

My Nappy Roots -



A Journey Through our Hair-itage

A Documentary About the History and Culture of Black Heritage and Hair

By Lafayette Jones

Hair and history. For no other Americans are these two elements as intertwined as they are for black Americans. A film, "My Nappy ROOTS: A Journey Through Our Hair-itage" traces the history and culture of African-American hair from ancient Africa to the present. Regina Kimbell, president of Virgin MOON productions and executive producer of the documentary notes that it depicts "the complex social, political and cultural influences that have shaped the dialogue and controversy surrounding African and African-American hairstyles."

To look at the various styles and trends that have come and gone in the African-American community is to understand the history of a people who were spread throughout the world by the African Diaspora. Many of these trends have become popular beyond the black community and have influenced hair styling nationally and internationally as the mainstream market has opted for natural styles like braids as Bo Derek did in the movie "10."

"Black people are the only people in America with 'political hair'," notes Kimbell, whose documentary vividly portrays the trade that brought slaves to America. There's an explanation for the covered heads and uneven patches of hair seen in the early photos of slaves. Willie Morrow who has collected a number of historical combs and irons used by African-Americans through the decades, sums it up in his book and video by the same name, "400 Years Without a Comb." After their capture, the hair implements the tribal people of West Africa had used to comb their hair were gone. And there was little time or place to groom.

Madam Walker launches an industry

In 1906, 37 years after the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves, an African-American entrepreneur, Madam C.J. Walker found the free enterprise highway to success by creating and marketing products to address the unique needs that African-Americans had for hair care. Launching out on her own after first selling products for Annie Turnbo Pope Malone's Poro Co., Walker created a unique formula, "Madam C.J. Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower." She and her husband, C.J., were experts at marketing and promotion and used the black newspapers of the times to spread the word. As her great great granddaughter A'Lelia Bundles tells the story in *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker*, she bought property, built a factory and began the manufacture of hair goods and preparations. As I noted in the film, Madam Walker is considered to be the mother of the ethnic hair care and beauty industry and gave birth to what has become today's multi-billion dollar category. Walker became a millionaire – one of the first in the United States – and was famous for her philanthropy. She built a mansion on the Hudson River, Villa Lewaro, which is now a museum. To honor her contributions, the United States Post Office unveiled a stamp in her honor – the 21st addition to its Black Heritage stamp series on January 28, 1998 at the Madam Walker Theatre Center in Indianapolis. As marketers of the event, Yvette and Kofi Mayo, of Marketing Opportunities in Business & Entertainment (MOBE) scripted a history of African-American hair styles from Madam Walker's time to the present day.

Beauty schools, salons, licensing

In her Harlem town home, Madam Walker oversaw the renovations undertaken by her daughter, Lelia, to the Walker Hair Parlor and Lelia College. The latter became the first of some 200 beauty schools that were part of the Walker chain, notes Julia Kirk Blackwelder in her book *Styling Jim Crow: African-American Beauty Training During Segregation*. Walker realized that teaching the use of her product and demonstrating its success was key to the growth. I was privileged to meet Marjorie Stewart Joyner, a key executive in the management of the Walker chain, who became the first African-American woman to receive her license as a beauty consultant. Joyner also helped write the first Illinois laws regulating schools and salons.

In the South, J.H. Jemison, one of the first well known male stylists in the African-American hair business, with his wife Abbie led the movement for licensing of salons and instructors in Texas. They opened the first state accredited African-American beauty school in 1935 – Madame N.A. Franklin's School of Beauty Culture. It became the largest in the South notes Blackwelder. "In segregated institutions such as beauty schools black Americans built skills, financial resources and self-respect that ultimately empowered them to destroy Jim Crow." The Jim Crow laws, named after a character in a minstrel song, were those instituted in the South that spread the doctrine of "separate but equal." All came crashing down in 1954 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that racial segregation in public schools violated the 14th Amendment (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*). It was the end of segregation, at least legally, and the demise of Jim Crow in the South.

