hidden as they worked, versus the “house slaves” who wore their hair freely.

Why must one hair texture be hidden while another can flow free for all to see?

During the Reconstruction Era after slavery, many rules were set in place to further limit Blackness and the expression of such.

One was the Tignon Laws of

Louisiana. Black and Creole women were forced to wear their hair wrapped in headscarves so that white women wouldn’t be “jealous” of their hair.

Our hair, as unique to America as us, wasn’t celebrated. Instead, we were taught to hate it simply because white women were jealous.

Jealousy brews hatred from the envious person, but no one thinks as to how jealousy impacts those who are being envied.

When it comes to hair, we’ve seen the effects of jealousy for hundreds of years.

Growing up in the 2000s, centuries after slavery began, majority of the Black women and girls I knew either had perms/ relaxers, weaves or wore single braids.

I rarely saw Black women with their natural hair, and Black girls only wore their natural hair until they

started attending school.

I have memories of my grandma straightening my hair with a hot comb the night before Easter and school so my hair could be “pressed” and “look right.”

I’d go to school and girls would be in my hair telling me, “Oh Lillian, you got good hair!”

I didn’t exactly understand what it meant to have “good hair.” I thought they just meant my hair looked nice.

If that’s the case, of course I had good hair! You think my grandma did all this for no reason?

But that’s not what they meant.


They meant that my hair was able to be slicked down with minimal gel and that it was long.

I would hear things from other girls like, “Lillian you got real good hair. I wish mines was like that.”


Looking back, it’s crazy to think that we were five

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Brief history of Black hair




During the Reconstruction Era after slavery, laws were put into place to limit Blackness and the expression of such. One would be the Louisiana Tignon Laws, prohibiting Black women to wear their hair without it being in a headscarf.



In Spike Lee’s 1988 film *School Daze*, the topic of “good” and “bad” hair in the Black community is explored in a 1940s style musical piece.

We see “good” hair portrayed by women in silver and “bad” hair by the women in red, but where did this debate really stem from?



no matter how you wear your hair... First Straighten then Style!

In the 1920s, perms were invented as a way to chemically straighten hair. Perms have been a major part in Black hair since.

Perms further restate the idea that textured hair is bad and that straight hair is the standard, thus reinforcing Eurocentric beauty standards.

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years old wishing for our hair to be different.

We were already conditioned at our young and innocent age to believe that the hair that grew out of our scalp had to be categorized as either “good” or “bad” hair.

I began getting my hair straightened regularly in third grade when my family decided my hair was too thick to take care of and I hated it.

Not only did it suck being in a chair for three straight hours, but even then, I felt a sense of guilt in getting my hair “done”.

I loved how my hair looked when water touched it.

I loved that my hair grew towards the sun rather than ground.

I loved how it made little spirals. Hundreds of spirals coming out of my head as beautiful as they could be, only to be fried at 425 degrees.

Still during elementary, I didn’t see many Black girls with natural hair, but in sixth grade, I made the proclamation that I would “go natural”

in seventh grade.

This was bred out of me finally becoming conscious as what I was watching on YouTube.

My hair was straight, but I wanted curls without adding in rollers or extra heat, so I would look up “heatless curls

ashamed of myself.

Heatless curls? I have those in my head naturally, I just thought that it wouldn’t “look right.”

No women around me wore their hair like that. My mom, aunts, cousins, sisters, women at church, I mean the list goes

encouraged me to go natural.

I hated how difficult this process was.

Trying to renourish fried hair while going to school was not a battle I anticipated.

Crying before school, struggling to get a good braid out, cutting my

anyway.”

Those words ate at me.

I resented straight hair so much and I knew I made the right choice, but it was so hard to be confident and secure with my decision when no one around me supported it.

The only one who did was my dad.

He would print out articles about which hair products were the best, and always complimented my hair.

One person can make a big difference and that difference did change the way I viewed my hair.

Now, five years in the making, I have nothing but love and confidence in my hair. I wear my curls free and embrace the natural spirals growing from my scalp.

In wearing my hair, I felt that I did my ancestors justice, being able to wear my hair freely and mix up my styles as much as I please.

From braids to twists to afro and puffs, I love my hair and it definitely shows.

## VISUAL TIMELINE OF MY HAIR

2008-2022



Age two: 2006



Kindergarten: 2008



2nd Grade: 2011



Senior year: 2022



8th grade: 2017



6th grade: 2016

on straight hair tutorial.”

When I would see videos of white girls, I would get confused and after adding “Black girl” to my YouTube search, I was almost

on. Everyone had straight hair.

I hated it all. I hated how no one embraced what was placed on our head naturally.

I hated now no women around me

hair: I mean the whole nine yards.

It also didn’t help when I had Black classmates joke about my hair saying things like “Your hair looked better straight