

{essays in history}

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(Big and) Black is Beautiful: Body Image and Expanded Beauty Ideals in the African American Community, 1945-1968



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In a widely covered media event, advocates for women's liberation protested the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City on September 7, 1968. The day was filled with guerilla theatre skits, protest placards, lobbying that targeted the pageant's contestants, and the disposal of "oppressive" female accoutrements like bras, high-heels, and women's magazines into a "Freedom Trash Can." Members of the New York Radical Women, an early radical feminist group formed in that same year, chose the Miss America pageant as the site for the protest, key architect Robin Morgan explained, because the event created "an image that oppresses women in every area in which it purports to represent us."^[1] At the end of the rally, the protestors crowned a sheep Miss America, symbolizing their belief that the antiquated pageant was little more than a cattle auction.^[2]

At the same time that white women decried Atlantic City's Miss America pageant, a few blocks away at the Ritz Carlton Hotel, Philadelphian Saundra Williams accepted the title of Miss Black America. At 5 feet 4 inches and weighing 125 pounds, *Seventeen* magazine would have described the beauty queen's build as "stocky."^[3] Williams, the contest's inaugural winner, was from a middle-class family and had worked to integrate businesses in her college town of Prince Anne, Maryland. In front of an audience of around 300 people, Williams outperformed the seven other contestants, performing an original, African-inspired dance with her hair styled in an Afro. "It was like an impossible dream coming true," she recalled. "For years I'd been brainwashed into thinking that beauty consisted of straight hair, a thin, straight nose and thin lips. The contest proved what I'd recently learned—black is beautiful."^[4] The pageant's creator, J. Morris Anderson, produced the Miss Black America Pageant to protest the absence of African American women in Atlantic City's annual televised event. The contest did not start until midnight on September 8th, in fact, because Anderson hoped media from the white pageant would stop by afterwards. The alternative pageant capped what had become a growing rejection of white beauty standards in the postwar period.

Historians have begun recently to articulate the impact of the Black Power movement on the civil rights movement and the United States as a whole.^[5] Emerging scholarship on the “Black is Beautiful” phenomenon describes this assertion of racial pride exhibited by African American men and women rejecting white ideals of style, beauty, and personal identity. In June of 1966, Diana Smith, as a twenty-year-old civil rights worker, graced the cover of *Ebony* magazine in a cover story titled, “The Natural Look: New Mode for Black Women.” Her presence signaled the first appearance of an Afro on the cover of the middle-class African American publication. Smith was neither a celebrity nor a model, yet she held the coveted cover space where black entertainers like Lena Horne and Dorothy Dandridge previously appeared. She symbolized not only 1960s political activism, but also an ideal where “natural” trumped white America’s beauty standards. Pointing to examples such as this, historians assume that without an established Black Power movement, the ideology of “Black is Beautiful” could not have existed. An examination of the pages of *Ebony*, *Jet*, and other middle-class black periodicals from the immediate postwar years suggests otherwise. Black women, in the 1940s and 1950s, did not universally conform nor desire lightened skin, relaxed hair, and the body of Marilyn Monroe—or in later years, Twiggy. Rather than yielding to narrow ideals of fashion, body, and cosmetic culture, African American women and men broadened the definition of female beauty, which included skin color, hair texture, fatness, and athleticism. This rejection of white beauty standards demonstrates that the black middle class sought to create a unique identity even prior to the Black Power movement of the mid-1960s.

To better understand the voices of both resistance to and acceptance of white beauty ideals, this project explores the period’s best-selling African American periodicals. During the 1940s, picture-based magazines began to change the face of American journalism. Magazines were consumed by members of a growing middle class who increasingly looked to cultural tools like periodicals to guide them through their newly acquired social mobility. *Ebony* magazine’s creator, John H. Johnson noted, “The picture magazines of the 1940s did for the public what television did for the audiences of the fifties: they opened new windows in the mind and brought us face to face with the multicolored possibilities of man and woman.”^[6] In a culture where television had only just begun to take root in suburban living rooms, magazines offered guidance, disseminated the

news, and informed Americans, both black and white, how to think and feel about national and international issues.

The primary sources for reconstructing these multicultural beauty models comes largely from print media aimed at a middle-class African American readership. Marjorie Ferguson notes that periodicals act as a “syllabus” and provide “step-by-step instructions” that help socialize their target audience from adolescence to adulthood.[7] Nowlie M. Rooks agrees that women’s periodicals have historically served the same purpose for African American women as well.[8] Within the content of these publications, one is able to analyze middle-class assumptions and ideals of feminine beauty through the discussion and images of beauty culture, pageants, fashion, body image, athletics, and popular entertainers. Such publications aspired to showcase the less serious side of American society and similarly emphasized the power of photography to tell a story. If discontent can be found even within the generally conservative readership of *Ebony* magazine and similar periodicals, this demonstrates the extent to which African Americans spoke out, rather than hiding safely in the anonymity of the middle class.

The study of the female body and beauty culture has received serious and prolific attention within the past three decades. Works focusing on nineteenth-century women reaffirm and challenge existing scholarship on larger issues such as middle-class gender roles and the ideology of separate spheres.[9] While scholarship on female body image in the nineteenth century exists, a void remains regarding the twentieth century, particularly the decades immediately after World War II. Historians writing about beauty and cosmetic culture in the postwar era focus on the beauty industry rather than women’s bodies specifically. [10] Although many works have attempted to demonstrate the democratic and inclusive potential cosmetic culture provided American women throughout the past two centuries, this scholarship fails to incorporate the historical realities for women outside the dominant heterosexual, white culture. While having the “choice” to look one way or not does appear egalitarian, parameters of preferability still exist and are, generally, Caucasian. Monographs that discuss and examine cosmetics and fashion shape our understanding of the distant past, but more work is needed in the area of body image and feminine ideals.

Historians of African American women, similarly, have also explored the effect of the beauty industry on black women throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this way, these women's historians question the concept of a universal womanhood. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham observes that African American women have historically lived in communities whose behavior resulted not only from learned African American traditions, but also from the values and behaviors of the dominant white society.[11] Black studies focusing on beauty culture highlight the unique relationship of cosmetics and hair care in African American women's culture.[12] Other historians focus on the racial and political meanings behind the American beauty industry, especially attaching it to Black Power and Black Nationalism.[13] Despite the attention given to African-American women's historical connections to and relationship with cosmetics, hair, and skin color, attitudes regarding black women's body image remain largely unstudied. This essay addresses this void by identifying and analyzing the breadth of body types celebrated by both men and women in the African American community in the postwar years.

