This poster explores the hairstyles and hair stories of Black women in America. The images follow a historical chronology from the legacy of slavery to these contemporary times. Black women have both struggled to conform to and at times to reject the traditional Eurocentric definitions of beauty. From the early 1900s to the 1950s, we see a shift from headscarves and natural hair (typically worn by former slaves and sharecroppers) to chemical straighteners. In the 1960s and 70s, the Afro became a symbol for the Black Power Movement and the “Black is beautiful” mantra. The 1980s and 90s represented a backlash and rejection of the Afro that was considered revolutionary and confrontational; we witnessed a return to the hairstyles of the early 20th century, with relaxers, wigs, and jheri curls. And finally, the 2000s to the present have ushered in an “anything goes” attitude and the democratization of media, through Facebook, natural hair websites, and Youtube tutorials have encouraged many Black women to reclaim their natural hair. Currently Black women are using a variety of means of constructing identities that challenge the definitions of who and what is beautiful to ultimately proclaim, “we are more than our hair.”

Abstract

History: 1960s – 1970s

Black is Beautiful

1980s – 1990s

Fried, Dyed, and Laid to the Side

2000 – Present

Where Are We Now?

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