

# AU NATUREL

## PERSONAL AND SALON UPDATES

It's been a minute since my last missive. I tried to put things together at the end of February; but, the vibe was off. For the past four months, I've been to Asheville, Atlanta, Columbia, SC, Florida and many places in between. It's the first time I've had the opportunity to travel with my husband during his job site visits. I've enjoyed the time immensely which explains much of my absenteeism. In December, I transitioned from being an employee of Family Health Ministries to being a board member. I now work for an international non-profit doing maternal and child health work in West Africa. Yes, I said West Africa!! My appointment to the position materialized in late March and I'm elated. I've waited my entire professional career to do international development work in West Africa. It's why I majored in French in college. In fact, my husband and I met at UVA in a class called "Planning in US vs. Third World/Developing Nations." It's the only class we ever took together. West Africa was always my target region of the world in which to work, as it is the connection to my ancestors. I've pushed in this direction many times over the years; but, the opportunity never came. And now at age 50, the clouds have opened and I'm blessed with my heart's desire. When I took the job at FHM, I thought that was the dream! I gave up salary and benefits because I felt that God told me to. Well, I just got it ALL BACK!! And without the FHM experience, I would never have qualified for my current position. At the time of writing this update, I have little information about what lies ahead; but, I will pursue this passion with aplomb. I had honestly given up on the dream. I had accepted my fate and was content with life. And then came the unexpected. Needless to say, I'm informing my regular clients who are all elated. I'll continue with work and salon life as I always have; but when I'm out of the country a few times out of the year, I will refer clients to others in the salon or schedule them after my return. I'm hopeful that I'll have lots of interesting stories to share as the months unfold, as I will ever be viewing the world with the eyes of a naturalista and with a natural attitude. Life is good, even with it takes 30 years to realize your dream! We give thanks!



## What happens to a dream deferred? By Langston Hughes

Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore-And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over-like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.  
*Or does it explode?*

**Response:** Sometimes, it encloses itself in a cocoon...seemingly dormant and re-emerges as a butterfly! Give thanks for all that comes. It is surely preparation for another phase of the journey, no matter how difficult the road may be.

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*This is the type of love that we need within our communities to overcome the struggles of yesterday, today and tomorrow. This mother is a truly a divine inspiration. Her faith is indomitable! I am amazed every time I see grace in action. She is truly the hand of God.*



## A Relaxer by any other name would smell as...

A Commentary on Relaxers, natural-laxers and everything in between.

Within the salon, I've had a recent spate of requests from prospective clients (Black and White) who have asked me to help them "soften their curls." In their words, "I don't want a relaxer." But, the spirit of their words is undeniable. I can "soften their curl" by blow-drying their hair straight, but that's not what they're asking for. They want a "softening" that will outlast the shampoo bowl. My response is and ever will be the same: We don't provide relaxer services. They then probe further, concluding that I don't know the specific procedure that they are requesting, because it's not a relaxer. But, a hair softener, is a texturizer, is a relaxer, is a conk. It doesn't matter what era of history you're referring to, the chemicals concocted or the nomenclature used. Softening the curl of African (or any other) hair is a chemical process and we don't provide this service. While we have reached a point in American history where we are acknowledging that Black women and White women have similar style challenges (i.e. the desire for bone straight hair), our philosophy remains unchanged. Relaxers smell horrible and are damaging to the hair and the psyche. I don't want them in my salon. All the same, companies are working overtime to address this desire with as minimal damaging effects as possible. There are products that you can comb into the hair and leave on for a short time that will loosen the curl. A Caucasian sister who is a stylist recently told me about one. Our discussion began with her asking me to put tracks in her hair for length in the back. I acknowledged that her hair was thick enough in the back to cover the tracks, so it is definitely do-able for a temporary style change. The biggest challenge would be matching her color and texture. Well when I approached the subject of hair texture, she expounded on a new product that she had purchased to soften her curl pattern. She followed, "I'd love for you to put that in first and then the tracks." Suddenly, I was faced with a dilemma because while we provide extension services, which are temporary, we do not provide permanent relaxer services, no matter how benign they may appear. Women like change, so we like to be flexible. But, if you're hating on your hair, I'm not going to help you with that! There are many other sisters in the game who will happily oblige you. So, I gracefully exited the hair discussion with an explanation of our salon philosophy and changed the subject. So to all the forces in the universe bringing this energy of compromise to my doorstep, know this: I'm not the one. Embrace the beauty of you.



### GUN RIGHTS?

*"A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."*

**Second Amendment of the Constitution**

*"I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and Constitutions. But laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind.*

*As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy as civilized society to remain under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors."*