National Beauty Culturists' League launched

The quest for excellence and professionalism in the African-American hair and beauty business came into focus as black cosmetologists and beauty product manufacturers joined together in 1919 in Philadelphia to organize the first elements of the National Beauty Culturists' League (NBCL) which was chartered in 1940 as a nonprofit organization. This association is the only one offering certified degrees in cosmetology as members work toward bachelor's, masters and doctoral degrees like those of its national president, Dr. Wanda J. Nelson who writes a column in *Sophisticate's Black Hair Styles and Care Guide*, a hair care magazine dedicated to African-Americans reaching 600,000 readers monthly. "Today at NBCL we have 8,000 members in 42 states with international affiliates in Canada, Germany, France, England and Africa," notes Nelson. "Our commitment is to ensure that our members are the best trained, educated and supported professionals who make great contributions to their local communities and profession." Cosmetologists, barbers, nail technicians and estheticians take part in any of 20 NBCL state conventions, proceeding to the National Institute of Technology (NIC) where they earn credits towards a degree. Members of the manufacturing sector can join the organization as associate members.

A history of styles

Madam Walker not only introduced a product she introduced a process. She trained African-American women how to use a straightening comb with her product and thus was born the "Press and Curl." This look became the standard of that time and is still seen today. As the Virgin MOON movie relates, many African-Americans were not comfortable with their "nappy roots" and sought a number of ways to straighten them. The film vividly depicts Denzel Washington as Malcolm X getting his hair konked (straightened

with konkaline), a lye based straightening solution which he tolerates, shaking as he holds onto the barber chair— until he can no longer stand it and lunges for the sink where the stinging, burning creme is washed from his head. Later, Malcolm X eschewed the look as he led black pride movements. The film shows a montage of African-American entertainers who strove for this straight haired Eurocentric look – Nat King Cole, Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington. Comic Sabrina Lamb relates her story of the “battle of the nap” in an issue of *Essence*, one of the oldest and most well known magazines for black women: “It was my grandmother who first prepared me. She laid out her weapons across the kitchen table. There before me were tools that would scare the bejesus out of any terrorist and prevent Africa in all its glory from rising up through any hair follicle; lye, dye, head rag, straightening comb, Dippity Doo, Sulfur-8, Glover’s Mange, blow-dryer, curling iron and wood root tonic.”

Minority owned manufacturers form AHBAI

When Chicago entrepreneur George Johnson founded Johnson Products, he introduced a safe permanent hair straightening system that could be used in salons. In the ‘60s a retail kit was developed for home use. Relaxers are still a favorite today of African-American women who want the ability to easily comb through and style a tightly curled hair pattern. Along with Johnson, other African-American entrepreneurs pioneered in the ever expanding ethnic beauty-manufacturing sector: Edward G. Gardner, Soft Sheen Products Company; Comer Cottrell, Pro-Line Corporation; Cornell McBride Sr., McBride Research Laboratories; Austin W. Curtis, A.W. Curtis Laboratories; Nathaniel Bronner Sr., Bronner Brothers, Fred Luster Sr., Luster Products, Inc. and S. Henry Bundles, Jr., who carried on the tradition of his family in the Madame C.J. Walker Company. It was my privilege to work with these business leaders in the founding a new association for minority owned manufacturers of ethnic products in 1981. The American Health and Beauty Aids Institute continues to represent the interests of the ethnic hair and beauty care (HBC) industry and has grown to 17 member companies with 100 associate members. In 1982 the association developed the Proud Lady symbol. The woman’s silhouette with both straight and curly strands, signaled to consumers that the producer of the product was a supporter and contributor to the African-American community. Clyde Hammond, president of Summit Laboratories is currently chairman of AHBAI. Geri Duncan Jones is its executive director.

Enter the Afro

While relaxers were the first innovations on the African-American hair scene after Madam Walker’s successful introduction of the Press and Curl, other styles arrived in due time. Manufacturers, marketers and retailers have not lacked for opportunities as African-American men and women adopted new styles requiring new products to create and maintain them. In the ‘60s the Afro – though not chemically straightened – still required its own regimen of moisturizers, special pics and combs for styling and maintenance. By 1969 the U.S. military was taking the look seriously. Author, inventor and scientist Willie Morrow was contracted by all the services to travel the world and teach personnel on military bases how to care for and cut the hair of African-American

service people and their families. “They sent me all the gear – caps, headgear and photos of how they were supposed to set on the head, so we could teach how a modified Afro could be integrated into military styling.” Today soldiers of color represent 20 to 25% of the U.S. military and there is always a need to address hair and shaving issues.

