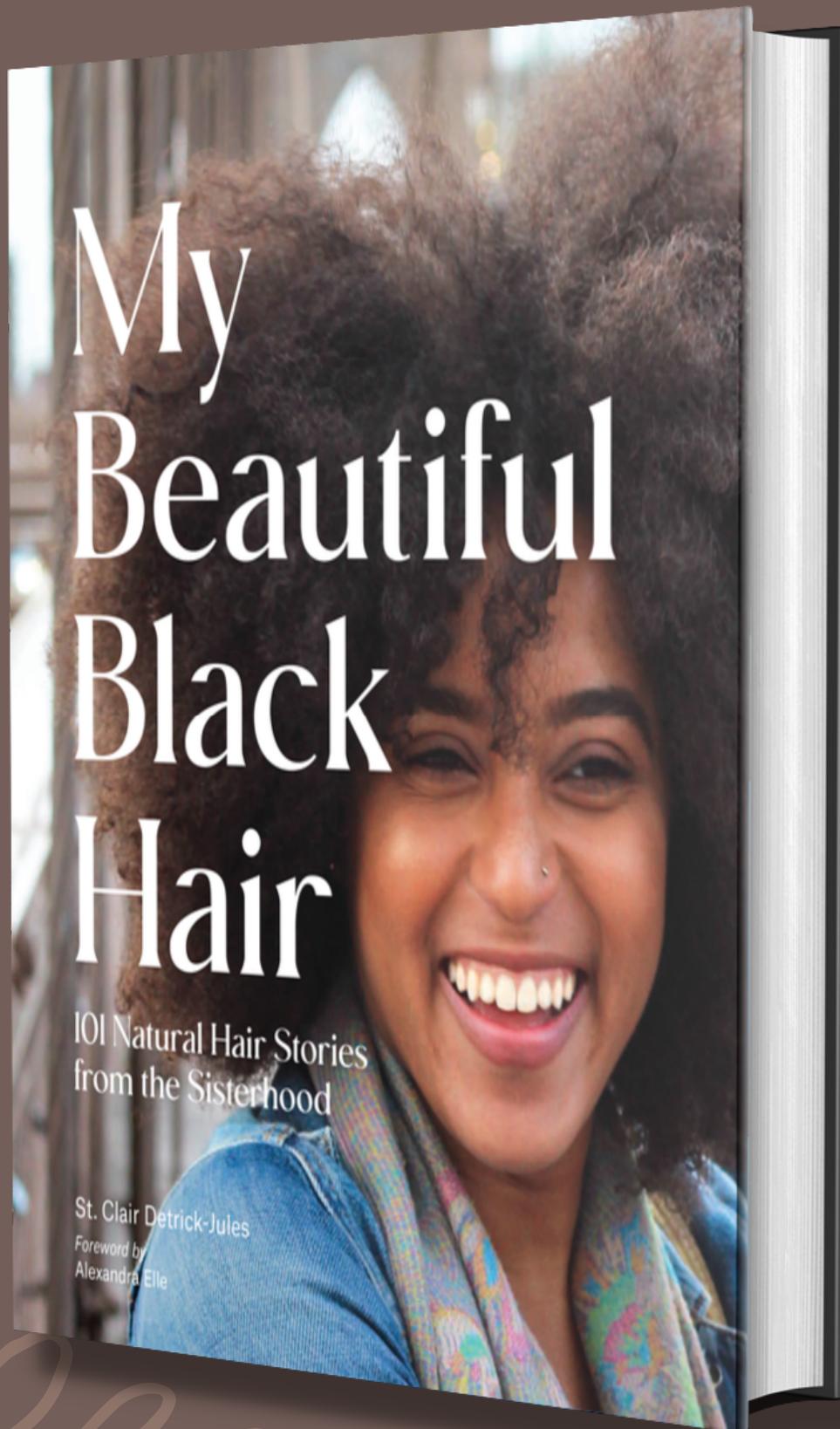


BOOK CLUB KIT



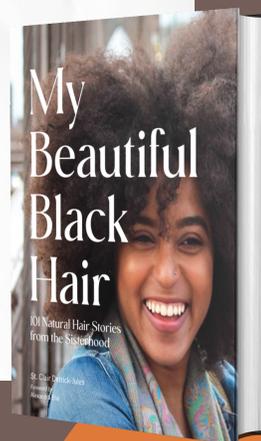
My Beautiful Black Hair

101 Natural Hair Stories
from the Sisterhood

St. Clair Detrick-Jules
Foreword by
Alexandra Elle

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AUTHOR INTERVIEW

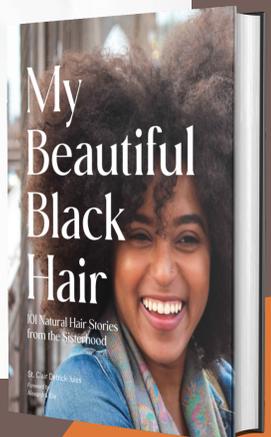
This book began with you asking friends for help sending your sister Khloe messages and evolved into a collection that includes over 100 Black women. What was it like to see the project transform before your eyes?

