NO YOU CAN'T HAVE NAPPY

When I was 8 years old I had a classmate who came from a mixed background, her mother was white and her father was Black. One day I was over her house when her mother called her over so she could braid her hair. I watched as she separated the mass of curly fluffy hair on her head and braided 4 pig tails. "My mom could never do that to my hair," I commented as I touched the bo-bo secured around my tiny afro puff. To which her mother replied, "I don't know how she manages to do anything with your hair, I would die if my daughter had nappy hair like that." My feelings were hurt and I wasn't even sure why, what was wrong with my nappy hair?

Nappy is not the same type of N-word as nigger is. Historically nappy was a means of spitting on the phenotypically African nature of our hair. It was a way of separating African Americans from Europeans and it was a means of shame that we connected back to being a slave. When we existed as a Black society obsessed with European features, when we lived by hot combs and created straightening creams and chemicals, nappy was a means of signifying that we had ugly, slave like hair.

Black Girl Long Hair came out with an article today pointing out that the hashtag nappy was hijacked by white girls with messy bed head and unwashed hair. It was so… infuriating. To think that something else from Black culture had been columbsed yet again. But unlike cornrows and baby hairs, the term nappy carries a history of self hate that was instilled in Black people by European culture. Even worse is that the white women using nappy to refer to their hair are not using it as the positive adjective that we've adopted into Black culture, but instead are choosing to use it to describe undesirable hair.

Credit: OrganicBeautyTalk.com

Taking back nappy was a means of reclaiming pride in a natural thing. By nature our hair is nappy, kinky, and full of life. It battles us because it grows however it feels, and it doesn't like to be forced into unnatural states, and we work with it and love it because it's beautiful. Nappy is a celebration of accepting the beauty of our own hair, it's become a commonplace term in the Black community and even more so in the natural hair community. Nappy is a difficult term, it wasn't quick to be picked up and accepted, but once it was embraced it was a positive norm.

As a kid, growing up in an all white school had me begging my mother to rid me of my kinks. I hated my hair, it didn't hang or flip like all the white girl's hair did. All the characters in our books at school had long silky locks, and even the girls younger than me, just had all of this "pretty hair". Growing up with white people turned nappy into an ugly thing for me, until I was old enough to understand that my hair struggles were a part of my narrative, a part of finding and being me.

Nappy means kinky and coily, and natural, and when used to refer to hair as such, it is a celebrated word. When nappy is used as a negative connotation by anyone it's an issue, regardless of race. When you try to take something we fought to accept and make positive and use it as a negative, in a pejorative nature, or in reference to something undesirable you are making an effort to look down on and disrespect a part of a culture. Ignorance is not an excuse, just like ignorance of the history of black face is not an excuse for its use. If your hair is unwashed and unkempt, then those are the words to use when you want to describe it. Nappy is not dirty, it is not ugly, and it is not bed head. It is not the ugly insult Europeans leveraged against us as slaves and it is not a word to be claimed by those who don't understand it's meaning. So no you may not have nappy, the Santa Maria can sail right on by.