The reign of the Curl

The ‘70s introduced Oprah Winfrey to daytime TV talk and the Curl to the world of African-American hair care; it was the first of many looks that Oprah would sport as she changed from her ‘60s Afro. The Curl, sometimes known as the Jheri Curl after its inventor, Jheri Redding, was a cold wave relaxer that “maintained the curly textured look of an Afro, but simulated shiny, soft, glossy, tame curls.” It used chemicals to straighten the hair followed by acid-based chemicals to create a wave. A daily moisturizing spray was required. Nappy ROOTS shows humorous footage from Eddie Murphy’s “Coming to America” where three oily spots stand out on the back of the sofa as three Curl wearers rise and leave their seats. Oil on collars and furniture was one of the downsides of the look.

The Natural ‘90s

Braiding, locking, twisting, corn rows, wrapping and rolling – natural hairstyles came to the forefront in the ‘90s as more and more African-Americans again embraced their natural “roots” as they had in the ‘60s with the Afro. These styles allowed men and women to bypass chemical straightening. Hair coils were free to latch into braids for several months or into the more permanent dreadlock. Weaves and extensions – the use of natural or synthetic hair “woven” or sewn onto natural hair allowed African-American women to have a new look overnight, to instantly go from short to long, to add shafts of color without chemicals. Salon stylists are so skillful at interweaving and sewing in hair extensions that observers are surprised when they realize they are looking at a weave. Poet Sharon Smith-Knight personifies the clever weave in several lines of her poem in “Confessions of a Weave,” which is recited in its entirety in Nappy ROOTS:

*“I fool even the most critical eye
I command much attention as I go by
Who am I?
I am a Weave.”*

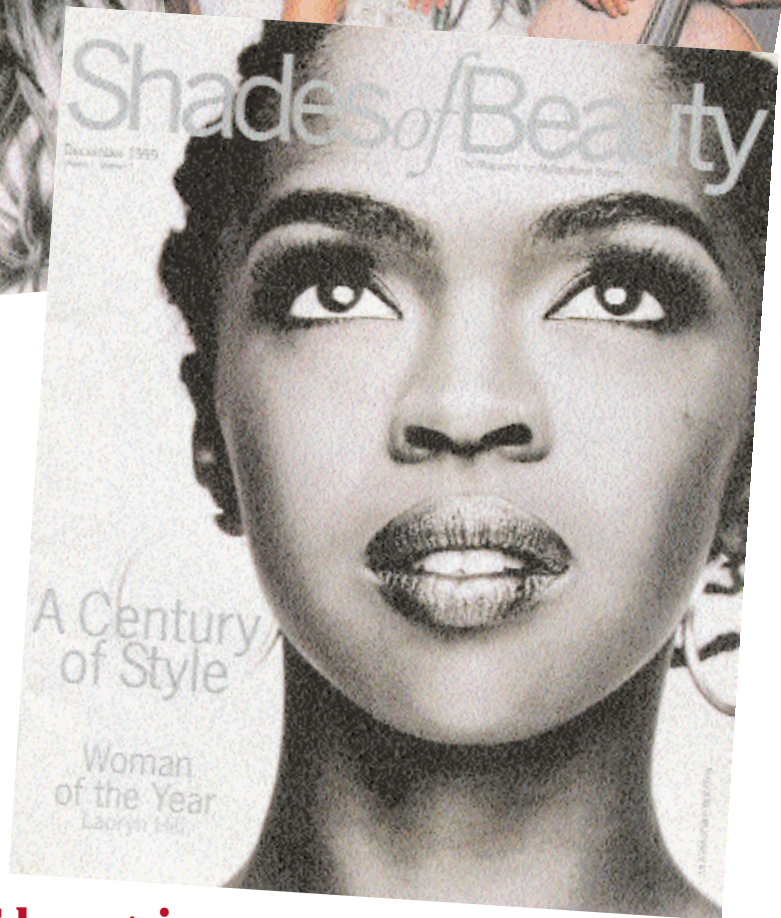
Ironically, the tables have turned. As African-Americans strove to imitate the straight hair of European Americans in the early part of the 20th Century, the 21st Century sees many white Americans experimenting with hair extensions and weaves.