It was beautiful. Transformations are always a learning experience, and I learned so much from this one. I was thinking of this as a small collection of photos and stories that I'd give Khloe, but so many amazing and generous women ended up signing on—and their stories were so powerful—that the project quickly took on a life of its own. Also, although I started this book for Khloe, the more stories I collected, the more I realized that there are so many Khloes of the world who need this affirmation. In fact, many of the women in this book had stories similar to Khloe's, and that knowledge transformed me. The more I realized how many people needed this affirmation, the more inspired I became to continue growing this project until it became the book it is today.

Is there anything you learned about yourself while compiling these stories?

Before I started compiling these stories, I was at a place where I no longer hated my hair, but I didn't love it either. I had moments where I liked it, but mostly I tolerated it. However, compiling these stories of courage and self-love helped me understand that simply tolerating ourselves is not enough; we need to have the courage to love ourselves unconditionally. So even though I started creating this book to teach my sister to love her hair, I've actually come to love my own hair—and the history my hair holds—more deeply, too.

Compiling these stories also helped me deepen my appreciation for storytelling and the power that our voices hold. When we share our stories we gain control over our own lives. And when our stories intersect (around hair, for example), we gain community.



AUTHOR INTERVIEW

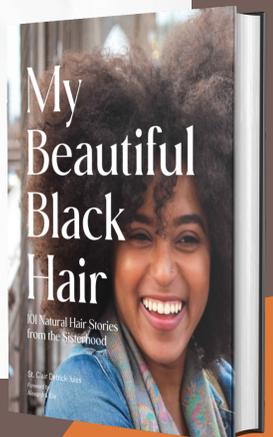
Did you know from the beginning that you also wanted to include photos or was that something that developed as the project grew?

I actually knew I wanted to create something visual before I knew I wanted to include a written component. The act of seeing someone who looks like you being held up as beautiful is revolutionary for Black girls and I wanted my little sister Khloe to have that experience. I wanted her to see her own beauty reflected on each page. The written component came about after I'd begun photographing the first few women and realized how powerful and unique each Black woman's hair story is, and I felt like these personal narratives of courage, joy, and self-love would be empowering for not only Black women but for everyone. I think of the book as visual anthropology, and I hope others will see that it's pictures, but it's not "just" pictures.

Is there a story in the book that particularly resonated with you?

Karyn Siobhan-Robinson is so full of light and love, and her story of being both a Black woman navigating the complexities of Black hair and a Black mother navigating those complexities with and for her daughter, is one I won't ever forget. Her daughter—also featured in the book—embraced her natural hair at a young age, which Karyn said was a dream come true for her as a mother. During the interview, she actually started crying when she said, "I just think of all the strife my hair caused me when it was relaxed, and I wonder, 'What would my life have been like at twenty if I had just loved my hair?'"

I was reminded of all the years I spent looking in the mirror and wishing that my hair was straight. It's such a common experience for Black girls to grow up hating some aspect of our physical appearance that we forget self-hatred isn't normal. But while I mourn for the little girl I was who missed out on so much joy because she hated her hair, I'm grateful for the woman I am now who has found liberation in self-love.



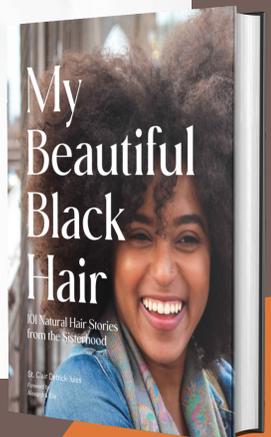
AUTHOR INTERVIEW

You spoke with different generations of Black women for this book. What differences and similarities did you notice?

I'd say there are more similarities than differences; among all generations, there's a sense of self-love, courage, and joy. However, one thing I noticed was that Black women in older generations exude a sense of unwavering self-love that can't be diminished. There's a sense of being grounded in our history and rooted in our ancestors' love. Several of the women in their twenties are, like me, still on their self-love journeys and working to get to a place where nothing —no policy against natural hair, no comment from a family member about afros being ugly, no disparaging question from coworkers about curly hair being “unprofessional”—can throw us off balance. And for the little elementary-school girls I noticed a sense of joy as they grow up untethered to the idea of Eurocentric beauty standards.

