

“In a time of racial and social tension, embracing this movement, and others like this, help us to rise above the confines of the status quo. So when you see a woman with braids or locks, draping down her back, or you notice your colleague who has stopped straightening her hair to work, do not simply approach her and admire and ask her if you can touch it. Really appreciate her! Applaud her. Heck you can high-five her if that's what you feel so inclined to do. Because this...this is more than about a hair style. It's about self-love and self-worth. It's about being brave enough, not to fold under the pressure of others expectations. And about know that making the decision to stray from the norm, does not define who we are, but it simply reveals who we are. And finally, being brave is easier, when we can count on the compassion of others. So, after today, I certainly hope that we can count on YOU. Thank you.” – Cheyenne Cochrane, an ambassador for the natural hair movement.

[2016 TEDx VIDEO] To Truly Succeed, Black Women Need to Wear Their Natural Hair!



Verbatim transcript excerpts from Cheyenne Cochrane's November 2016 TEDx presentation titled "A Celebration of Natural Hair"

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This PDF was created as part of Tayo's **Proud African™** public education series. Download FREE from www.tinyurl.com/nhm2017tks

**Photos on the Cover are of my 11 and 8 year old daughters wearing their natural hair. Following their completion of a 2 week cosmetic make-up training, few months ago, they are now 3 months into a 6 month training in natural hairstyling.*

Introduction

“Brave Black Women (BBW)™ Wear Their Natural Hair. Be a Brave Black Woman!” – Tayo K. Solagbade

I am a male African living and working in Africa with my family. Two of my kids are female. One is aged 11 and the other 8. Ever since they were born, I've wondered, quite often, how I would help them to grow up to be like the proud African queens I used to read and hear about in my childhood.

I refer here not necessarily to the amazons who fought battles against colonial invaders, but instead to proud Black/African women like Nigeria's Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti (mother to the legendary Afro Beat music creator, African and human rights activist – Fela Anikulapo Kuti), as well as to South Africa's Miriam Makeba, and other women like them who NEVER compromised their Blackness in order to get respect or recognition from any quarters.

Women who had healthy levels of self esteem and confidence to wear their natural hairs and leave their natural black skin in its original color right till they were grey and old, and ultimately passed on. Women like Lupita Nyong' yo.

I wondered how, with all the social pressures in the pro Western African society my girls had been born into, I would be able to get them to be proud of their blackness no matter where they went or who they were with.

These concerns made me resolve to actively interact with my daughters and involve myself in the activities they would need to do, to appreciate their Black heritage.

One of those activities has to do with their choice of hair styling. With the use of long straight hair from white people by blacks

becoming the rave of the day, infecting Black/African women across educational, social and economic classes, so that they shamelessly (?) chose to wear those hairs on their heads, rather than groom theirs, I knew it was one area that damaging brainwashing and destruction of self esteem was happening among black females.

I did not want my girls to suffer that fate. So, I decided to enroll them in a hair styling training provided by a lady we'd met at the close of a 2 week makeup/cosmetic training course run by the Lagos State government the girls finished.

As we began going for the lessons, I kept thinking I needed to find a message to preach to the girls that would make them understand why they needed to embrace this new vocational skill. They already understood that I wanted them to be able to earn income doing it for others and to save money by doing it for themselves (Thankfully, the idea had appealed to them – in fact they'd jumped at the opportunity).

However, I felt they needed to see the bigger picture of why I had gotten them to sign up for the training. They needed to understand the history behind the evolution of the long and straight hair styles **WRONGLY** favored by most of the African/black women they were seeing around them. I knew that history, and had exposed them to publications (like Chancellor Williams' excellent research based book titled **“Destruction of Black Civilisation**) but I wanted to find a female role model for them to hear it from. That proved hard to do in Nigeria. So one day, I went online and did a Google search.

Luckily for me, I stumbled on Cheyenne Cochrane’s wonderful TEDx presentation titled “A Celebration of Natural Hair”.

By the time I was done listening to it, I knew her message was the perfect one I’d been looking to share with my girls, Indeed, I knew it was a message MANY of the lovely African women I saw daily, well schooled and traveled, but who subjected themselves to wearing human hair from white persons, needed to hear.

I believe this video’s message can open the eyes of those black women to understand that they damage themselves in many ways by doing what they do with their hair – trying to make it long and straight like that of White women, and/or covering it with long/straight hair from humans of another race.

