Black No More: Skin Bleaching and the Emergence of New Negro Womanhood Beauty Culture

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Abstract

This article examines the usage of skin bleaching products and processes among some African American women in the urban upper south in the United States during the early twentieth century. Numerous African American women invested in these products and processes as means to shed vestiges of enslavement and to configure "urbane" and "modern" identities. More specifically, as African American women exercised their ability to function as consumer citizens, manufacturers and advertisers built upon prevailing beauty aesthetics among whites and on a black intra-racial beauty standard that posited dark skin as inferior. By exploring the history of skin lightening in this particular community, I uncover a politics of appearance that intersected with white cultural hegemony as well as gendered discourses about urban black modernity and social mobility. Although pre-Emancipation enslaved and freedwomen struggled against the devaluation of their darker hues, the privileging of white skin imparted lasting effects on African American beauty culture and intra-racial class and color politics. Some African Americans internalized beauty aesthetics that privileged whiteness. Among African American women in the urban upper south, skin bleaching rose in popularity during the early twentieth century. I discuss what factors led to this rise in popularity such as the desires of some African American women to perform urban modernity and to participate in the public sphere as consumer citizens through the purchasing and usage of products associated with fashioning a "New Negro" self. Beauty culture, and in particular, discourse surrounding skin bleaching, served as sites for competing ideals and perspectives regarding the aesthetics of New Negro womanhood.

Keywords: New Negro, black women, skin lightening, beauty, aesthetics, modernity

Introduction

Understand, we do not advertise this bleach to make one white.
God alone can accomplish this, and it would be miraculous.[1]

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, skin bleaching products and procedures became increasingly popular in African American communities across the United States. Many African American newspapers and periodicals carried numerous advertisements for these products and procedures in their consumer sections. Although skin bleaching/lightening had a long history in African American communities in the U.S., the formalization of a racially-specific consumer marketplace during the Progressive and New Negro eras created opportunities for manufacturers and sellers to target new, potential customers. The rhetoric extant in these advertisements trumpeted whiteness and or lightness as preferential and aesthetically desirable. Advertisers marketed their skin bleaching products and processes to African American communities throughout the United States. African American women in urban centers became central to advertising discourses. African American men participated in various arenas of beauty culture, however, beauty culture existed as a feminized space. Through purchasing a skin bleach cream or a bar of complexion soap, New Negro women in the U.S. embraced their fledgling status as consumer citizens and contributed to broader discussions about the interplay of race, class, color, gender, aesthetics, urbanity and modernity.

At the core of the New Negro Movement was a desire for a re-creation of self, both individually and collectively. New Negroes acted upon this desire for re-creation through reconfiguring aesthetic and cultural traditions. African Americans engaged in new practices and aesthetic discourses with an unprecedented sense of possibility for self-determination and autonomy. Through the altering, adorning, and maintenance of physical appearance, African Americans could literally reconstruct and refashion themselves and create new models of black aesthetic identity.[2] Aesthetic practices were integral to African Americans in shedding the vestiges of enslavement and for asserting their place within the modern world.

African American women, in particular participated in urban consumer culture as a means to recover and to restyle themselves as claimants of modernity. I conceive of New Negro Womanhood as a space in which black women

struggled against interracial and intra-racial political and cultural currents to claim a distinct voice and place within the modern world.[3] New Negro cultural productions, as Erin Chapman argues, were "disseminated through the powerful arbiter of white supremacist understandings and capitalist exploitation."[4] Among the culture industries that achieved prominence in black urban communities, the beauty industry emerged as a site, arbitrated by white cultural hegemony. This industry could not escape the racism and sexism that pervaded the New Negro era. White beauty ideals and trends within U.S. beauty culture played integral roles in the formation and growth of a nationalized, black beauty culture.