The book is divided into eight sections. What made you decide to break down the stories this way, and how did you decide on each section's theme?

When I started creating this book, I basically just asked the women to talk about any aspect of their natural hair journeys: why they went natural, how they learned to embrace their roots, and what they loved most about their natural hair now. After I'd finished collecting most of the women's stories, I transcribed all their interviews and realized there were several common themes emerging. I let the stories speak to me, and they pretty much showed the way for grouping them in several sections. By dividing the book into these eight sections by theme, I hope the stories in each section will speak to each other and inspire more in-depth conversations.



AUTHOR INTERVIEW

What resources do you recommend for readers who want to go natural but don't feel like they have the tools or knowledge?

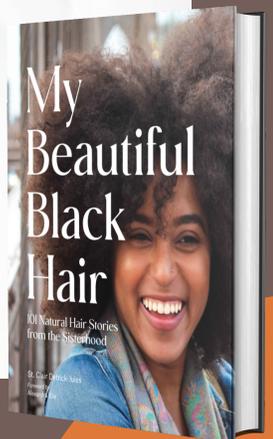
YouTube! So many Black women I talked to said that YouTube was their best friend when they first went natural. You can find tutorials and tips for all hair types, textures, and lengths on YouTube. There's a whole university for Black natural hair on that platform, with Black women really stepping up to the plate to help their sisters across the diaspora learn how to care for and love their natural hair. Patience is key; embracing our natural hair can be challenging at times, but I think it's a beautiful journey.

What advice would you give to readers who want to embrace that self-love, but have a hard time putting it into practice?

As one of the women in the book says, self-love is active work. We have to be gentle with ourselves and remember that self-love doesn't just happen overnight; it takes time to unlearn all of the negative thoughts we have about ourselves. I'd recommend a few things:

1. Keep a growing list of everything you love about yourself.
2. Surround yourself with people who uplift you and are also working on their own self-love journeys.
3. Try to be aware of your negative thoughts about yourself, and whenever you hear that little voice inside your head telling you that you're not good enough, counter those negative thoughts. Say "I love myself" out loud—even if you don't believe it at first. And then say it again, and repeat it until you start to believe it.

In terms of loving your physical appearance in particular, remind yourself that your body is your home, and it is because of your body that you are able to experience all the beauty that life has to offer. Our bodies love us, and they deserve our love in return. And our hair is part of our body, and it, too, is home.



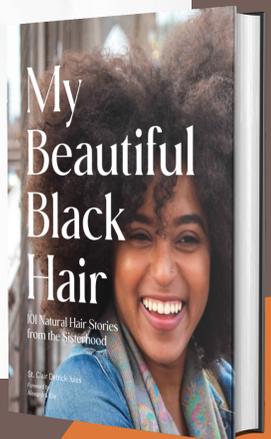
AUTHOR INTERVIEW

Has Khloe seen the book yet, and if so what has her reaction been to this outpouring of love?

Yes—and she loves it. Khloe lives in France with our dad, my stepmom, and our two other siblings, so I had to mail her the book. My stepmom took a video of her opening the package, and she was so excited and started shouting that she loved me. We went through each page of the book together through video chat, and every time she turned the page, she said (in French), “Wow, she’s so pretty!” To see my sister see herself represented—and for her to see that representation as beautiful—is the greatest gift.

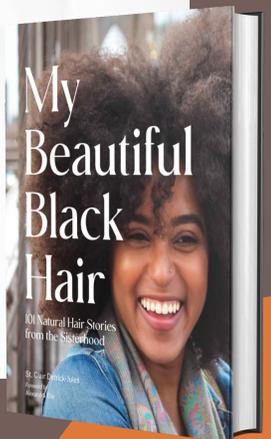
You have to realize that she had previously been really adapted into Eurocentric beauty standards and I remember one time being in the mall with her and pointing out a picture of a beautiful Black woman with natural hair and telling her how pretty the woman is, and her response was a fairly complete rejection of the idea that the woman or her hair was beautiful. But seeing the pictures in the book and listening as I translated their stories into French was transformative for her.