This is why I’ve prepared this verbatim transcript version of Cheyenne’s 15 minute presentation – so that they can listen to and read the message, then digest and act on it, to bravely embrace their blackness with renewed pride.

As can be seen from a few photos I’ve put up on the cover, and here, that’s what I’m challenging my daughters to do, and it has been exciting to see them apply their creativity with enthusiasm, to learn new hairstyles they are being taught to plait, by their tutor.

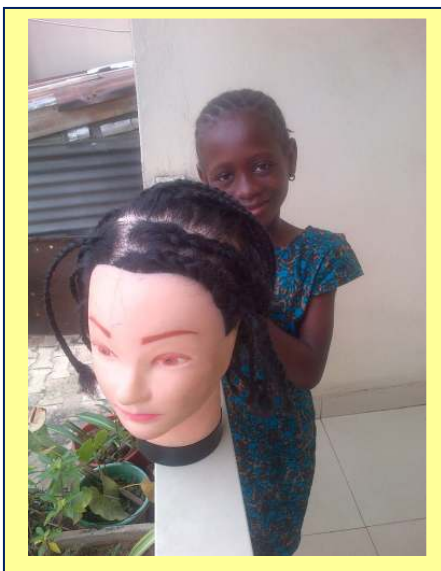
It’s obvious to anyone that they are comfortable carrying their hair in its natural state, and when they feel like it, they know they will be able to use braiding and other techniques to make it up as they want. I’m therefore optimistic that they will grow up to be black women who do NOT feel inadequate about NOT having long straight hair, and who will proudly walk around without feeling any need to cover their hair.

Here’s the URL to the TEDx video presentation:

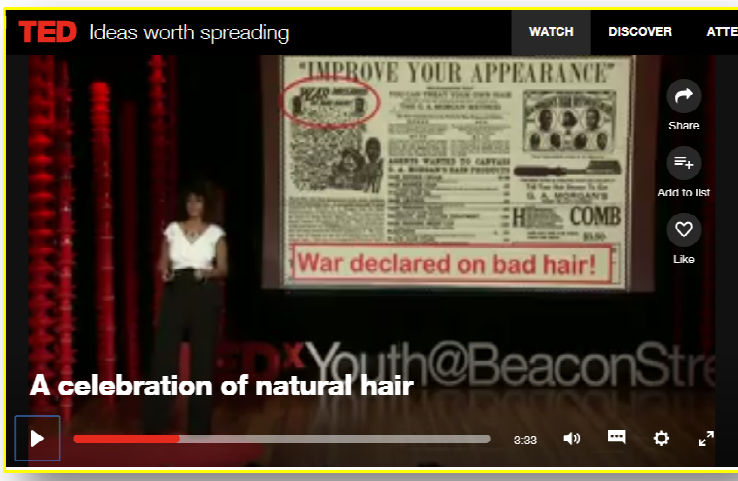
https://www.ted.com/talks/cheyenne_cochrane_a_celebration_of_natural_hair/up-next#t-298286

Read the verbatim text transcript I’ve prepared from the next page.

READ ALSO: POWERFUL TRUTHS ABOUT REAL BLACK HISTORY, NOT TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS, BUT WHICH YOU (AND YOUR KIDS) NEED TO KNOW - Tayo Solagbade
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Verbatim text transcript excerpts from Cheyenne Cochrane's November 2016 TEDx presentation titled "A Celebration of Natural Hair".



[APPLAUSE]

I am from the South Side of Chicago, and in 7th grade I had a best friend named Jenny, who lived on the South West side of Chicago.

Jenny was white, and if you know anything about the segregated demographics of Chicago, you know that there are not too many black people who live on the South West side of Chicago.

But Jenny was my girl and so we would hang out every so often, after school and on the weekends. So one day we were hanging out in her living room and talking about 13 year old things and Jenny's little sister Rosie was in the room with us, and she was sitting behind me, just kind of playing with my hair and I wasn't thinking too much about what she was doing.

But at a pause in the conversation, Rosie touched me on the shoulder.

She said: Can I ask you a question?

I said: Yeah Rosie, sure.

Rosie: Are you Black?

The room froze, Silence.

Jenny and Rosie's mum was not too far away. She was in the kitchen and she overheard the conversation and she was mortified!

She said: "Rosie! You can't ask people questions like that!"

And Jenny was my friend and I know she was really embarrassed, and I felt kind of bad for her. But actually, I was not offended.