A colorful millennium

With the advent of new millennium, African-Americans have trended to hair colors. Urban style makers like Kelly Roland of Destiny’s Child are choosing bright reds one day and golden blonds the next. Manufacturers are making products that can lift the very dark tones of African-American hair and provide these options. Less dramatic color use is being employed by African-American working women who spice up their natural color with red and blonde highlights or wash their hair in a color treatment that allows their gray strands to become a highlight themselves.



The Proud Lady symbol on products was created by The American Health and Beauty Aids Institute (AHBAI), a trade association representing African-American owned companies that manufacture hair and beauty care items.



Magazines for the trade

As I travel the lecture circuit speaking about African-American women and ethnic hair and beauty care I point out the versatility that this woman exhibits in her choice of hair styles. She may decide on relaxed hair, then opt for braiding, get a weave or a color – all in the course of one year. Consequently she is a frequent shopper with multi-faceted hair care needs. “That’s the great thing about our nappy roots,” notes John Williams, owner of Universal Pacific Business Schools in Los Angeles who is interviewed in the film. “We can have our nappy roots and we can wear our hair straight as well. We can have it any way we like it.” Keeping up with all the trends and changes – the products, the tools needed to create and maintain the multi-faceted looks of African-American men and women is a great venture. In some part the need for a communication vehicle for ethnic beauty care manufacturers and retailers was the inspiration for *Urban Call—The Magazine for Urban Retailers and Businesses* launched at Segmented Marketing Services Inc. (SMSi©). There remains today a great need for manufacturers, marketers, buyers and retailers to understand the needs of the ethnic hair and beauty care market and its potential for economic growth. SMSi has also opened the communication paths for retailers and marketers to ethnic stylists in some 30,000 beauty salons and 10,000 barbershops with the original SMSi Beauty Network and the SMSi Barber Network now extended to online networks.

Salon magazines

Ethnic salons continue to be served by magazines like *SalonSENSE*. Before its merger with L’Oreal, Soft Sheen produced *Shop Talk*, a magazine for black salons in which I was a contributing columnist. It was also my privilege to be the publisher of *Shades of Beauty—The Magazine for Multicultural Salons*, a ground breaking industry publication launched through an alliance with SMSi and Advanstar’s International Beauty Group, producers of the New York based International Beauty Show and *American Salon* magazine. During the magazine’s life span we succeeded in bridging some of

A ground-breaking industry publication, *Shades of Beauty* was the first trade magazine to serve multicultural salons.



the gap in communications between salon owners, cosmetologists, and manufacturers who served African-American, Latino and Asian customers. Marianne Dougherty was the editor in chief. The magazine won several awards for its cover and content.

The supply chain grows

In the beginning of the ethnic hair and beauty care industry, the unique product needs of African-Americans were met by the door-to-door salesperson. That's how Madam Walker started. Part of the genius of George Johnson at Johnson Products was his ability to retail his product. As the industry grew Beauty & Barber Supply Stores stocked the specific needs of African-Americans. They still have 60 percent of the market.

Some of the most successful retailers have been Korean shop owners who, it is estimated, own some 5,000 stores across the United States. Many are members of the National Beauty Supply Dealers Association – (NBSDA). And there are Korean B&B trade magazines – *Beauty Times*, printed in Korean, and *OTC*, which is bi-lingual. A second generation of Korean owners has evolved. John Kim, owner of two Beauty World supply stores in Winston Salem, NC was profiled in the English language general market trade publication, *Beauty Store Business* in which he noted increased business success has come through hiring African-American sales personnel.