When I finally saw Khloe in person this past summer for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic, she took my phone, went to the camera, and asked me to interview her talking about why she loves her natural hair—just like I interviewed 101 other Black women and girls. That moment made me realize how excited she is to be a part of this growing community of Black women and girls who are wholeheartedly embracing who we are. So many of us don’t learn to love ourselves until we’re older, so the fact that my sister is already on this self-love journey as an 8-year old is beautiful.



DISCUSSION GUIDE

- 1) *My Beautiful Black Hair* includes first-person narratives from 101 Black women with natural hair. What is gained from this format? Why is it important for Black women to be able to share their stories?
- 2) To what extent does our exterior—including our hair—define us? Is it possible for us to create an identity that is disconnected from our exterior? Describe the different ways in which the women in *My Beautiful Black Hair* see their hair in relation to their identity.
- 3) To what extent are we trapped in our identities? To what extent are we liberated by our identities? How much of our identity is interior versus exterior?
- 4) What kinds of cultural, racial, and structural barriers hindered many of the women in *My Beautiful Black Hair* from immediately embracing their natural hair?
- 5) How does global anti-Blackness play a role in the perception and treatment of Afrocentric hairstyles? How is discrimination against Black hair a stand-in for anti-Blackness?
- 6) How can the women of *My Beautiful Black Hair* help us redefine our perception of Black hair? How does this book stand in contrast to other portrayals of Black hair in the media?
- 7) Consider the context in which *My Beautiful Black Hair* was created: St. Clair's younger sister was bullied by her white classmates into hating her afro, thus prompting St. Clair to create this book. To what negative experiences are young Black girls subjected to, and how can we all play our role in supporting these girls?
- 8) How do the photographs in *My Beautiful Black Hair* offer a sense of representation, belonging, and community to Black women and girls? Why is this important? How can we all do our part to create more representation?



DISCUSSION GUIDE

9) According to a recent study by Dove, Black women's hair is 3.4 times more likely to be perceived as unprofessional. How do the women of *My Beautiful Black Hair* shatter these stereotypes? Why is this critically important?

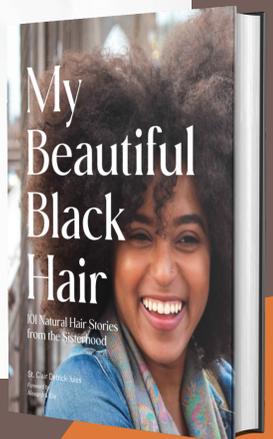
10) Of the eight chapters—"The Big Chop" / Going Natural, Embracing Blackness, Hair as Identity, Self-Love / Self-Discovery, Sisterhood, Mothers and Daughters, White Spaces, and Liberation—to which chapter did you relate most deeply?

11) How can the letters to Khloe act, by extension, as letters to all young Black girls? Why are such letters necessary—especially coming from Black women who were once in their shoes?

12) What lessons can *My Beautiful Black Hair* teach us outside of the realm of hair? How are we forced to reconsider notions of identity, family, beauty, (self-) love, and community care?

13) The CROWN (Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair) Act, which has been passed in several states and is on the docket in others, prohibits discrimination against Afrocentric hair textures and styles in the workplace and public schools. How might this act impact the lives of the women in the book? How can everyone—including non-Black people—benefit from this form of justice? Why is the law necessary in the first place, and why did it take so long for the legal system to step in? Finally, will the law actually stop daily acts of hair discrimination?

14) Black women spend more money on hair care-related items than any other demographic; many Black hair care products are also found to be "toxic, containing chemicals that are carcinogenic, linked to hormone disorders, reproductive health challenges, and contributing to obesity rates." Looking at Black hair through this lens, how can the de-stigmatization of natural hair contribute to economic equity and health justice for Black women?



DISCUSSION GUIDE

15) For Black women: Through these natural hair stories, we see many Black women who have internalized the white supremacist belief that straight hair is better than curly, kinky hair. How can we, as a community, work to rid ourselves and others of these negative belief systems?

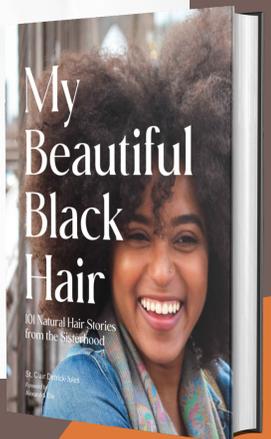
16) For allies: Consider the difference between diversity (the presence of differences within a group) and equity (the consistent redistribution of power and resources to those who have been marginalized). How can non-Black allies work to create a society that is not only diverse but also equitable? How does hair factor into this equation?

17) For everyone: Keeping in mind that our stories are our expertise, what personal stories do we, as individuals, want to share with the world? What do others have to gain by hearing our stories?