Social historian Peter Stearns argues that black Americans have historically held a broader view of beauty, not constraining it to a specific body type, hair or skin color, because (1) God does not make mistakes, and (2) African Americans prioritized race issues over size. Stearns traces the roots of these beliefs to African matriarchies and attitudes about working women during Reconstruction. "Unlike their white counterparts," he argues, "most black women have always worked, even when married; and in some physical labor, size was a positive advantage, associated with strength, not fat." [14] Although convincing, Stearns cannot explain why "plus-size" women continued to be celebrated in the years following World War II. The success ethic of the new black middle class promoted the single (male) breadwinner ideology. Black men took pride in the fact that their wives need not financially contribute to the family income to maintain their middle-class status. If body size was associated with strength and work, it would be more logical then that small, frail black women would be seen as the ideal body type in the years after World War II. A careful study of celebrated women in black periodicals, however, complicates Stearns' argument.

Naomi Wolf's oft-cited *Beauty Myth* similarly cannot explain this phenomenon. Wolf argues that in eras when women realize more political and economic gains, beauty ideals become more rigid and unattainable. She observes that as women demand more public recognition, smaller body types become *en vogue* so women literally take up less space.[15] While the beginning of the second wave of feminism coincided with the popularity of thin fashion models like Twiggy and Penelope Tree, the same did not apply for black women and the civil rights movement. Black America's newspapers and magazines, in fact, discouraged women from mimicking the hyper-thin look and warned readers about the dangers of excessive dieting.

John H. Johnson, Black Periodicals, and Their Audience

Magazines were consumed by members of a growing black middle class who, like their white counterparts, looked to cultural tools such as periodicals to guide them through their newly acquired social mobility. [16] At the epicenter of the growing black periodical industry, was John H. Johnson. Originally from rural Arkansas, Johnson migrated to Chicago with his family in his early teens. After graduating from high school with high honors, he found employment at the Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Company with the plan to attend college after saving enough money. Early in 1942, Johnson's employer and mentor, Harry H. Pace, asked his ambitious pupil to compile information about current events in the black world from various newspapers and other media sources. Pace and his family were passing for white in the Chicago suburbs, but the insurance company president wanted to keep abreast of the happenings in the black community.

His experience as Pace's personal reporter inspired Johnson to create a magazine that would similarly enlighten the entire African American community. Later in the year, with a \$500 loan from Citizen's Loan Corporation, with his mother's new furniture as collateral and the partnership of *Chicago Defender* editor Ben Burns, Johnson purchased \$500 worth of stamps and sent a letter to 20,000 African American households, inquiring if they were interested in subscribing to a new black magazine. The resulting periodical, *Negro Digest*, consisted of a compilation of intellectual articles on race and black history.[17] Realizing that Henry Luce's *Life* magazine was the only other periodical selling as much as *Negro Digest* in the black community, Johnson soon

entertained the idea of creating a “lighter” publication. By creating *Ebony*, a magazine so similar to *Life*, Johnson acknowledged that America was a two-society nation—one white and one black.[18] The magazine’s mission statement made no apologies for its purpose: “As you can gather, we’re rather jolly folks, we *Ebony* editors. We like to look at the zesty side of life ... not enough is said about all the swell things we Negroes can do and will accomplish. *Ebony* will try to mirror the happier side of Negro life.”[19] The magazine’s first issue in November of 1945 contained columns on race, youth, personalities, culture, entertainment, and humor.[20]

Print advertisements for consumer products were visibly absent from this first issue. Early in the magazine’s life, Johnson avoided printing small advertisements; he wanted to attract national companies who would buy four-color advertisements like those in *Life* or *Look* magazine. At least one *Ebony* reader, Beulah Harris, appreciated the lack of hair straightening and skin lightening products in the inaugural issue: “*Ebony* is a live, real life magazine that we need, want and have been longing for. Please keep it clean like it is. We do not want advertisements of how to get white. We are beautiful as a race as we are—we only need more intelligence and more race pride.”[21] Johnson could hold out for only so long, however. Despite selling over 100,000 copies of each issue in the early months, the success and cheap production costs of *Negro Digest* was the only thing keeping the more expensive entertainment magazine afloat. In May 1946, *Ebony* printed its first advertisement, picturing an exotic woman with a low cut sarong, holding onto a bamboo curtain was pictured. Her dark, long, black hair hung loose and flowing and a fully bloomed flower perched behind one ear. The advertisement enticed readers to purchase “Murray’s Pomade and Murray’s Hair Glo” for “Natural Beauty.” The product promised “natural” hair that clearly did not occur naturally for African American women.[22]

Almost universally, black women in America straightened their hair from the late 1940s through the early 1960s. Straight hair was not only the preferred look, but also a marker of one’s position in society. The flat-ironed look required frequent visits to beauty salons and dedicated upkeep. Relaxed hair represented wealth, education, and access to society.[23] At least one author has argued that hair straightening had

become, not the “damaging influence of a white beauty standard,” but rather a coming of age ritual for young girls.[24] Moreover, during the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, careful grooming was an important part of the middle class’s strategy. Susannah Walker notes that photographs of African American protestors reveal carefully dressed and coifed women with straightened hair.[25] When Afros became popular among the youth and the working class in the late 1960s, this trend horrified middle-class blacks. But despite the association with middle-class mores, many *Ebony* readers acknowledged the hypocrisy of the magazine’s editorial policy to include articles on racial pride and yet sell advertising space to “whitening” products. One mother wrote in, “With a daughter approaching her teens, I’ve become very conscious of this especially when she asks, ‘Is it true, blondes have more fun?’”[26]

The hue of one’s skin could also be a factor in determining beauty for black females. Although John H. Johnson accepted advertisements for skin bleaching products, his editorial rant in May 1946 declared:

Beauty is skin deep—and that goes for brown as well as white skin. You’d never think it, though, to look at the billboards, magazines, and pinup posters of America. Cheesecake ... is all white. But the Petty girl notwithstanding, Negro girls are beautiful too. And despite the fact that Miss America contests hang out “for whites only” signs, there are thousands of Negro girls lovely enough to compete with the best of white America in pulchritude.[27]

While the editor admonished white beauty standards, the inclusion of advertisements for products like Nadinola Bleach Cream (“Give Romance a Chance! Don’t let a dull, dark complexion deprive you of popularity!”), negated the cohesiveness of the magazine’s message. [28] *Ebony*’s readership was not blind to or accepting of these mixed messages. Multiple letters to the magazine throughout the postwar period mirrored the concerns of one reader: “How can you, *Ebony*, sacrifice our integrity and hypocritically continue to proudly devote pages to colored women ... and at the same time sell space to a product which forwards the opinion that success comes with fair skin?”[29] Although advertisements for skin bleachers and hair straighteners had appeared in black periodicals since the mid-nineteenth century, the

readership of *Ebony* in the postwar period bristled, protesting their inclusion.