Trade publications like *Beauty Times*, in the Korean language, and *OTC*, a bi-lingual publication, serve a national network of Korean Beauty and Barber Supply Store owners.

doors to ethnic hair and beauty care products. "We opened up the distribution channels both within and without the ethnic community," notes Cornell McBride, founder of McBride Laboratories, who was one of the first to see the potential of AHBAI. We met with the leadership of the food, drug and mass distribution channels and told our story to associations like the National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) and the Food Marketing Institute (FMI). Now African-Americans can find their needs being met at general market beauty supply stores like Sally Beauty Supply. Michael Renzulli, president and CEO of Sally Worldwide was one of the first general market leaders to recognize the power of ethnic HBC.

Changing times

There have been changes in the manufacturing world. The original black owned family companies like Johnson Products and Soft Sheen Products have become part of general market holdings. In 1998 world beauty conglomerate L'Oreal purchased Soft Sheen and in 2000 it purchased Carson, creating the SoftSheen/Carson division. Procter & Gamble purchased Clairol and Wella and now has some of the original Johnson Product brands under its umbrella. Other black-owned companies continue to prosper. Dudley Products has a world-renowned Dudley School of Cosmetology in Kernersville, NC and owns a number of beauty schools. Jory and Fred Luster carry on their father's legacy at Luster Products, Inc. an international enterprise. J. M. Products, Summit Labs and McBride Labs all carry on the family tradition.

Hair and beauty shows

The Bronner family has branched out under the leadership of Bernard Bronner who heads Bronner Bros. Enterprise. The company manufactures beauty products and runs a magazine, *Upscale*. The family name is synonymous with one of the biggest hair and beauty shows in the country. The Bronner Brothers Shows in February and August draw 30,000 to 70,000 visitors, many of them international. The late Darrow Bronner transformed the show into a world class event and made it an integral part of Atlanta's economy. Regional shows have grown all over the country. The International Hair and Nail Show takes place in New Jersey/New York. On the West Coast, the Ideal Black Gold Show draws 8,000 to 10,000 people yearly. In North Carolina, the city of Raleigh hosts the Carolina Trade Show Hair and Business Symposium. In the Midwest AHBAI Proud Lady Beauty Show draws 12,000 visitors annually. NBCL also has a trade and beauty show. *Urban Call* carries an extensive list of the shows. Taking her place in history as the founder of the first national black beauty show, The Big Show, is Bernice Calvin who launched it in 1961.

Industry pioneers honored

Calvin and other industry pioneers were honored at the AHBAI Hall of Fame in 1999. Neal Harris, one of the sales representatives who blazed the trail for ethnic products in salons and retail stores, was among the distinguished honorees. "There's still a lot to be done," he noted. "The African-American market has not yet been fully penetrated," he said. Harris is now a consultant to L'Oreal's SoftSheen/Carson division. Other sales reps honored at the Hall of Fame event were J. Walter Jackson and William Madison. Manufacturing honors went to Johnson Products, Summit Laboratories and Wave O Productions. Distributors who led the way for mass expansion were Blankinship Distributors, C.A. Howell, L & M Beauty Supply and Moses Beauty Supply. One of the first successful specialty distributors in the country, Ted Fishman of Ted Fishman & Associates, noted in *Urban Call* that ethnic hair and beauty care product distribution is a small, tough industry. "The top five companies control 60 percent of the business."

Remembering the History Makers

Films like "My Nappy ROOTS" – are telling the marvelous history of African-Americans and hair care. Others who have been involved in this industry for many years are creating museums. Paul Randleman is the president and founder of the Philadelphia Beauty Showcase National Historic Museum, which converted an abandoned candy factory on 52nd Street to a place where school children can visit and learn the history of barbering and hear about the multicultural hair industry. Willie Morrow is exhibiting some of his wide collection of combs there. Morrow is also developing his own museum at his Lemon Grove, Calif. home. "I have an original tin of Madam Walker's product," notes Morrow.

