



## Naturals, News & You

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maLana t. ruminates on the natural hair styles ban implemented by the Baltimore Police Department.

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For most of my life, like many Black women, I've had relaxers that indirectly taught me to hate my natural hair. Like many, I regarded my cute coils as funky follicles. And like many Black women, I'm waking up.

After a season with kinky twist extensions, I tried to return to perms. But it didn't feel the same; it felt...unnatural. It was then that I realized the poisonous suffering I'd been putting my hair through all these years. Now I'm growing and enjoying my precious curls. I've learned to keep it healthy and soft, to love it as it is. But I've also learned that not everyone, Black or otherwise, can see the beauty in being natural.

One organization that has not only failed to see but has made it a criminal attribute is the Baltimore Police Department (BPD). In early December, I was alerted by Nappturality.com, a natural hair forum, that this department was instituting a "grooming" policy that banned certain natural hair styles. Listed as "extreme or fad," those prohibited included cornrows, dreadlocks and twists, all of which are natural hair styles primarily of African Americans. According to the BPD, these styles are unprofessional and are often worn by street criminals. This policy outraged many, and a successful petition was set up in response. As of December 31, 2006, the policy will be rewritten and re-introduced January 15, 2007.

There are two very big problems surrounding this incident. The first is how a policy obviously targeted toward Black hairstyles could be supported to the point of institution. This occurrence is further evidence that racism, though implicit, is still a common occurrence.

The second less apparent issue with this scenario is its lack of coverage in the Black community. Local news reported BPD's new policy, but why was such an obviously racist protocol confined only to Internet coverage? I myself only heard of the incident through a natural hair forum. Upon further research I found other blogs giving their two cents, but no formal Black news source had said anything on the issue. Perhaps racial discrimination by hair isn't high enough on the totem pole for coverage. Or maybe we as a Black community have become so complacent and accustomed to American society that such news merely solicits a "That's a shame!," as we continue about our day.

Either way, I'd have to agree: it really is a shame.