In addition to attitudes about skin tone and hair texture, *Ebony* also provided a window to black women and their bodies. The focus on black women's bodies, however, was not always met with praise from the periodical's conservative readership. Despite the "lighter" tone of the magazine, many readers felt the inclusion of "cheesecake" – photographs of provocatively posed and dressed models – was unnecessary and "revolting." An early example of the complex issues regarding standards of beauty and morality was coverage of the "Miss Fine Brown Frame" beauty pageant in 1947. In a win for race pride, Evelyn Sanders, the darkest contestant, took the grand prize, but only after the assembled audience forced the judging panel to crown her the winner. Sanders made a revealing bikini for the contest to get the judges' attention, fearing that the pageant "would be won by some nearly-Caucasian face atop a light brown frame." Mirroring Sanders' assumptions, the pageant's judges originally crowned a light-skinned girl the winner, but the audience disagreed, and as *Ebony* reported, let the judging panel know that "for once, white standards of beauty would not be forced upon them." The judges then compromised and offered to award Sanders the cash prize and the light-skinned contestant the title. But when "[f]ists shot up threateningly from the audience," Sanders was crowned the outright queen.^[30]

On one level, this story reveals the rejection of white standards of beauty – instead of allowing a light-complexioned contestant to win the pageant, the audience demanded that Sanders, the beauty hopeful with the darkest skin, be awarded the top prize. Light-skinned African American women traditionally outnumbered their darker-complexioned sisters in beauty contests. Moreover, Dorothea Towles, one of the most successful African American models of the 1950s and 1960s, was light skinned and eventually dyed her hair blonde. Important black crossover actresses such as Lena Horne and Dorothy Dandridge were similarly light complexioned. In a pageant ironically named the "Miss Fine Brown Frame," crowning the darkest complexioned contestant the top award was significant.

Sanders' story highlights an important shift in attitudes about the relationship of prize-winning beauty and skin tone, but it also displays

the black middle class's unease regarding the fetishization of African American women's bodies. With measurements of 35-23-36, Sanders' figure fell well within the white body ideal. In the accompanying photo, her measurements were printed next to each respective body part, mimicking white publications, while her head was cropped out of the photograph. She literally became a disembodied figure. Mrs. Pauline Thomas of Detroit agreed with other *Ebony* readers, calling the pictorial a "disgrace to the magazine" and insisted that Sanders, pictured in her homemade bikini, could have put on a pair of shorts.[31] *Ebony* did not hide readers' dissatisfaction with the pictorial, and in later volumes minimized cheesecake photography. Instead, Johnson created a number of other periodicals such as *Jet* (1951–current) and the short-lived *Tan Confessions* (1950–1952) where pin-up photography occupied a more prominent position, although neither magazine was as commercially successful as *Ebony*.

The presence of "cheesecake" in black periodicals was important, despite the grumblings of *Ebony's* conservative readership. Historian Joanne Meyerowitz argues that rather than objectifying women for the sake of the male viewer, black models in mainstream magazines were ammunition against racist and classist beauty ideals.[32] Marjorie Byer agrees, noting that black "pin-up" girls and pageant winners demonstrated to white America that African American women were beautiful, too.[33] Indicating that white America was beginning to recognize that "black could be beautiful, too," a number of African American co-eds found themselves celebrated for winning mixed beauty pageants. Chicago's Clarice C. Davis at the University of Illinois reigned as the very first African American Homecoming Queen in the Big Ten Conference in 1951. Davis's classmates voted her the winner over eight other contestants, both white and black.[34] And in August 1964, Patricia Evans placed first at the Miss America Modeling Contest and became the first black model to appear in *Seventeen* magazine.[35]

Despite the genesis of integration in major white women's publications, minority models found little room in men's magazines in the postwar period. Black men wanted to see women of color celebrated on the glossy page, but most "girlie" magazines failed to employ women of color beyond a few token "exotic" models who could pass for any number of races or ethnicities depending on their costume. In August

1964, a reader bemoaned the lack of diversity amongst *Playboy* Playmates with a poem:

Hey great

Forward looking

Playboy magazine;

Hey iconoclastic

Philosopher of

The modern age;

Hey value examiner

For the American

People

Why does foldout

Beauty come in

But one color? Eh?[36]

Women of color, ironically, began appearing in *Playboy* in that same issue, albeit a decade after the periodical's introductory issue. China Lee, a 5 feet 4 inch "training Bunny" at the Chicago Playboy Club with 35-22-35 measurements, became the first woman of color to appear in the coveted Playmate section.[37] The Asian American "Bunny" was so popular, she was voted a finalist for the Playmate of the Year competition.

A few issues later, in March 1965, Hugh Hefner introduced his first African American Playmate, Jennifer Jackson of Chicago. Jackson's twin sister, Gloria Johnson, was the first African American "Bunny" at the Chicago Playboy Club. Jackson was significantly taller and heavier than other Playmates at 5 feet 8 and a half inches, weighing 130 pounds, with "vital statistics" of 36-23-36. In true credit to Hefner's famed racial liberalism, not once did the accompanying article mention her race. The

response to Jackson's inclusion was mixed; many applauded Hefner and his magazine for once again being so progressive, while others actually *mailed back* the centerfold from their copy of the March issue. One such reader who returned the fold-out section noted, "we entreat you to return to your time-tested format of Playmate selection, which is more in line with the thinking of the vast majority of your readers."[\[38\]](#) Although the label copy did not once mention Jackson's race, it is clear readers did not need to see her skin-color labeled to recognize her "otherness." Another African American centerfold would not appear again until October 1969. The failure of Hefner and other men's magazine editors to insert diversity into the pages of their magazines made public that if men wanted to see women of color in print, they would have to publish their own magazines.

The attempt to sate black male readers was *Duke* magazine. Published out of Chicago in 1957, the city that gave birth to *Playboy* magazine a few years earlier, *Duke* was the first and last attempt at a *Playboy/Esquire*-esque periodical for and by African American men. The next mainstream magazine geared toward black men was *Players* in November 1973, although the periodical came from the white publishers of *Adam*. *Duke* reflected the desire, rather than the reality of black men in the 1950s—flashy cars, expansive wardrobes, and "damn near white" girlfriends.[\[39\]](#) In its pilot issue in June 1957, *Duke* editor Dan Burley had this to say about the publication's mission:

Duke will strive to cater to the sophisticated, urbane tastes of our Ivy-minded males who have advanced fully enough so that virility is more than a word and adult truly connotes manhood in all its glories. We have no causes and no axes to grind except to bring moments of pleasure to he-men and their female friends of like mind with an amusing, delightful package of assorted goodies, ranging from top-notch fiction to the pinup ladies placed on display in our "Duchess of the Month" department each issue.[\[40\]](#)

Mirroring *Playboy's* mission statement a few years earlier, *Duke* strove to appeal to an educated black readership with a balance of girl-next-door centerfolds, urbanity, sexuality, and humor. The flagship issue featured fiction from well-respected authors like

Chester Himes, Erskine Caldwell, and Langston Hughes with humor from others like Geo S. Schuyler and Ray Bradbury. Sandwiched between works of fiction and cartoons was the centerfold pin-up girl—the only page of the magazine printed in color – featuring the “Duchess of the Month.” If playboys had playmates, then dukes had duchesses. “Every Duke to the royal manor born most certainly deserves and delights in a duchess,” the text that accompanied the first fold-out announced. The original “Duchess” was Eleanor Crews of Chicago who, during the day, was employed as an insurance company underwriter. Later Duchesses were mostly models and aspiring actresses. Crews and her other Duchess counterparts were generally very light skinned, not unusual for African American models at the time. Like the majority of *Playboy* centerfolds, Crews was not entirely nude, but instead wore a terrycloth towel draped over her lower torso, hiding her from the camera’s view, with a strategically placed arm covering her bare breasts.