Public historian Julieanna Richardson, a Harvard trained lawyer, video producer and former American studies major, is planning to incorporate the stories of African-Americans involved in the ethnic hair and beauty care story in her oral archival collection, *The History Makers*. She has begun the Style Makers section of the archives with interviews of hair care industry leaders such as Soft Sheen's Gardner and John Atchison, well-known New York City salon owner. In addition to fashion and hair care leaders, the oral history collection will highlight African-American leaders in medicine. It is currently the single largest archival project of its kind and will include 5,000 interviews when completed. I look forward to working with Richardson as she completes the Style Makers section.

The history of African-American hair care and the industry that grew with it is a fabulous story. For African-Americans, hair care has been a unique avenue of self expression and a path to economic self-determination. As a pioneer in the promotion of the category it has been my privilege to see doors open to the many wonderful products and tools that have been created to serve this market. Because I have been involved in the industry so long as an executive, publisher and marketer I am continually fascinated with the stories I hear and the information I gather. I have been able to share just some of that history in this article. My quest for the definitive story of African-American hair care and the ethnic HBC category is, like Regi Kimbell's film, a "work in progress." If you have information you would like to share, I would welcome your submissions at the email address below.

Lafayette Jones is an industry spokesperson and expert on ethnic hair and beauty care and led the founding of the American Health and Beauty Aids Institute (AHBAI), the leading trade association for black owned companies that manufacturer ethnic hair and beauty care products. He frequently addresses major associations like the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) and the National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS). He has been quoted in numerous publications including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Drug Store News* and *Progressive Grocer*. Before becoming president and CEO of *Segmented Marketing Services, Inc.* (SMSi), a 25-year-old marketing, promotions and sampling company, (www.segmentedmarketing.com), he served as an executive with Procter & Gamble, Johnson Publishing and Kraft Foods. Jones is also publisher of *Urban Call® – The Magazine for Urban Retailers and Businesses* (www.urbanall.com). He can be reached at ljones@smsi-net.com.

Regina Kimbell
President
Virgin MOON Entertainment



My Nappy ROOTS

"My Nappy ROOTS" is a work in progress," says Regina Kimbell, executive producer and president of Virgin MOON Entertainment which has developed the 20 minute documentary exploring the history and culture of African-American hair styles and the ethnic hair and beauty care industry. It features members of the entertainment industry including actresses Kim Fields, T'Keyah Crystal Keymah and Ella Joyce and leaders of the black hair care industry: John Williams, owner of Universal Pacific Beauty Schools and Lafayette Jones, president and CEO of Segmented Marketing Services Inc. (SMSi). Virgin MOON Entertainment (VME) is an African-American-owned, Los Angeles-based independent film and television production company. To inquire about film showings e-mail mynappyroots03@aol.com. The web site is www.mynappyroots.com

Timeline – African American Hair and Hair Care – the rise of an industry

- 1906 – Madame C.J. Walker sells her first product – Madam Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower.
- 1910 – Madame C.J. Walker Hair Culturists League is formed.
- 1919 – Cosmetologists and beauty product manufacturers form an association that becomes the National Beauty Culturist's League, chartered in 1940 as a nonprofit organization.
- 1935 – Madame N.A. Franklin's School of Beauty Culture in Houston – the first state accredited school in Texas, and becomes the largest African-American beauty school in the South.
- 1954 – Brown vs. Board of Education ends legal segregation in the United States.
- 1955 – Rosa Parks sparks the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Civil Rights Movement.
- 1960 – Bernice Calvin organizes the first national black beauty show, The Big Show Expo.
- 1969 – Author, inventor Willie Morrow is contracted by the U.S. Government to educate military personnel on proper care techniques for African-Americans at military bases.
- 1971 – Johnson Products becomes the first African-American founded company to be traded on the New York Stock Exchange.
- 1981 – American Health and Beauty Aids Institute (AHBAI) was founded by Lafayette Jones.
- 1982 – The Proud Lady symbol is developed by AHBAI.
- 1998 – L'Oreal acquires Soft Sheen.
- 2000 – L'Oreal acquires Carson and creates Soft Sheen/Carson. Alberto Culver acquires Pro-Line Corporation.
- 2000 – Philadelphia Beauty Showcase National Historic Museum officially opens.
- 2003 – "My Nappy ROOTS: A Journey Through Our Hair-itage" documentary is premiered to the trade at ECRM's hair care conference.