I figured it wasn't Rosie's fault that in her ten short years on this earth, living on the South West side of Chicago, she wasn't a hundred percent sure what a Black person looked like.

That's fair.

But what was more surprising to me was in all of this time I had spent with Jenny and Rosie's family, hanging out with them, playing with them, even physically interacting with them, it was not until Rosie put her hands in my hair that she thought to ask me if I was black.

That was the first time I would realize how big of a role the texture of my hair played in confirming my ethnicity, but also that it would play a key role in how I'm viewed by others in society

[Photos appear of a man and woman labeled Gareth A. Morgan (L) and Madame C.J. Walker(R)]

Gareth A. Morgan and Madame C.J. Walker were pioneers of the black hair care and beauty industry in the early 1900s

They are best known as the inventors of chemically based hair creams and heat stretching tools designed to

permanently or semi-permanently alter the texture of black hair.

Oftentimes when we think about the history of blacks in America, we think about the heinous acts and numerous injustices that we experienced as people of color, because of the color of our skin, when in fact in post civil war America, it was the hair of an African American male or female that was known as the most telling feature of negro status - more so than the color of the skin.

And so before they were staples of the multi-billion dollar hair care industry, our dependency on tools and products like the hair relaxer and the pressing comb, were more about our survival and advancement as a race, in post slavery America.

Over the years, we grew accustomed to this idea that straighter and longer hair, meant better and more beautiful.

We became culturally obsessed with this idea of having what we like to call "GOOD HAIR".

This essentially means the looser the curl pattern, the better the hair.

And we let these institutionalized ideas form a false sense of hierarchy that would determine what was considered a Good, greater hair, and what was not.

What's worse is that we let these false ideologies invade our perceptions of ourselves.

And they still continue to infect our cultural identity as African American women today.

So what did we do?

We went to the hair salon, every six to eight weeks, without fail, to subject our scalps to harsh straightening chemicals, beginning at a very young age, sometimes 8, 10, that would result in hair loss, bald spots, sometimes even burns on the scalp.

We fry our hair at temperatures of 450 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, almost daily, to maintain the straight look.

Or we simply cover our hair up with wig and weaves, only to let out roots breathe in private where no one knows what's really going on under there.

We adopted these practices in our own communities, and so it's no wonder why today the typical ideal vision of a professional black woman, especially in corporate America, tends to look like this (photo of black female executive with straight hair appears on screen) , rather than like this (photo of black female executive with wild looking curls).

And she certainly doesn't look like this (photo of female executive with long straight hair).

In September of this year, a federal court ruled it lawful for a company to discriminate against hiring an employee, based on if s/he brushed her locks.

In the case, the hiring manager in Mobil Alabama is on record as saying "I'm not saying yours are messy, but...you know what I'm talking about"

Well, what was she talking about?

Did she think that they were ugly? Or maybe they were just a little too "Afro centric" and "Pro Black" looking for her taste.

Or maybe it's not about Afro centricity and it's more just about it being a little too urban for the professional setting.

Perhaps she had a genuine concern in they looked scary and that they would intimidate the clients and their customer base.

All of these words are ones that are too often associated with the stigma attached to natural hairstyles.

And this...this has got to change.

In 2013, a White paper published by the Deloitte Centre for leadership and inclusion studied 3,000 individuals in executive leadership roles on the concept of covering in the workplace, based on appearance, advocacy, affiliation and association.

When thinking about appearance-based covering, the study showed that 67% of women of color cover in the workplace, based on their appearance.

Of the total respondents who admitted to appearance-based covering, 82% said it was somewhat to extremely important for them to do so, for their professional advancement.

Now this (photo of low cut African American female executive appears) is Ursula Burns. She is the first African American female CEO of a Fortune 500 company - a Xerox.

She is known by her signature look - the one that you see here: a short, nicely trimmed, well manicured Afro.

Ms Burns is what we like to call "A Natural Girl".

And she is paving the way, and showing what's possible, for African American women seeking to climb the corporate ladder, but still wish to wear natural hairstyles.

But today the majority of African American women who we still look to as leaders, icons and role models, still opt for a straight hair look [Photos of famous African American celebrities wearing long straight hair appear]

Now, maybe it's because they want to. This is authentically how they feel best.

But maybe - and I bet that - a part of them felt like they had to, in order to reach the level of success they have attained today.