Black and white photos depicted everyday activities in the same format as *Playboy*’s centerfolds. But the descriptions that accompanied that month’s Duchess, and even the name itself, suggested an untouchability. Unlike the Playmates who appeared eager for “play,” their African American doppelgangers posed more of a challenge. Crews enjoyed oil painting and “reading deep stuff like Edgar Allen Poe and Leo Tolstoy.” Her profile portrayed a woman who did it all; not only did she have a steady job, but she was a talented enough dancer to have once been an instructor, and took classes at the Art Institute of Chicago to learn more about painting with oils.[41]

Another Duchess, Dorothy Peterson, was a dancer and singer with plans to tour with Duke Ellington. A former model, Peterson also attended classes at the University of Southern California where she studied psychology.[42] Maxine Chancellor, the July 1957 Duchess, was also a model and aspiring actress, but as the accompanying text noted, “she’s no ordinary, humdrum girl, but a cultured charmer” who enjoyed spending time at art galleries and bookstores.[43] While Hefner continued to portray his centerfolds as physically and intellectually accessible, *Duke* readers were hard pressed to win the attentions of this kind of royal woman. *Duke* folded after only a six-issue run. The black middle class remained a relatively small group in the 1950s and, despite the success of *Ebony*, the failure of *Duke* magazine demonstrated that a

mass market of affluent African American male consumers was still in the future.

The Optimism of the Media: Diet, Exercise, and Pro-Body Messages

In the postwar period, Hollywood and the fashion industry helped shaped white America's ideals of female body perfection. The movie-making industry, however, had less of an influence on African American women's body image. Unlike their white counterparts, the most popular celebrities in the black community were largely singers, rather than actresses. The most famous crossover stars, Lena Horne and Dorothy Dandridge, both curvy yet slender actresses, first gained fame as jazz singers. In fact, when black scholar Maxine Leeds Craig surveyed African American women and asked if they had identified with any celebrities growing up in postwar America, her interviewees noted they had not identified with any celebrity, but found Lena Horne, Dorothy Dandridge, and Diahann Carroll to be the most beautiful.[44] Hollywood at this time was not yet ready to embrace black actresses for parts beyond maids, jungle roles, or chorus girl bit parts, which can help account for this lack of influence.[45] "I suppose everybody in America, especially girls, dreams about the movies and Hollywood," one hopeful black starlet told *Ebony*. "And the way the stars get discovered ... Lana Turner was sipping a malted on a high stool. Yes, it might even happen to you—except if you're colored!"[46]

Despite the lack of opportunities for African Americans in the movies, however, black periodicals held an optimistic attitude about black women's chances as professional models. While John Powers had a reputation in the white model industry for only employing willowy waifs, in an *Ebony* article he declared, "There is no set formula for female beauty, no rigid rules to follow in determining who is beautiful and who is not." [47] African American literature noted that the well-rounded and curved figure was regaining popularity in the fashion industry, whereas white periodicals continually warned that fashion magazines only photographed rail-thin beauties.[48]

In 1946, Ed Brandford and Barbara Watson founded the first black modeling agency, New York's Brandford Modeling School. Watson considered the "perfect figure model" to have a 34" to 36" bust and 34" hips, but noted that a few of the top fashion photographers were asking

for taller models with wider hips and larger breasts. “Slowly, but surely,” she declared, “the rounded figure is coming back into vogue.”^[49] Ophelia DeVore, creator of New York’s Del Marco Model Agency, looked for non-white models with pin-up and cover girl measurements of 34” or 36” bust, 22” waist, and 35” or 36” hips. She noted that while high-fashion magazines went for a more slender look, publications like *Seventeen* looked for models with “fuller figures.” Cordie Smith, Chicago’s most photographed black model, had measurements of 35.5-25-35.5, and she weighed 130 pounds in 1955. ^[50] Although the lean figure was still in demand in high-fashion, black models with more shapely silhouettes won beauty contests, pin-up prizes, and earned employment as chorine girls.^[51]

This optimism and message of self-assurance can also be seen in black periodicals’ attitudes regarding diet and exercise. While mainstream (white) magazines were largely silent about celebrity exercise regimes, black periodicals assured readers that their favorite stars’ fitness was the product of rigorous effort rather than something they came by naturally. Even in the fantasy play-world of Hollywood, “alluring movie queens have to bend over backwards to maintain those out-of-the-world shapes.” Dorothy Dandridge reported she maintained her 36-24-36.5, 5 feet, 5 and a half inch, 110 to 115 pound frame by going to the gym. She remarked it was a “sin” for a woman not to preserve her figure for as long as she could. ^[52]

Magazines like *Jet* and *Ebony* reported on the diet plans of celebrities, but unlike the coverage of white stars in mainstream periodicals, not all stars’ diets were regimented or successful. This forthright reporting once again reassured its readership that celebrity and fame did not depend on natural slimness. Lena Horne reportedly avoided foreign foods “because of [a] tendency to be hippy.”^[53] A chorus girl in three Broadway shows, Carmen Alexander, also worried about her hips. When she worked in an office, a girdle could handle the problem areas, but as a chorus girl, hiding her hips was not an option, *Ebony* reported.^[54] Internationally famous entertainer Josephine Baker told *Ebony* that she never monitored her food intake, but when she noticed her dresses getting too tight, she went on a diet of nothing but carrots. Dinah Washington, blues singer, reportedly lost 35 pounds in 6 weeks with pills and injections from her doctor; the rest of the time she ate whatever she wanted,

including pig's feet. Gospel singer Mahalia Jackson ballooned from 120 to 230 pounds because she could not resist her own cooking, and operatic singer Marian Anderson admitted she failed to follow her own diet prescription of avoiding bread, potatoes, and desserts.[55]

In 1956, the *Chicago Defender* posted the daily column, "The Housewives Corner," featuring two women who planned on losing a pound a day through dieting. Mrs. Beatrice Mendenhall and her friend Mrs. Marian Mims, whose combined weight totaled over 600 pounds, posted their weekly diets and their progress in the column.[56] The friends began with a "conditioning" diet for two weeks, to ready their body for the rigid diet of 750 calories a day that would follow. At the start of their third week, they began their goal of losing a pound of flesh a day. Cognizant that slender-seeking women reading the column would also have a family to feed, the *Defender* listed a meal for the family and one for the dieter in each article. Details such as this could not be found in the typical high-fashion magazine aimed at white readers. Moreover, they paid special attention to these diets being both economical and practical, and listed different lunch options for both working women and for housewives. In late August, Mrs. Mims and Mrs. Mendenhall abandoned their original diets and went on strictly liquid diets; at each meal they were allowed 2 ounces of orange juice and 4 ounces of skim milk.[57] The *Defender* religiously updated the dieters' progress up until this change to an all-liquid diet. Moreover, no final article appeared to capstone their experience. Perhaps they died of hunger.