Here are two questions suggested by St. Clair Detrick-Jules:

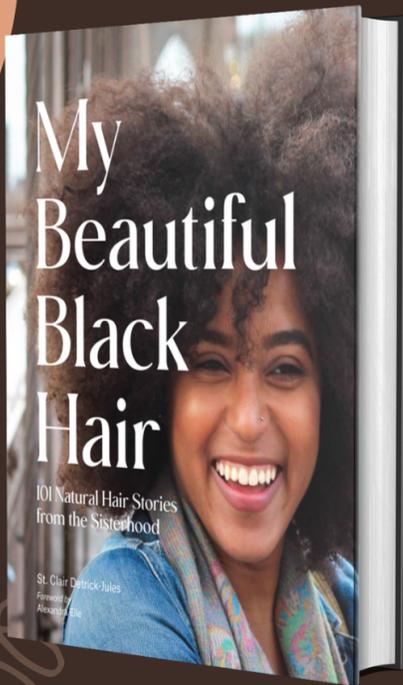
18) How can the women of *My Beautiful Black Hair* help us redefine our perception of Black hair? How does this book stand in contrast to other portrayals of Black hair in the media?

19) The women in *My Beautiful Black Hair* have given us the gift of their personal stories. Keeping in mind that our stories are our expertise, what personal stories do you, as an individual, want to share with the world? What do others have to gain by hearing your story?



BOOKMARKS

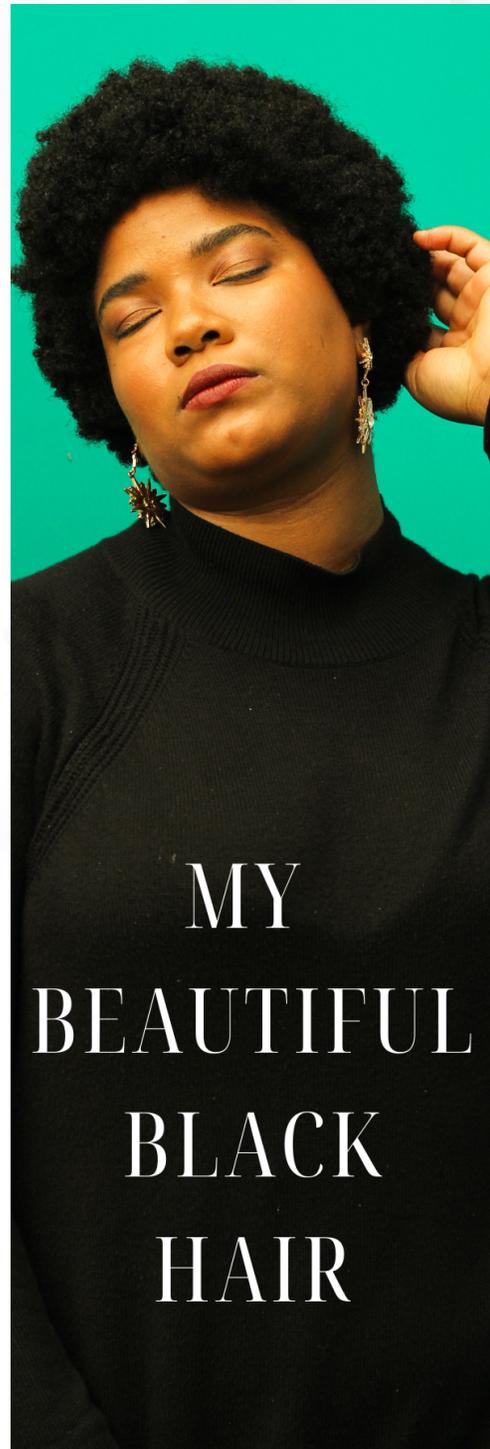
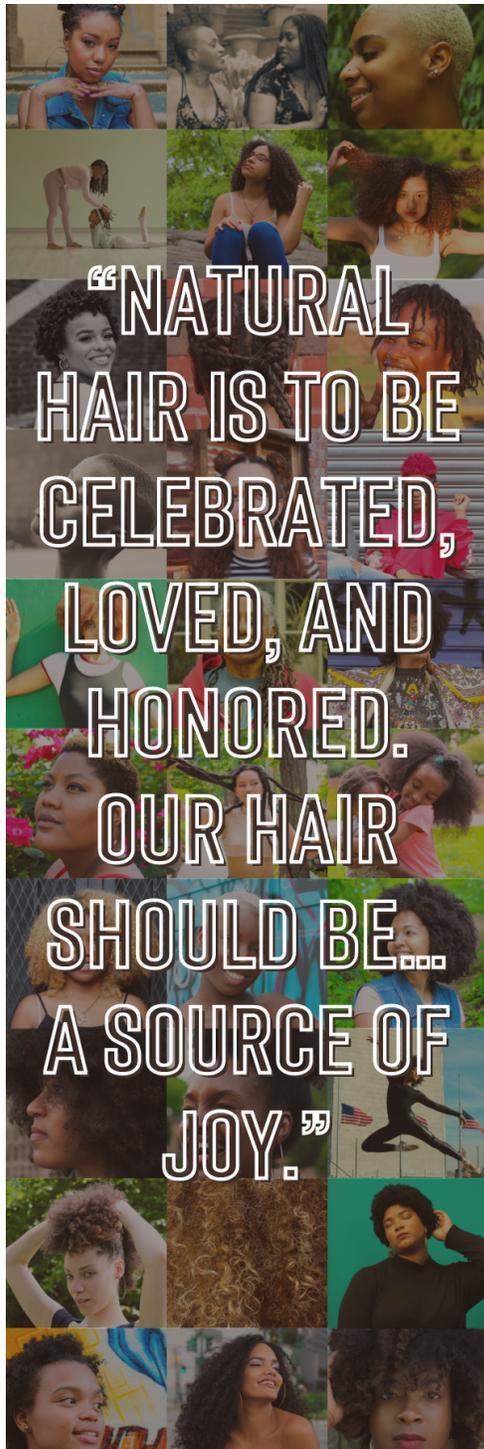
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YOUR
HAIR."



