

Title: The Black is Beautiful Movement: Celebrating Blackness in 20th Century United States

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Racist attitudes toward Black women have existed since the period of slavery. They were viewed as servile Mammys, hypersexual Jezebels, or aggressive Sapphires. These stereotypes caused White society to view Black women as inferior and primitive. By the 1960s, these stereotypes were further perpetuated by the media, and Black women were seen as ugly. This created a vicious cycle of non-Black people viewing Black women in this negative light and then Black women internalizing these attitudes (Craig 24). The pressure to conform to White beauty standards caused Black people to have a preference for lighter skin and straight hair (Camp 6). Thus, to fit into the White beauty mold, they used skin lightening creams and an assortment of products to dekind their hair (Lake 81). With the momentum built from the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Era, African Americans felt more pride in their pan-African identities and began embracing their 'African-ness.' Wearing natural hairstyles became one way to do that. They wanted to 'decolonize' their minds and African American women recognized that they did not have to abide by White beauty standards to be beautiful. The Black is Beautiful movement is important because it created unity amongst Black communities. Wearing a natural hairstyle was a public act of self-love and acceptance. Although the movement "brought no change in their economic situation," (Craig, 13) it was successful in transforming how society viewed African American women, but more importantly, how African American women viewed themselves.

Works Cited

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