A contemporary of the period, Era Bell Thompson points out that food was a status symbol for black America "after generations of living on crumbs from the Big Table." Moreover, Soul Food is deep fried and strongly seasoned; not the stuff diets are made of. The journalist created her own tongue-in-cheek "Soul Food Diet" in the pages of *Ebony* in the style of diets found in white women's magazines:

Breakfast: 1/2 cup pot liquor concentrate. 1 toasted cornbread stick

Lunch: dandelion green sandwich. 1 cup watermelon juice

Dinner: choice of 2 steamed chicken necks or 1 small pig's foot. 9 black-eyed peas cooked in clear water.

Dessert: 1 slice bread soaked in diet sorghum

Thompson, in an attempt to ascertain if she was overweight, also gave herself the “obesity test” similar to one that had appeared in *Seventeen* magazine. *Seventeen’s* self-examination encouraged young women to (1) look in the mirror and discern which areas needed toning and (2) pinch your body. If more than an inch of flesh resulted between the forefinger and thumb, “you’re probably too fat.”^[58] Performing the self-test, Thompson declared, “One look in the mirror ... should have eliminated the other two tests.”

Thompson momentarily bemoaned that someone as industrious as herself, having worked her way through college cleaning houses, should certainly have the stamina to rid herself of a bulbous middle. But the pursuit of a slender figure is not altogether simply a matter of willpower. Economics and racial discrimination had a role to play as well. Referring to elitist “fat farms” like Elizabeth Arden’s “Main Chance” diet camp, Thompson observes, “Neither can I afford, nor would I likely be accepted by a 600-calorie, \$100-a-day fat farm even if its gymnasium has wall-to-wall carpeting and a swimming pool filled with fat-free milk.”^[59] After dismissing exercise and diet drinks like Se-go or Metrecal, Thompson decided to diet. She calculated that by cutting 500 to 1,000 calories from her daily food regime, she could slim down to an appropriate 120 pounds—appropriate for her height and build, according to insurance tables.

Thompson began her diet in earnest, counting her calories for each meal. By the time she finished her calculations, however, her meal was cold and unappetizing. When she was five pounds lighter, a neighbor brought over a chocolate cake and Thompson suddenly found herself six pounds heavier than her pre-diet weight, she reported. “[I]t will take 42 days of sheer torture and determination to undo the damage [of the cake],” she reported. “In the meantime, I will wear clothes two sizes too large, and friends will grudgingly say, “My, how you’ve lost!”^[60] Letters to the magazine revealed the gratefulness of *Ebony’s* female readers for the change-of-pace story. Calling the story “marvelous,” one reader noted the timeliness of the article and its subject material. Another joked of the apple-shaped cartoon figure that accompanied the article, “I never realized anyone could draw such perfect pictures of me without seeing

me ... it is so nice to know we Big Fat Mamas are still being recognized.”[61]

Black periodicals pointed out that dieting was dangerous, in ways ignored by white magazines until the diet pill scare in the late 1960s. Magazines and newspapers aimed at black audiences were more cautionary than white women’s magazines in regards to the potential dangers of dieting. Horror stories about fad diets warned African American women to maintain balanced diets and to be realistic about monthly weight-loss goals. A once-beautiful model, readers were warned, had wasted away to a human skeleton of seventy-eight pounds after embarking on a fad diet of lemon juice, hot water, cola drinks, and an occasional hot dog.[62] Moreover, standardized height and weight tables were not always appropriate guides, and black women were cautioned against a “mechanical approach” to dieting. Dr. Hilde Bruch, a specialist in obesity, warned that some overweight people should avoid dieting altogether. “There are many people whose well-being is affected,” he argued in *Jet* magazine, “if they try to push their weight below a certain level which may be somewhat higher than that of the standard tables.”[63] Pro-body conscious messages such as these were largely absent from white women’s magazines.

Expanded Beauty Ideals – “Plus-Size” Women and Body Flattering Fashion

If black was beautiful, with the African American community re-appropriating what was considered “bad” hair and “the wrong” skin color, was fat beautiful, too? Despite concerns about dieting, foundation garments, and exercise, black periodicals celebrated women who embraced their larger frames—not every woman had to be “the perfect 36” to be heralded as a success, nor did they have to maintain an uncomplicated femininity. In this way, postwar African American men and women broadened beauty ideals in ways white media did not. “[S]lenderness in itself is no criterion for success in a woman’s world,” *Jet* magazine articulated, noting that this was particularly true for female musicians. Gospel singer Mahalia Jackson observed, “My work for the Lord is more important than reducing. I was born big and fat for a purpose and there is no need for me to try and look different now.” [64] One blues singer, Big Maybell, noted, “I’m not worried about gaining weight—I don’t want to lose a pound. I think I’m prettiest when

I'm fat.”[65] The Peters Sisters, a singing trio weighing in at over 800 pounds combined, joked in their act about riding in small elevators or tipping over small European taxis.[66] Supremes singer, Mary Wilson, did not shy away from publicizing her curves either. “Already considered quite voluptuous,” *Ebony* reported, “she wants to add few pounds for insurance.”[67]

Another singer, Ruth Brown, described as “a visual as well as vocal delight” and who apparently had the best voice since Sarah Vaughan, used her size 16 figure to “put all the oomph” into her soulful ballads.[68] And swing singer June Richmond, at 270 pounds, noted that her weight was part of her “professional personality.” Photos showed Richmond consuming a large breakfast in bed, but also discussed her success – the popular singer owned a \$40,000 home in Hollywood where she lived with her two daughters.[69] Not only were these plus-sized women professionally successful, numerous articles charted their personal happiness with marriages and maintaining a family. This positive attitude toward weight contrasted sharply with a *Life* magazine article chronicling the singing group the Mamas and the Papas. Despite attributing Cass Elliott’s powerful contralto to her near 200-pound frame, the *Life* story described Elliott as “hefty” with a “full-moon face” while identifying her co-“Mama,” Michelle Phillips, as “model-looking.” The article also noted Elliott’s diet of eating only a head of lettuce a day in the hopes of losing weight.[70]

