

Nappy Hair

Searches for its Identity

Mara Michelle
 Director, *Consenso Noticias*
 Havana, Cuba

Ever since the wind started dancing with the strands of my hair, I have felt free. I am black, the daughter of a white woman and black man, and my hair would be characterized as somewhat nappy. I have nappy hair.

Like many blacks, for a long time I straightened my curly hair, so I wouldn't have to see or feel that dark mound upon my head. More over, the lack of commercially available hair products made me decide to let my hair grow totally naturally. I began to crop it nearly down to my scalp, a radical change in me that situated me in the new world of black *cocotimbas* [a negative slang term meaning an unattractive black woman with scant, short and nappy hair].

It was a necessity for me; I simply parachuted down towards my new reality. It was just a matter of time from that moment on: my hair grew, but not straight. Instead of out, it grew inwardly, in tightly wound curls. Little by little, my head was overgrown by a dark and full forest of dancing pines where no simple combs or brushes could venture. Instead, it was picks or Afro combs for me. It was fun and empowering to hear the sound of their prongs dodging in and out of stiffened nap. There's no more pressure, no more having to visibly conform. Just a little combing here, and a little bit there and everything is tip-top. Wow! What a relief!

This aesthetic change made me freer with-

in my society. Historically, it has been a long time since whites—with their sense and belief of superiority—have been imposing their phenotype. The color of their skin, their eye color, the form and texture of their hair, the distribution and shape of their features, all of these have been banners for freedom in many societies; first the slavocracies and then the modern ones, from which stereotypes were promoted all around the planet and encouraged to propagate.

Trapped—as they've been—by white fashion and style, blacks have not managed to be able to escape wanting to be part of “the” market. Upon being taken from their native Africa, they underwent diverse transformations imposed on them by white slavers—from evangelization to the imposition of customs, norms and fashions. Blacks began to lose their perspective and identity, sometimes more, sometimes less, depending on the society, and this has resulted in a *phenotypical transmutation* in which blackness moves on a continuum



towards whiteness. Then came the plastic surgeries to change facial features and hair treatments to make curly hair into long or straight. We have even endured changes to our skin color.

Many blacks mutated within their multiracial societies, and being a mutant black person is to remain a slave to the customs of others. It is a different form of slavery for modern or postmodern times. Freedom slips away on the pages of glossy magazines that advertise

lightened and whitened blacks, or artists drawn upon white bodies.

When a black person breaks the chains, what he or she finds is freedom, right at the very center of racial difference in contemporary society. Upon assuming its essence, he or she consequently forces others to do the same. Unfettered, natural, loose nappy hair: pure and original. It is the continuation of what should have been the next socially and culturally evolutionary step for blacks.



Cuban singer. Xiomara Laugart