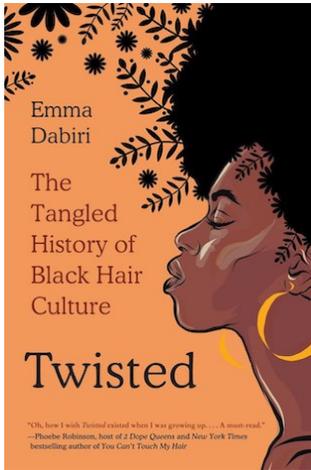
"IT IS YOUR
CROWN;
WEAR IT
WITH PRIDE."

"YOUR NATURAL CROWN IS BEAUTIFUL"

BOOKMARKS



WHAT TO READ NEXT

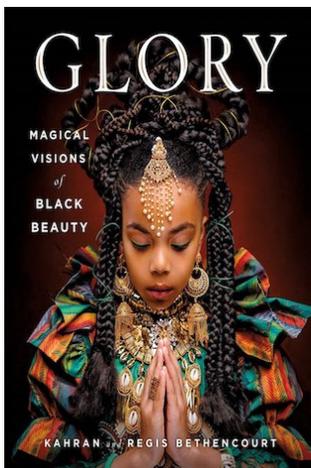
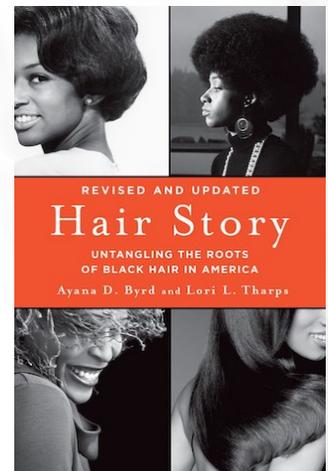


Twisted by Emma Dabiri

In this essay collection, BBC correspondent Emma Dabiri explores the history of Black hair culture. Taking readers from pre-colonial Africa to today's Natural Hair Movement, the book explores the ways that Black hair has been discriminated against alongside Dabiri's own journey of self-love.

Hair Story by Ayana Byrd, Lori L. Tharps

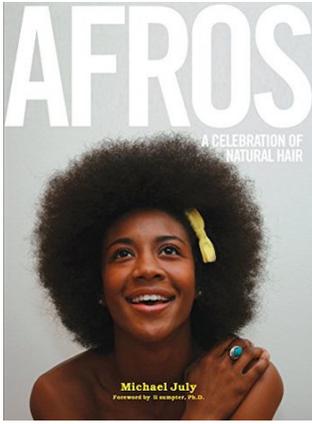
Hair Story begins in 15th-century Africa and explores the way Black hair has been seen, treated, and styled over the years. Featuring quotes from stylists and cultural critics, the book looks at the evolution of specific styles such as the Afro, the history of straightening, and more.



