



Ain't I a Beauty Queen?: Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race

Maxine Leeds Craig

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"Black is Beautiful!" The words were the exuberant rallying cry of a generation of black women who threw away their straightening combs and adopted a proud new style they called the Afro. The Afro, as worn most famously by Angela Davis, became a veritable icon of the Sixties.

Although the new beauty standards seemed to arise overnight, they actually had deep roots within black communities. Tracing her story to 1891, when a black newspaper launched a contest to find the most beautiful woman of the race, Maxine Leeds Craig documents how black women have negotiated the intersection of race, class, politics, and personal appearance in their lives. Craig takes the reader from beauty parlors in the 1940s to late night political meetings in the 1960s to demonstrate the powerful influence of social movements on the experience of daily life. With sources ranging from oral histories of Civil Rights and Black Power Movement activists and men and women who stood on the sidelines to black popular magazines and the black movement press, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?* will fascinate those interested in beauty culture, gender, class, and the dynamics of race and social movements.

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