**Thomas Jefferson**

## THE GUN DEBATE WHAT'S IT REALLY ABOUT?

Whenever I hear people use the words "gun rights", it always feels like an oxymoron to me. As a child, I always believed that to kill (or even to think of killing) someone is an unpardonable sin. As we know that assault weapons and handguns are not designed for hunting animals, I'm real suspicious of what all the fuss is about. Yet strangely, it's many Christians among us who are the most avid advocates for gun rights. It is because of rich contradictions such as this one that many [Black parishioners are abandoning White mainstream churches in droves](#). Hypocrisy is an abomination that cannot hold up to the litmus test of social, political or moral correctness. The current Administration has brought out many contradictions in the views of stated Christians. But sometimes, we simply must allow the chaos to reign so that we can live in the true reality of our society and not just the Never-never land of lore. The truth is a frightening one. So much so, that the children seem to be the visionaries of our society. Gun advocates say that they want guns to defend our nation from foreign aggressors and from tyranny from within. But since the birth of the nation, African-Americans as a group have been tyrannized by individual rights to bear arms as demonstrated in the [Tulsa Race Riots](#), [Rosewood](#), the [Wilmington Insurrection](#) and ethnic cleansing in [Corbin, Kentucky](#). And the Christians who remained silent (while others instigated these abuses years ago) are not so different from the many Christians of today who are silent when unarmed Black youth are gunned down and who seek to be gun *right* rather than gun *righteous*. The Sankofa symbol of Ghana is often interpreted to mean "look to the past to inform the future." What does America's past tell us about the gun rights debate? I, for one, am uncomfortable with the unspoken silence that surrounds these discussions. The truth hurts; but, the nature of the silence is deafening. In the meantime, I'll continue to [breath](#).



*Take Home Messages from the Black Panther Film*

**Black iconography is lucrative in the film industry when it places Blacks in less than subservient, nihilistic or secondary roles.** Blacks have been cast in the roles of the White characters of the Black Panther movie since the dawn of the film industry and no one's batted an eye at this imagery. Yet, we felt almost sorry for the way that our White brothers were portrayed in the movie because they were White men in a Black man's world. And they looked extremely greedy or very weak. Isn't that how Blacks are often portrayed in film industry? It's time for a more balanced view of world history and of social reality.

**Black consciousness, like all other social belief systems, is on a continuum. The battle between reform and revolution is an eternal one.** In the late 1800s to early 1900s, the debate raged between a more assimilationist-minded Booker T. Washington, a more moderate Dr. W.E.B. Dubois and revolutionary-minded Marcus Mosiah Garvey. In the 1950s, the debate was between Dr. King and Rev. Malcolm X. Because I'm a revolutionary at heart, I was indifferent when Killmonger tossed T'Challa over the waterfall. I looked at my husband and said, "Bye!" That's how much I wanted the N'Jobu vision of an African future to thrive. The struggle can be tiring, and we can feel lost and impatient. But like T'Challa's resurrection, we must nurture and maintain the strength to rise above adversity to carry on for future generations with our beliefs, our values and our integrity intact.

**The subservience of women to men is not necessarily an African worldview, as many of these societies are matrilineal.** African women have always carried their weight and don't seek to be rescued. Cinderella, Snow White and Rapunzel taught us to think with these European values which are not our own. As my South African friend from college once told me: 'A wife is highly valued in our culture. So much so, that a man must pay lobolo (dowry) to get one. In Britain, families pay a dowry to the male to get rid of the burden of their women. This is not the African way.' I saw this notion of equality etched on the walls of Kemetic tombs and temples. We must reawaken to the reality of the African social norms and traditions which serve to strengthen the family. Because in the modern Black world, women rule...though seemingly from the shadows. Look within your own home and know the truth.




## The Panther Awakening

### A Historical Fact Check

The allure of Black Panther over the past two months has been undeniable and frankly spell-binding. ([This manifestation of Wakanda solidarity is my personal favorite.](#)) Who knew there was such a hunger for a truly honest portrayal of black power and black genius? It's surely long overdue. Did you know that Africans are the most educated group in America? These ideas are not mythology. They are simply the reclaiming of our status in the world—a reminder of the possibilities for today. We ate it up!! I must truly give Stan Lee his props for being such an iconoclastic and visionary genius in the comic genre. But, I must correct a historical reference about the Black Panther that is incorrect. I've seen an FP post circulating which credits Stan Lee with coming up with the image of the Black Panther in April of 1966 while Bobby Seale came up with the Black Panther party in October of 1966. My people, Marvel doesn't get THAT much credit. [The image of the Black Panther as a social movement within the African American community began in 1965 with Stokely Carmichael.](#) He was conducting a voter registration drive in Lowndes County Alabama and wanted a symbol to represent the new movement. After deliberating with activists within the community, the Black Panther symbol was selected as the symbol of the movement. ([See the March 19<sup>th</sup> Townhall meeting with Bernie Sanders](#) to hear about some of the challenges that Lowndes County still faces today!) It is this image which was later borrowed by Bobby Seale (and Stan Lee) to represent "black power." And if you want to go further back in history, please reference my [November issue of AuNaturel](#) to learn more about the ancient African meaning of this black power symbol.

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*Embrace the beauty of you.*

## Musical Interlude

### A Salute to Motherhood

I've honestly been very busy of late. So, I've not taken the time to commune with nature and with the spirit of love as I am want to do. I miss the fragrant careess of a warmand gentle breeze as I bend my ear to hear a mockingbird's serenade. Sometimes when I'm less reserved and self-aware, I sing or whistle for the birds so that they know their chansons are well received. Music is a divine gift. So, for today's musical interlude, I reflect on the work that is ongoing within the Western Region of the African Continent with the purpose of improving maternal and child health outcomes . For a time, I am called to march with champions abroad and imagine a beautiful day when quality health care is a right for everyone. Even within the US, that dream is not realized. Yet, we strive for greater than what we are. Please enjoy three beautiful sonnets which are a joyous salute to motherhood through [faith](#), [hope](#) and [love](#). May we all experience the purity and honesty which underlies their expression.

*Embrace the beauty of you.*

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