The privileging of white/light skin predominated African American beauty culture throughout the New Negro era. In this article, I will examine the usage of skin bleaching products and processes among African American women in Washington, D.C. during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By exploring the history of skin lightening in this particular community, I uncover a politics of appearance that intersected with white cultural hegemony as well as gendered discourses about urban black modernity and social mobility. Moving from a brief history of skin bleaching and lightening in African American communities in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to an analysis of a localized advertising discourse that emerged during the New Negro era, I explore the relationship between New Negro womanhood, skin bleaching, and white cultural hegemony.

New Negro Washington

Black migrants moving from the deep South envisioned greater opportunity and more possibilities for themselves and their families in northern, Midwestern, and upper South cities.[5] In cities in these regions, African Americans also had greater access to emergent technologies associated with an evolving mass media-based consumer culture. What drew black women migrants to Washington in particular were the educational and employment opportunities as well as established black-owned businesses that catered to African Americans. The relative availability of job opportunities encouraged continuous migration of African Americans to the District of Columbia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."[6] Opportunities did not erase the presence of racism or sexism. The horrors of racial violence and economic oppression affected the lives of African American urban communities. Nevertheless, many African Americans viewed the overall living conditions in cities such as the nation's capital as preferable to conditions in the deep South. Additionally, industrialization and

urbanization were making cities more appealing to several groups of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds. The expansion of the mass communications industry and interstate commerce at the turn of the twentieth century catalyzed unprecedented economic growth that catered to a growing Progressive Era penchant for consumption. The burgeoning black beauty industry, which connected to those larger economic changes, offered African American women both professional prospects and new cultural opportunities.

The nation's capital experienced a significant influx of African American women post-Emancipation. Between 1860 and 1930, the population of African American women in the District of Columbia increased by over 800 percent. The federal census of 1860 reported a total of 8,402 black women in Washington. In 1890, the federal census counted 41,581 black women in the nation's capital; by 1930, there were 69,843 black women.[7] New York and Chicago experienced similar trends in the growth of their black populations from 1890-1930. However, black migration to Washington between 1860 and 1900 had equally profound demographic implications as African American migration to the city during the early twentieth century. By 1957, Washington became the first major city where African Americans comprised a racial majority. The rapidly growing population of African Americans in Washington resulted in Washington becoming an intellectual and cultural capital for African America. African Americans in Washington contributed to a burgeoning New Negro ethos that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century and thrived through the 1930s. African American women in Washington were at the forefront of reimagining and redefining black womanhood during the New Negro era, and African American beauty culture was central to this re-imagination.[8]

A Brief History of African American Beauty Culture

The origins of the modern black beauty industry predate its emergence a national, black consumer market. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed the development of products specifically for African Americans and the rapid growth of beauty salons and cosmetology schools in black communities. Beauty practices, intra-racial and interracial ideas about the physical appearance of black women (most notably their hair texture and skin color), and an informal African American beauty market existed since the arrival of African women as chattel to the United States.[9] This aesthetic subculture encompassed folk traditions, intergenerational exchanges between black women, and the survival techniques black women used to maintain their appearances

under the harsh conditions of enslavement. Enslaved and impoverished black women were more limited in their grooming choices than free African American women because they did not have access to or could not afford to purchase skincare products or services. Many of these women also faced a constant struggle to attend to their physical appearance because of the lack of time they had to groom themselves as a result of their extremely demanding labor schedules.