In addition to celebrating weighty celebrities, fashion columns in black periodicals reflected more sympathy for plus-size women than mainstream white magazines. *Ebony*’s “Styles for the Not-So-Thin” highlighted a new fashion line for women under 5 feet 5 inches tall, with well-rounded hips and busts, and less visible waistlines. This new line created a less exaggerated silhouette, both fashionable and flattering, while Christian Dior’s “New Look” made these women look “short, squat, and dumpy.”[71] When the House of Dior introduced the “Flat Look” in the mid-1950s, *Jet* magazine declared the fashion house had “uncorked what was perhaps the greatest controversy since the U.S. atom-bombed Nagasaki.”[72] Although equally unpopular in the white and black community, the shapeless silhouette was once again introduced in 1960. Yves Saint-Laurent, top designer for Dior called his design the “Silhouette of the Future.” At least in the black community in the 1960s,

the bust flattening, knee-revealing fashion was considered unflattering. One Howard University student, Sheila Gregory, observed, “I should think that for slender women of slight build, Dior’s new look would be very attractive. I don’t think, however, that it would be becoming to me.”^[73] Black journalists predicted the style would “fall as flat as the fashions.”^[74]

Rather than looking to Paris for the newest fashions, more popular fashion trends in black women’s magazines were those that could be flattering to a variety of body types. Moreover, *Ebony* employed “plus-size” models for their annual “Fashion Fair,” a nationally touring runway show that highlighted the talents of young black designers and models. One of the touring models, Michelle Zeno, was 193 pounds and 5 feet 10 inches tall. A 1955 article about beachwear found styles that every woman could comfortably wear whether very tall, very slender, or too fleshy. The article noted that suits could be found to “hide a multiple of faults” like flower-printed beachwear with small skirts or one-piece suits to hide “too much tummy.” The author cautioned readers that scant bathing suits should only be worn by those with near-perfect figures so “consider your assets before investing in an all-revealing bikini suit.”^[75]

Another column highlighted a summer swimwear collection in which “even the less-than-Venus girl can arrange to exude boat-loads of beguilement by strolling surf-side.” This “Covered Up” collection concealed a bit more skin, hid the midriff, and added an extra inch to pant legs.^[76] White women’s magazines exhibited minimal sympathy for heavier women when compared with the articles in the black press. *Life* highlighted a fashion-friendly clothing line, but only for adolescent girls. Designer Emily Wilkens used black fabric and stripes to “elongate chunky young figures” and created styles “designed to flatten-embarrassing adolescent curves.” As the text indicates however, this was not the ideal figure with which white teenage girls should be satisfied.^[77]

And while the white fashion world became obsessed with the lanky model Twiggy in the mid-1960s, the black press found her laughable. The *Chicago Defender* joked that whenever Great Britain faced a financial crisis, they called an emergency meeting to create a scheme to siphon money from the former colonies. “All we have to do, gentlemen, is go into one of the Cockney districts and pick out a teenage girl who is flat-chested, bird-legged and looks under-nourished. Then we tell the

Ameddicans [sic] that this girl is the world's most sought after fashion model ... I recommend calling her either 'The Splinter' or 'Twiggy.'" [78] Another columnist noted, "We'd hate to break anybody's baloon [sic], but British model Twiggy's appeal comes from the fact that she knows she's ugly. If a Soul Sister looked anything like Twiggy, she'd be in a whole world of trouble – and we mean trouble." [79] The urgency for extreme slenderness never resonated in the African American community. The ultra-thin fashion model of the 1960s was a white body issue.

Expanded Beauty Ideals: The "Unfeminine" Athlete

For African American women in the postwar years, beauty had little to do with size or weight. Instead, middle-class black women were encouraged to "exemplify domesticity," remain feminine, and present themselves as respectable. [80] Protecting one's femininity and a return to domesticity was certainly paramount in the postwar years; nowhere is this more apparent than in the African American community. But even ideas of femininity were not without complication, particularly in the arena of female athletes. Historian Susan K. Cahn argues that black and white female athletes were celebrated for their athletic prowess, but only if they exuded traditional female beauty ideals. [81] Cahn focuses on female track-and-field stars in her analysis of African American athletes in the postwar period; because of this narrow scope, she overly simplifies the role of the black female athlete. If one casts a wider scope, a more ambiguous interpretation exists for African American women. African American periodicals celebrated black women's achievements in masculine sports like roller derby and wrestling with far less discussion of femininity than their white media counterparts.

Throughout the 1950s, African American women made up more than two-thirds of American women competing in track-and-field events. [82] More than any other sport, track garnered a "masculine" reputation; the 1950s Olympic committee even considered eliminating track events that were not considered "feminine." African American women's achievements in track reinforced the stereotype that black women were less womanly than their white counterparts. As Cahn observes, athletics could "affirm the dignity and capabilities of African American womanhood," but it could also play into stereotypes of black women as animalistic, primal, and mannish. [83] *Ebony* attempted to counteract

stereotypes of black female athletes. One 1955 article noted that track-and-field was slowly gaining more acceptance due to the international fame of many of the black female competitors. Moreover, fewer girls avoided the sport for fear of it making them “masculine freaks” and, as the article boasted, boys learned that a girl track star “can be as feminine as the china-doll type.” Frances Kaszubski, an Amateur Athletic Union official who supervised the American girls at the Pan-American games, additionally argued, “If more girls knew how to run ... fewer of them would be so awkward.”^[84] In this way, *Ebony* advertised that participation in track-and-field would not threaten a woman’s femininity, but rather could potentially add grace and poise.

Most white media outlets ignored female black track stars despite heralding their male counterparts as the answer to the Russians.^[85] The only female African American athlete to appear regularly in the white press was tennis champion Althea Gibson, whom one magazine described as “lanky” and as playing “with the slam-bang determination she once used fighting kids in Harlem.”^[86] Track speedster Wilma Rudolph appeared sporadically in *Life* magazine after her Olympic success in the 1960s. She was called “lissome” compared to her “hardy” Soviet competitors.^[87] Cahn notes that athletes of all ages and races received the most media praise when they met popular beauty ideals. ^[88] However, while Althea Gibson became the most popular black female athlete in the white press, she was certainly not heralded as being a beauty queen.

Despite the black press’s concerns regarding track-and-field, they did not appear dedicated to portraying other sports’ athletes as overtly feminine. Periodicals highlighted the achievements of female athletes in high-contact activities as varied as judo, wrestling, high diving, and speed skating. The mother of speed skating star Gayle Ann Fannin told *Ebony*, “when I realized she was determined to race, I gave up my dream of dainty, pretty costumes, stuck her in dungarees and told her to forget how she looked.”^[89] Female wrestling was an odd voyeuristic phenomenon popular in both black and white magazines in the postwar period. Magazine stories noted that while the majority of women spent hours perfecting glamour “in an effort to land a husband,” the wrestling rings around the country were filling with a new kind of woman who, forsaking femininity, spent her time building muscles instead. ^[90] Even

roller derby garnered attention. Although one headline noted that derby star, Quintina Cosby, “add[ed] glamour to rough, grueling indoor sport,” the photo essay pulled no punches, showing Cosby in various action poses, blocking, pushing, tripping, and tackling other players. The article continued, describing her as “[u]nusually strong and possess[ing] of real stamina” and that she had trained her body to take the “jolting body checks” common in the sport. Cosby’s coaches ranked her higher than most of the boys skating in New York’s Junior Roller Derby. [91]

Gloria Jean Thompson, a twenty-five year-old female boxer, appeared in a number of black periodicals. Purportedly she avoided marriage because it would not only interfere with her career, but because she was afraid “if I was married and my husband fouled up, I would hit him just like I do another fighter.”[92] However, to avoid rumors about her private life, Thompson never wore pants in public.[93] Baseball player Toni Stone became the first female to play on a professional baseball team in the Negro American League in 1953. *Ebony* reported that she was effective at the plate, “swinging a man-sized bat,” and her speed matched and surpassed many of her teammates, beating out many bunts. Her teammates, while acknowledging her gender, treated her no differently from the other players.[94] When Toni Stone appeared at a public event wearing a pink flowered dress, one on-looker marveled “I thought she’d be chewing tobacco and swearing like a man.”[95] Although black periodicals published articles guarding the femininity of track-and-field athletes, participants in other sports who appeared in the same magazines did not attract the same public relations feminine check-ups. Even stars in high-contact sports like martial arts, boxing, and wrestling were celebrated for their physical prowess with little concern about defending their femininity or physical beauty.