There is a Natural Hair Movement that is sweeping the country, and also in some places in Europe.

Millions of women are exploring what it means to transition to natural hair, and they're cutting off years and years of dry damaged ends in order to restore their natural curl pattern.

I know because I have been an advocate and ambassador for this movement for roughly the last 3 years. After 27 years of excessive heat and harsh chemicals, my hair was beginning to show extreme

signs of wear and tear. It was breaking off; it was thinning, looking just extremely dry and brittle.

All those years of chasing that image of conventional beauty that we saw earlier, was finally beginning to take its toll.

I wanted to do something about it, and so I started what I call the No-Heat Challenge where I would refrain from using heat-styling tools on my hair for 6 months, and like a good millennial, I documented it on social media

I documented as I reluctantly cut off 3 to 4 inches of my beloved hair. I documented as I struggled to master these natural hairstyles and also as I struggled to embrace them, and think that they actually looked good.

And I documented as my hair texture slowly began to change.

By sharing this journey openly, I learned that I was not the only woman going through this, and that in fact there were thousands and thousands of other women who were longing to do the same.

So they would reach out to me and they would say:

"Cheyenne how did you do that natural hairstyle that I saw you with the other day?"

"What new products have you started using that might be a little better for my hair texture as it begins to change?" OR..."What are some of the natural hair routines that I should begin to adopt, to slowly restore the health of my hair?"

But I also found that there were a large number of women who were extremely hesitant to take that first step, because they were paralyzed by fear.

Fear of the unknown.

What would they now look like? How would they feel about themselves with these natural hairstyles?

And most importantly for them...

"How would others view them?"

Over the last 3 years of having numerous conversations with friends of mine and also complete strangers from around the world, I learned some really important things about how African American women identify with their hair.

And so when I think back to that hiring manager, in Mobil Alabama, I'd say:

"Actually No. We DON'T know what you're talking about."

But here are some things that we do know...

We know that when black women embrace their love for their natural hair, it helps to undo generations of teaching that black in its natural state is not beautiful or something to be hidden or covered up.

We know that black women express their individuality, and experience feelings of empowerment, by experimenting with different hairstyles regularly.

And we also know that when we are invited to wear our natural hair in the workplace, it reinforces that we are uniquely valued, and thus helps us to flourish and advance professionally.

I leave you with this:

In a time of racial and social tension, embracing this movement, and others like this, help us to rise above the confines of the status quo.

So when you see a woman with braids or locks, draping down her back, or you notice your colleague who has stopped straightening her hair to work, do not simply approach her and admire and ask her if you can touch it [Laughter]

Really appreciate her!

Applaud her> Heck you can high-five her if that's what you feel so inclined to do.

Because this...this is more than about a hair style.

It's about self-love and self-worth.

It's about being brave enough, not to fold under the pressure of others expectations.

And about know that making the decision to stray from the norm, does not define who we are, but it simply reveals who we are.

And finally, being brave is easier, when we can count on the compassion of others.

So, after today, I certainly hope that we can count on YOU.

Thank you.

=ENDS=

Once again, here's the TEDx video presentation:

https://www.ted.com/talks/cheyenne_cochrane_a_celebration_of_natural_hair/up-next#t-298286

About Tayo Solagbade

Tayo works as a Location Independent multipreneur, with a bias for **Farm Research & Extension Advisory/Best Practice Services provision.**

Apart from a growing library of popular farm business articles, Tayo's **Feed Formulation Handbook**, and his customisable **Excel-VB driven Ration Formulator** (see video demos at www.tinyurl.com/RealRationDemo), bring him in constant contact with farm business owners, feed manufacturers, policy makers and extension professionals in and out of Africa.

Among other services, he develops custom Excel-VB driven software (e.g. an **Excel-VB Driven Poultry Layers Farm Manager**) used in measuring Farm Key Performance Indicators for timely/accurate farm planning and decision making (www.tayosolagbade.com/pfmgr.html). See full range of products details at www.tayosolagbade.com/sdn-sell.htm

When not with clients, Tayo works as the creative force behind his blog at www.tayosolagbade.com/sdnuggets - where he write on Best Practice Parenting, entrepreneurship, self-improvement, career development. He also publishes a **Weekly Farm CEO™** newsletter, an Excel-VB Coaching newsletter and a Performance Improvement Ideas newsletter, Visit his flagship website at www.tayosolagbade.com to learn more about Tayo.

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