From its inception, African American beauty culture was simultaneously syncretic and adaptive. White manufacturers, which dominated the beauty culture industry, however, relied on white cultural ideals in product development and marketing throughout the nineteenth century. These manufacturers used prevailing white aesthetic tastes to target African American men and women with the ability to purchase beauty products. Both enslaved and free black women confronted white cultural dominance and beauty norms that degraded and dehumanized black women. White Americans and eventually, some African Americans perceived the features of enslaved and free black women as physically unattractive and as indicative of the "inherent" primal, animalistic, and lascivious tendencies of peoples of African descent. Advertisements for slaves and slave auctions illustrate the racist and sexist notions that shaped America's white cultural imaginary, in which conceptions about physicality, physical features, and the capacity for labor intersected. Slave traders focused on gender and skin color to lure potential buyers into purchasing human merchandise. Light-skinned, black women were marketed as "Negroes fit for domestic service" within their masters' homes.[10] Slave traders often communicated the idea that light-skinned blacks' closer proximity to whiteness in their physical appearance rendered them comparatively more attractive to slave owners in search of slaves to work in their homes than darker-skinned blacks. Notwithstanding the privileging of lighter skin within an imperious racial-social hierarchy, light-skinned African Americans could not escape negative racial stereotypes. White skin remained the pinnacle of physical beauty in the United States. Consequently, white cultural hegemony of the nineteenth century imparted lasting effects on African American beauty culture and class and color politics within the black community. [11]

Prior to Emancipation, many African Americans associated light skin with greater freedom and opportunity as well as with membership in an elite class of African Americans. Some free African American women were of both European (white) and African (black) descent, and subsequently certain phenotypical features, including lighter skin, represented freedom to enslaved and

impoverished African Americans. While not accepted fully by whites, free African American women often attained comparatively more social and economic freedoms than enslaved women. Many of the African American elite in Washington, arguably because of their mixed-race heritage had lighter skin. For many of them, their skin color in its unaltered state was the ideal to which thousands of African Americans strove to achieve. The physical appearance of the "Negro Elite" became integral to an African American politics of appearance that intersected with ideas about African American possibility and the fashioning of a New Negro identity. According to black beauty scholars Ayana Byrd and Lori Tharps, "by the time slavery was officially abolished in 1865, 'good' hair and light skin had become the official keys to membership in the Negro elite," although exceptions were made based upon educational attainment and occupation.[12] Free African American women were the foremothers of the "Negro Elite" class that continued to grow after Emancipation.[13]

The ideal of light and white skin were foundational to how white manufacturers who dominated the African American beauty industry throughout the nineteenth century created and marketed racially-specific beauty products and how some African Americans consumed beauty products. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, white-owned companies manufactured and sold skin care products that claimed to lighten and whiten black skin. These advertisements appeared in African American periodicals and reified lighter skin as both "American" and modern beauty ideals. Freedwomen were the prime consumers of these products.[14] A small market for skin care products for the African American elite in D.C. emerged in the 1840s and 1850s. Among black Washington women of all classes, skin-lightening continued to flourish after emancipation and well into the twentieth century.[15] These beauty practices often reflected the aspirations of some Washington women to adhere to prevailing beauty norms and to escape the vestiges of "physical blackness," which located them at the bottom of the U.S. beauty hierarchy and connected them to their past as slaves or poor workers. Attempting to escape their cultural past and their labor identities, some African American women migrating to Washington in the late nineteenth century mimicked styling choices and practices of D.C.'s African black and white women. Dark skin was not viewed as attractive or modern within certain elite circles in Washington and within the U.S. more broadly. Consequently, the racially-specific enterprise of African American skincare that emerged post-Emancipation honed in on a racial-social-class-color-gender hierarchy that devalued dark skin and that further solidified the primacy of physical whiteness.

The Formalization of White Cultural Hegemony in African American Beauty Culture

African American beauty culture became more formalized in urban centers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the African American press and interstate commerce. It also built upon much of the racial, gender, and color hierarchies that flourished in pre-Emancipation consumer markets for beauty products. The leading black periodicals in D.C. captured this explosion in their frequent publication of advertisements for beauty products and services.[16] Advertisements for skin lightening products such as Black-No-More (a skin bleach/lightener), Ozono: Electric Skin Refiner (a skin lightening product), The Chemical Wonder Company of New York Products (a line of products for both skin lightening and hair straightening), Scott's Face Bleach and Beautifier (skin bleaching products), Imperial Whitener (skin bleach), Mme. Turner's Mystic Face Bleach (skin bleach), and Black Skin Remover (a skin bleach/lightener) frequently recurred throughout the New Negro era. Thousands of advertisements for skin bleaching and lightening products and services ran in *The Colored American* and *The Washington Bee*, two of the most prominent African American newspapers in Washington from 1880-1920.[17] Numerous "skin care" manufacturers and businesses advertised in Washington's leading African American periodicals during the New Negro era; most of these manufacturers marketed skin bleaching/lightening products and services.