Conclusions

Cosmetics industry giant Helena Rubenstein is quoted to have famously said, “there are no ugly women, only lazy ones.” According to this, any woman can achieve beauty. But what Rubenstein ignored was whiteness. Black scholar Maxine Leeds Craig notes that not only did black women experience unequal access to education, housing, and job opportunities, they also “bore the shame of being women in unacceptable bodies.”[96] In the postwar period, black women sought magazines like *Ebony*, *Jet*, and others that spoke to their lived experiences. Black

beauty queens and magazine pin-up girls showed white America that black was beautiful, too. And because the average African American cover girl weighed more and had broader measurements than the typical white model, magazines fêted a more realistic body type. More importantly, unlike their white counterparts, black periodicals showed an open celebration of plus-size models, celebrities, and female athletes who did not conform to or fit white ideals of acceptable femininity.

Current scholarship takes for granted that the Black Power movement created racial pride within the African American community and invented the rejection of white beauty ideals. The study of black periodicals in the postwar era, however, reveals that even before the first black activists thrust their clenched fists into the air, African American women cried for beauty standards that were realistic, attainable, and truly representative of the person they saw in the mirror. This project inserts alternative populations outside of the dominant white, heterosexual norm to challenge the belief that the pursuit of beauty ideals has the democratic potential to unite all American women. The inclusion of African Americans suggests that while women may have exposure to cosmetic culture and mass media pressure, the response to these beauty myths in the postwar period was not monolithic.

Women are created in different shapes and sizes. No matter how much a woman naturally or artificially manipulates her body in order to obtain a specific ideal shape, there are some body types that will remain forever beyond her reach. The popularization and dissemination of model body ideals is dangerous. While beauty culture was never as oppressive as previous feminist writers have argued, the pursuit of the perfect body was not a uniform and unifying event for women. It is empowering and tempting to reinterpret and re-appropriate an industry that challenges women to change who they are. But the examination of beauty culture through the lens of body image, rather than cosmetics, demonstrates an absence of democratic benefits and qualities. Careful study demonstrates that African American women embodied and embraced a variety of forms in postwar America. This variety should be celebrated and mirrored in our world today.

[1] “No More Miss America! Ten Points of Protest,” in *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Random House, 1970), 521.

[2] For more on the pageant and its protest see Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women’s Liberation Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 184-187; Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain’t I a Beauty Queen?: Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3-18; and Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 173-179, 283.

[3] *Seventeen*, “Size-Wise Diet,” May 1969, 144.

[4] *Seventeen*, “Face to Face with Miss Black America,” March 1969, 151.

[5] For a comprehensive history, see Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting ’Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2006), Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Leonard Moore, *Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Peniel E. Joseph, ed., *The Black Power Movement: Re-thinking the Civil Rights–Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Peniel E. Joseph, ed., *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Cedric Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); and Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945–1990* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990).

[6] John H. Johnson, *Surviving the Odds* (New York: Warner Books, 1989), 156.

[7] Margorie Ferguson, *Forever Feminine: Women’s Magazine’s and the Cult of Femininity* (Exeter, NH: Heinemann, 1983), 85.

[8] Nowlie M. Rooks, *Ladies’ Pages: African American Women’s Magazines and the Culture That Made Them* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 89.

[9] For works addressing white women's bodies and beauty ideals in nineteenth-century America, see Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Knopf, 1983); Joan Jacob Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988); Frances B. Cogan, *All-American Girl: the Ideal of Real Womanhood in mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989); Alison Piepmeier, *Out in Public: Configurations of Women's Bodies in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Nancy M. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: The Biosocial Construction of Femininity* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996); and Jan Todd, *Physical Culture and the Body Beautiful: Purposive Exercise in the Lives of American Women, 1800-1870* (Macon, GA.: Mercer University Press, 1998).

[10] For the historical impact of beauty culture on white America, see Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Joan Jacob Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Random House, 1997); E. Mary Lisa Gavenas, *Color Stories: Behind the Scenes of America's Billion-Dollar Beauty Industry* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007); Dorothy Hoobler and Thomas Hoobler, *Vanity Rules: a History of American Fashion and Beauty* (Brookfield, CT: Twenty-First Century Books, 2000); Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998); Kerry Segrave, *Suntanning in 20th Century America* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Company, Inc., 2005); and Rachel C. Weingarten, *Hello Gorgeous!: Beauty Products in America, '40s-60s* (Collector's Press: Tigard, OR, 2006).

[11] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "Beyond the Sound of Silence: Afro-American Women's History," *Gender and History* 1, no 1. (1989): 50-67.

[12] Concerning African American women's beauty culture, especially in the post-World War II period, see Laila Haidarali, "Polishing Brown Diamonds: African American Women, Popular Magazines, and the

Advent of Modeling in Early Postwar America.” *Journal of Women’s History* 17 (2005): 10-37; Noliwe M. Rooks, *Ladies’ Pages: African American Women’s Magazines and the Culture That Made Them* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004); and Susannah Walker, *Style and Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920- 1975* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007). Scholars have paid particular attention to attitudes about African American women’s hair. See Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Styling Jim Crow: African American Beauty Training During Segregation* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2003); Ayana Byrd, *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001); and Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

[13] Korey Bowers Brown, “Ideals, Images, Identity: *Ebony* Magazine in an Age of Black Power, 1965-1970.” MA thesis. Vanderbilt University, 2000; Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain’t I a Beauty Queen?: Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Monika N. Gosin, “The Politics of African-American Women’s Beauty in *Ebony* Magazine: the 1960s and 1970s.” MA thesis, University of California-San Diego, 2004; Sue K. Jewell, *From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of US Social Policy* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Megan E. Williams, “The Crisis Cover Girl: Lena Horne, The NAACP, and Representations of African American Femininity, 1941-1945,” *American Periodicals* 16 (2006): 200-218.

[14] Peter Stearns, *Fat History: Bodies and Beauty in the Modern West* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 90-92.

[15] Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing, 1991), 272.