Glory by Kahran and Regis Bethencourt

If you were moved by the photography in *My Beautiful Black Hair* then you'll love the stunning images in *Glory*, which highlight the beauty of Black children. Through the pairing of essays and photographs, the collection encourages Black children to find power in shattering Eurocentric beauty standards and owning their greatness.

WHAT TO READ NEXT

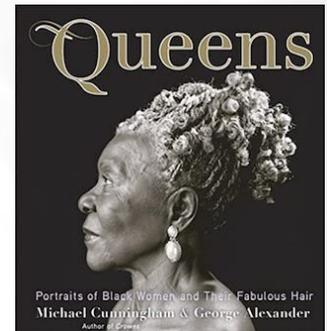


AFROS by Michael July

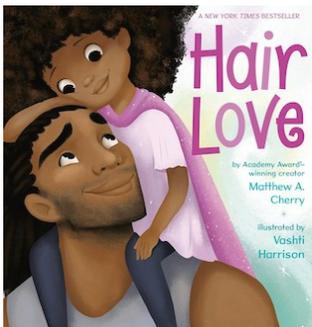
For this coffee table and lifestyle book Michael July traveled across America taking photographs of subjects showing off their natural hair with pride. Interspersed are stories about going natural, what hair represents on a personal level, and more.

Queens by Michael Cunningham, George Alexander

Queens pairs 50 breathtaking photographs of Black women from the America, England, and Africa with personal narratives that explore their relationships with their hair, their salons, and each other.



Hair Love by Matthew A. Cherry, illustrated by Vashti Harrison



A heartwarming tale for readers of all ages, this picture book follows Zuri. She loves the way her mom styles her hair, but when her mom is away her dad steps in. Dad has a lot to learn as a stylist, but his love for Zuri means he's determined to succeed and leave her feeling confident. After reading be sure to watch the Academy Award-winning short film!

WHAT TO WATCH NEXT

In our interview, St. Clair Detrick-Jules recommends YouTube as a great resource for those looking to start their natural hair journey or for anyone with natural hair looking for more style, product, and caretaking tips. Here are a few community favorites to start with.



Naptural85

Whitney White is beloved in the community as one of the original natural hair vloggers. Her channel features easy-to-follow tutorials and product reviews, including spotlights on Black-owned companies.

StarPuppy

Danielle's enthusiasm and energy is infectious, making her videos feel as though you're sitting down with a friend. Come to her channel for product and style trials, stay for the nerdy fun!



NappyFu

From life advice to haircare routines, NappyFu does it all. Plus her channel often features live chats where you can connect with her and the rest of the community.

These are just a few of the amazing vloggers sharing their experiences and expertise on YouTube. As you come across more, tell your book club about them!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

St. Clair Detrick-Jules is an award-winning filmmaker, photographer, author, and activist. She captures personal stories and intimate moments centering on immigrant justice, women's rights and Black liberation. An Afro-Caribbean artist who remains rooted in her community, St. Clair grounds her work in radical love, joy and the knowledge that a more just world is possible. St. Clair has a BA from Brown University in French and Francophone Studies. She has been featured in *The Washington Post*, *Washingtonian Magazine*, *The Guardian*, NPR's *Strange Fruit*, *BuzzFeed News*, and *Everyday Black History: Afro Appreciation*. Her documentary *DACAmented* has received awards at Immigration Film Fest, Baltimore International Black Film Festival, and Ogden City Latino Film Festival. St. Clair currently resides in her hometown of Washington, DC.