Primarily patronized by the city's nationally recognized black elite class, the periodicals were also read by poor and working-class African Americans. Hundreds and eventually thousands of African Americans in Washington became sellers, entrepreneurs, customers, and business owners within African American beauty culture during the New Negro era.[18] African American beauty culture unfolded and evolved on the pages of newspapers and journals. The majority of advertisements encouraged black women to look more like their white or bi-racial female counterparts. African American beauty culture manufacturers—a group comprised of white men and women as well as African American men and women—promoted skin lightening as a vehicle for social mobility. Because of the substantial population of African Americans in Washington, beauty culture manufacturers flooded African American Washington newspapers with advertisements for their racially-specific products and services throughout the New Negro era.

Many of the earliest advertisements in African American periodicals in Washington reveal the centrality of white cultural hegemony to African American beauty culture. From a business standpoint, the African American elite had a greater ability to indulge in conspicuous consumption, and more specifically, in the purchasing of products and services for aesthetic purposes. Additionally, the embracing of white beauty standards and those standards' connection to social and economic mobility by some African Americans in Washington structured the predominating discourse of both national and local African American beauty cultures. Manufacturers and sellers placed advertisements in publications that widely circulated in middle and upper class African American communities and built upon the existing perception, that African American women desired lighter skin.

In the February 15th, 1902 edition of *The Colored American*, an advertisement highlighted the predominant discourse that shaped national African American beauty culture in its formative years. The advertisement for a Black Skin Remover: A Wonderful Face Bleach presents a product manufactured in Richmond, Virginia.[19] Many of manufacturers of African American beauty products remained in southern states throughout the era of the Great Migration.[20] African Americans in cities from the 1890s onward comprised a significant portion of the consumer base for African American beauty products. Black publications became the vehicle through which manufacturers could reach a national audience with their products. Informal exchanges of beauty products and techniques among African Americans in different regions of the United States occurred before the Great Migration, but these exchanges became formalized as African Americans populated urban areas throughout the Upper South, Northeast, and Midwest and as African American publications with space for advertisers circulated more widely.

BLACK SKIN REMOVER.

A Wonderful Face Bleach,

AND HAIR STRAIGHTENER.

Both in a box for $1, or three boxes for $2. Guaranteed to do what we say and to be the "best in the world." One box is all that is required if used as directed.

A WONDERFUL FACE BLEACH.

A PEACH-LIKE complexion obtained if used as directed. Will turn the skin of a black or brown person four or five shades lighter, and a mulatto person perfectly white. In forty-eight hours a shade or two will be noticeable. It does not turn the skin in spots but bleaches out white, the skin remaining beautiful without continual use. Will remove wrinkles, freckles, dark spots, pimples or bumps or black heads, making the skin very soft and smooth. Small pox pits, tan, liver spots removed without harm to the skin. When you get the color you wish, stop using the preparation.

THE HAIR STRAIGHTENER.

that goes in every one dollar box is enough to make anyone's hair grow long and straight, and keeps it from falling out. Highly perfumed and makes the hair soft and easy to comb. Many of our customers say one of our dollar boxes is worth ten dollars, yet we sell it for one dollar a box. THE NO-SMELL thrown in free.

Any person sending us one dollar in a letter or Post-Office money order, express money order or registered letter, we will send it through the mail, postage prepaid; or if you want it sent C. O. D., it will come by express, 25c extra.