[16] The black middle class has always held a unique position in American society. Because of the economic uniformity of black society immediately after Emancipation, status groups based on community positions, rather than wealth, emerged. These status distinctions were based on characteristics such as manners and morals and connections to white ancestry rather than socio-economic class.[16] In the early 1900s,

however, a new black middle class emerged. When many white business professionals refused to provide basic services to African Americans, black America had to create their own. Occupations such as insurance providers, dentists, undertakers, realtors, and doctors formed the core of this growing minority class. Because of this socioeconomic diversity, the importance of status factors such as skin color and social links with whites declined. In the immediate postwar period, the black middle class expanded along with civil rights legislation that opened up additional occupations to black men and women as well as the new postwar affluence and consumption patterns. Indeed, this new black middle class doubled in size by the 1960s. For more on the new middle class see Mary Pattillo-McCoy. *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1999). Pattillo-McCoy challenges E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie: The Rise of a New Middle Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1957). Frazier's hypothesis that the black middle class mirrors the white middle class and has no cultural roots in either the black or white world has been widely contested in recent scholarship.

[17] John H. Johnson, *Surviving Against the Odds* (New York: Warner Books, 1989), 123.

[18] Korey Bowers Brown, "Ideals, Images, Identity: Ebony Magazine in an Age of Black Power, 1965-1970." MA thesis. Vanderbilt University, 2000, 3.

[19] *Ebony*, "Mission statement," November 1945, 1.

[20] For more on the early years of *Ebony*, see Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 129-177.

[21] *Ebony*, "Letters and Pictures to the Editor," January 1946, 51.

[22] *Ebony*, Advertisement, May 1946, 1.

[23] Ayana D. Byrd and Loris L. Tharps, *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 47.

[24] Susanna Walker, *Style and Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 129.

[25] Walker, 145.

[26] *Ebony*, "Letters to the Editor," January 1966, 4.

[27] *Ebony*, "Backstage," May 1946, 4.

[28] *Ebony*, Advertisement, November 1959, 39.

[29] *Ebony*, "Letters to the Editor," May 1948, 8.

[30] *Ebony*, "Miss Fine Brown Frame: Darkest Girl in Contest Wins First Prize," May 1947, 47.

[31] *Ebony*, "Letters to the Editor," August 1947, 4.

[32] Joanne Meyerowitz, "Women, Cheesecake, and Borderline Material: Responses to Girlie Pictures in the Mid-Twentieth Century U.S.," *Journal of Women's History* 8 (1996): 20.

[33] Marjorie Lee Bryer, "Pinups, *Playboy*, Pageants and Racial Politics, 1945-1966," PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2003.

[34] *Jet*, "Queen of Illini," November 22, 1951, 33.

[35] *Ebony*, "Teen-age Beauty with Brains," August 1964, 77-78.

[36] *Playboy*, "Dear Playboy," August 1964, 9.

[38] *Playboy*, "Dear Playboy," May 1964, 13.

[39] Dian Hanson, *Dian Hansen's The History of Men's Magazines*, Volume II (Los Angeles, CA: Taschen, 2004), 388, 392.

[40] *Duke*, "Duke Debut," June 1957, 2.

[41] *Duke*, "Introducing the Duchess of the Month," June 1957, 34.

[42] *Duke*, "Duchess of the Month," September 1957, 34.

[43] *Duke*, "Duchess of the Month," July 1957, 32-33.

[44] Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?*, 30.

[45] *Jet*, "Hollywood's Unknown Negro Beauties," November 22, 1951, 59.

[46] *Ebony*, "I Tried To Crash the Movies," August 1946, 6.

- [47] John Powers, "The Most Beautiful Negro Women in America," *Ebony*, November 1949, 44.
- [48] *Jet*, "What is the Perfect Figure?" June 26, 1952, 32-38.
- [49] *Ibid.*, 34-35.
- [50] *Ibid.*, 32-33.
- [51] *Ibid.*, 33-34.
- [52] *Ebony*, "Film Formula for Glamour," June 1948, 32.
- [53] *Ebony*, "Meet the Real Lena Horne," November 1947, 11.
- [54] *Ebony*, "I Tried Crashing the Movies," February 1946, 22.
- [55] *Ebony*, "Diets of the Stars: Wealthy or Poor, Famous or Unknown, Everybody is Trying to Lose Weight," May 1960, 106-110.
- [56] *Chicago Defender*, "Get on the Mark! Diet With a Fat Girl and Lose Pound a Day!" June 12, 1956, 14.
- [57] *Chicago Defender*, "Stay With It If You Want to Win: Keep on Liquids," August 16, 1956, 16.
- [58] Alice Lake, "Obesity: Rate Your Weight," *Seventeen*, May 1969, 187.
- [59] *Ibid.*
- [60] *Ibid.*, 124-130.
- [61] *Ebony*, "Letters to the Editor," October 1968, 24-25.
- [62] *Jet*, "Is Dieting Dangerous?" March 11, 1954, 30.
- [63] *Ibid.*, 29-30.
- [64] *Jet*, "Famous Fat Women," May 8, 1952, 56-63.
- [65] *Ebony*, "Big Maybell: Three Hundred Pounds of Rhythm and Blues," February 1955, 104.
- [66] *Ebony*, "The Biggest Act in Show Business," February 1951, 87-90.
- [67] *Ebony*, "The Supremes Make it Big," June 1965, 87.

- [68] *Jet*, "Ruth Brown: Best Voice Since Vaughan," January 31, 1952, 64.
- [69] *Ebony*, "June is Busting Out All Over," September 1946, 46-47.
- [70] *Life* "These are the Mamas," September 30, 1966, 77.
- [71] *Ebony*, "Styles for the Not-So-Thin," September 1948, 52.
- [72] *Jet*, "Will Dior's Bustline Be a Bust?" October 14, 1954, 38.
- [73] William Boone, "Will New 'Flat Look' Last Long?" *Jet*, April 7, 1960, 42.
- [74] *Ibid.*, 43.
- [75] *Jet*, "Bathing Suits Every Woman Can Wear," July 7, 1955, 38-41.
- [76] *Ebony*, "Covered Up," February 1964, 107.
- [77] *Life*, "New Young Styles: Emily Wilkens' Spring Designs are Kind to Plump Teen-agers," March 18, 1946, 87.
- [78] Dick West, "England Extracts Colonial Money," *Chicago Defender*, April 5, 1967, 14.
- [79] Ole Nosey, "Everybody Goes When the Wagon Comes," *Chicago Defender*, April 3, 1967, 14.
- [80] Monika N. Gosin, "The Politics of African-American Women's Beauty in *Ebony* Magazine: the 1960's and 1970's." MA essay, University of California, San Diego, 2004, 125.
- [81] Susan, K. Cahn, *Coming On Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sports* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998).
- [82] *Ibid.*, 120.
- [83] *Ibid.*, 121.
- [84] *Ebony*, "Fastest Women in the World: Fleet Track Lassies Win Fame at Mexico's Pan-American Games," May 1955, 27.
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