



# Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America

By Ayana Byrd, Lori Tharps

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**Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America** By Ayana Byrd, Lori Tharps

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 African American hair continue to linger as we enter the twenty-first century.

*Hair Story* is a historical and anecdotal exploration of Black Americans' tangled hair roots. A chronological look at the culture and politics behind the ever-changing state of Black hair from fifteenth-century Africa to the present-day United States, it ties the personal to the political and the popular.

Read about:

- \* Why Black American slaves used items like axle grease and eel skin to straighten their hair.
- \* How a Mexican chemist straightened Black hair using his formula for turning sheep's wool into a minklike fur.
- \* How the Afro evolved from militant style to mainstream fashion trend.
- \* What prompted the creation of the Jheri curl and the popular style's fall from grace.
- \* The story behind Bo Derek's controversial cornrows and the range of reactions they garnered.

Major figures in the history of Black hair are presented, from early hair-care entrepreneurs Annie Turnbo Malone and Madam C. J. Walker to unintended hair heroes like Angela Davis and Bob Marley. Celebrities, stylists, and cultural critics weigh in on the burgeoning sociopolitical issues surrounding Black hair, from the historically loaded terms "good" and "bad" hair, to Black hair in the workplace, to mainstream society's misrepresentation and misunderstanding of kinky locks.

*Hair Story* is the book that Black Americans can use as a benchmark for tracing a

unique aspect of their history, and it's a book that people of all races will celebrate as the reference guide for understanding Black hair.

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### Editorial Review

#### 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*

#### About the Author

**Ayana D. Byrd** graduated from Barnard College and is the co-editor of *Naked: Black Women Bare All About Their Skin, Hair, Hips, Lips and Other Parts*. Her work has appeared in numerous anthologies, as well as magazines including *Glamour*, *Essence* and *Rolling Stone*. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

**Lori L. Tharps** is an assistant professor of journalism at Temple University. A graduate of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, she is also the author of the memoir *Kinky Gazpacho: Life, Love & Spain*. She lives in Philadelphia with her husband and three children.

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**Derek Clancy:**

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**Kent Moore:**

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