In any case where it fails to do what we claim, we will return the money or send a box free of charge. Packed so that no one will know contents except receiver.

CRANE AND CO.,
122 West Broad Street,
RICHMOND, VA.

***The Colored American*, February 15th, 1902**

The advertisement for Black Skin Remover champions the product's ability to make black skin several shades whiter and mulatto skin "perfectly white." The "before" and "after" images used in the advertisement display a stark transformation of dark skin to white skin. While boasting other "positive" effects such as the removal of wrinkles and pimples, the most significant selling point of the face bleach was its ability to achieve whiteness for its purchaser. Toward the end of the advertisement, the manufacturer notes that the product will be sent to the consumer in a way in which, the contents of the package would be known only to the consumer. Despite the popularity of skin-lightening processes among some African Americans, this small section of the advertisement suggests a potential backlash from African Americans who viewed skin lightening/whitening as an anti-black cultural practice. It also suggests that consumers of skin lightening products desired a transformation that appeared "natural" and not achieved through usage of products.

On the same page of the advertisement for Black Skin Remover is an advertisement for another skin bleaching product, Hartona Face Bleach. Similar to the advertisement for Black Skin Remover, the Hartona Remedy Company claims that its face bleach "will gradually turn the skin of a black or dark person five or six shades lighter, and will turn the skin of a mulatto person almost white."[21] The advertisement also promises that the face bleach will be "sent securely sealed from observation." Both advertisements capture the effects of white cultural hegemony on African American beauty culture as well as the existence of African Americans opposing the consumption and usage of skin bleaching products and processes. Through the advertising culture that emerged in Washington's African American press, physical whiteness was constructed as the ideal to which African American women should strive. Notably, the advertisements focus on African American and "mulatta" women as consumers. African American men also consumed these products, however, throughout the New Negro era, advertisers primarily targeted African American women and identified African American beauty culture as a feminized space. At the expense of the devaluation of their skin colors, African American women became the central figures of a racially-specific aesthetic-based enterprise that responded to perceived and real desires for social mobility and aesthetic valuation within a cultural hierarchy premised upon white cultural hegemony.

***The Colored American*, February 15th, 1902**

Similar advertisements promoting skin bleaching ran in *The Washington Bee* throughout the early twentieth century. An advertisement for a skin bleaching product manufactured by The Chemical Wonder Company of New York ran almost weekly for the entire first decade of the century. The advertisement combined many of the ideas perpetuated in African American beauty discourse about black skin and hair.[22] The seven "chemical wonders" depicted in the advertisement promise to make African Americans more attractive through lightening their skin and straightening their hair. Although the advertisement targeted both African American women and men, the "benefits" for black women were greater in number. The ad for the "seven wonders" system states that women using their products would "occupy higher positions socially and commercially, marry better, get along better."[23] The manufacturers of the "chemical wonders" explicitly connect their products with African American women achieving a higher or "preferred" status through their physical appearance and with entering into the consumer marketplace as modern, commercially viable subjects and participants.

This advertisement also implied that African American women did or should value marriage and respectable social affiliations. Another striking part of this advertisement was its broader claim about the importance of beauty culture. The Chemical Wonders Company claims that, "white people spend millions to beautify themselves." This particular statement implies that African Americans should similarly function as modern, consumer citizens. The advertisement also avers that "colored people should make themselves as attractive as possible." This attractiveness, according to the Chemical Wonders Company of New York, could be achieved through lightening the skin and straightening the hair of African Americans. Additionally, the "seven wonders" advertisement illuminates the parallel beauty industries that thrived as well as racially-specific markets that similarly heralded "beautification" as a means to social mobility and individual and collective progress. The insertion of information about white beauty culture revealed the continuing effects of white cultural hegemony on African American beauty culture that lasted well into the early twentieth century.[24]