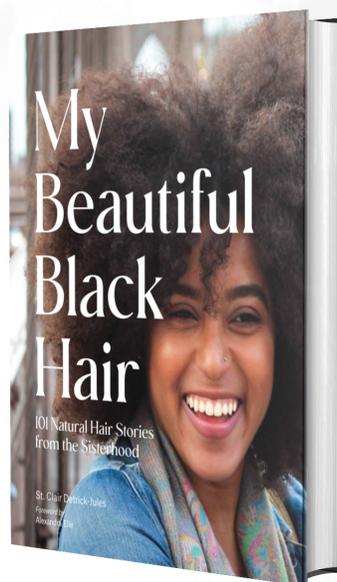


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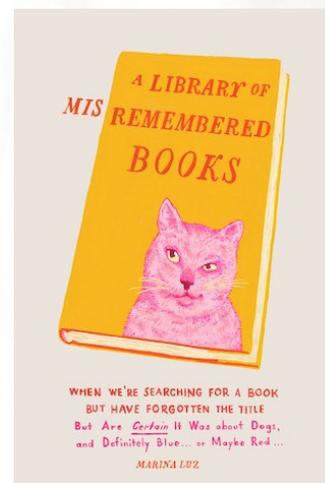
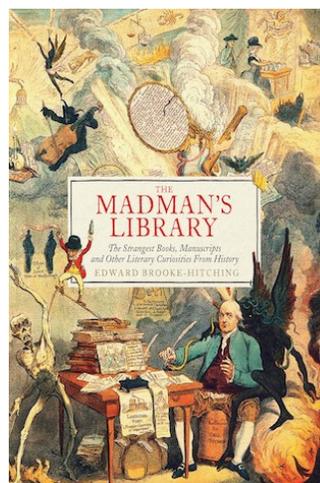
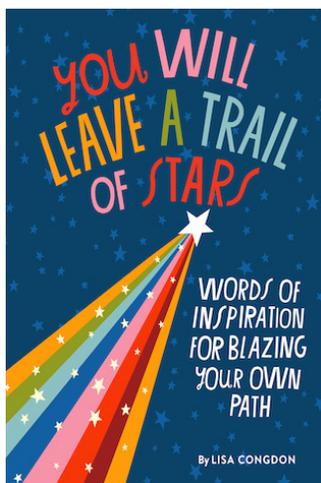
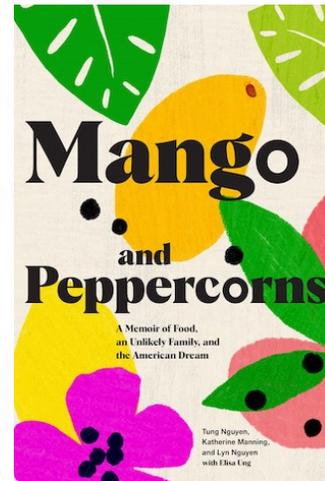
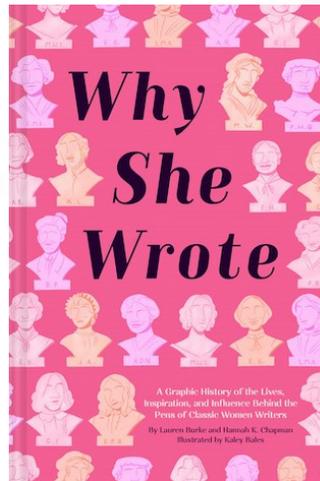
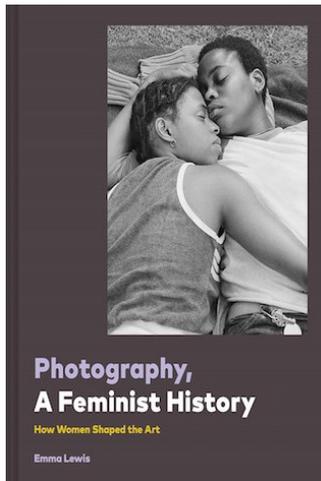
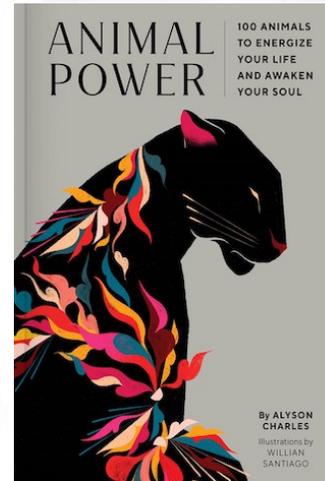
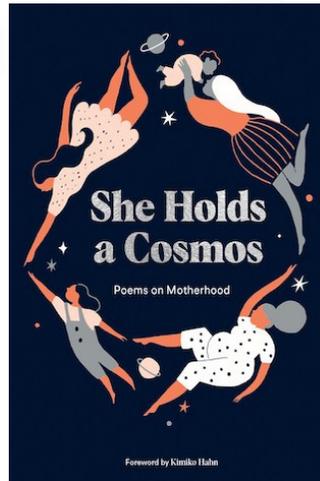
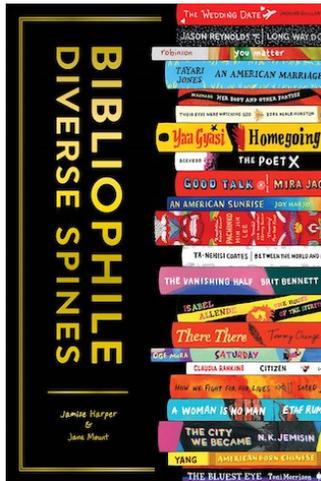


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