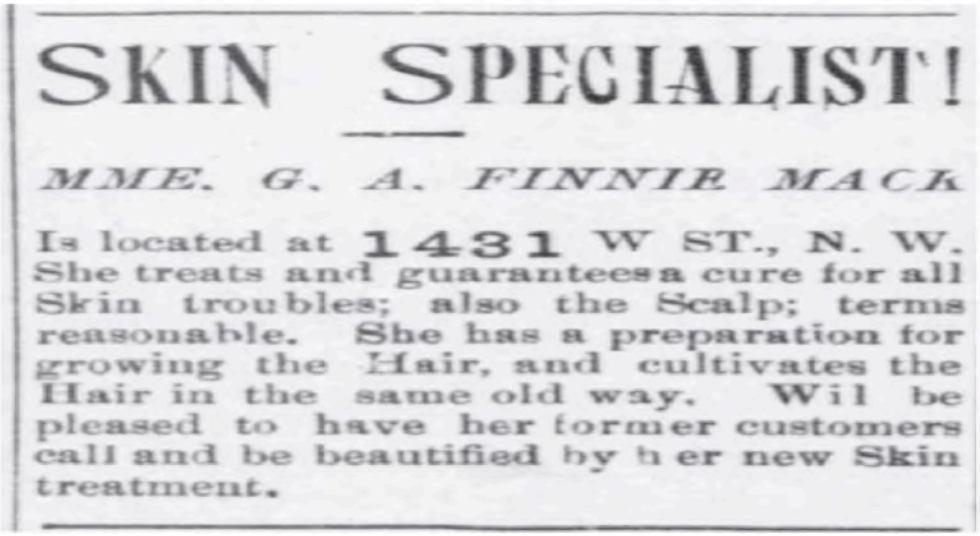
From its inception, the editor of *Washington Bee*, Calvin Chase "spoke out against racism and the internecine elitism of color-consciousness."[25] Chase personally spoke out on the negative impact of colorism in black Washington as well in African America more broadly. Seemingly oppositional to Chase's anti-colorism standpoint were the abundance of advertisements for skin lightening products and techniques in the *Bee*.[26] Nearly all of advertisements for skin care

products and services in the *Washington Bee* promoted skin lightening and bleaching, and consequently, reveal an editorial hypocrisy with regards to colorism. The advertisements contradicted one of the *Bee*'s founding principle of debunking the "elitism of color-consciousness."

Skin bleaching/lightening practices and products were not without detractors in Washington. One of the most notable proponents of a beauty culture who challenged white cultural hegemony was Nannie Helen Burroughs. Founder of the National Training School for Girls and Women (located in Washington), Burroughs explicitly connected the practices of skin lightening to white emulation. In her 1904 essay, "Not Color But Character," Burroughs asserts that, "If Negro women would use half of the time they spend on trying to get White, to get better, the race would move forward."[27] Like Burroughs, many African American women rejected the idealization of white beauty norms by criticizing the predominance of advertisements for skin lightening products and processes. *Half-Century Magazine*, headed by an African American woman editor-in-chief, Katherine Williams ran editorials and stories from black women that mirrored Burroughs' position. A particularly scathing critique, titled "Betrayers of the Race," appeared in the February 1920 edition of the magazine.[28] Editorials such as this served as the rhetorical foundation for the anti-skin bleaching "movement" in cities across the United States.

Within Washington's prominent African American newspapers and periodicals there did exist a small space for African American beauty culturists not selling skin bleaching products or processes. An 1899 advertisement in the *Colored American* exemplifies a particular segment of African American beauty culture targeted black women as potential customers for skin care, not skin lightening products. This short ad championed the local skincare and hair services of Madame G.A. Finnie Mack.[29] A "Skin Specialist" based in the predominantly black U Street corridor neighborhood of Washington, Madame Mack guaranteed to treat and cure "all Skin troubles," within reasonable terms.[30] In this ad, black beautification became synonymous with the health and well-being of the skin and hair. Madame Mack did not mention hair straightening or skin lightening products, but spoke vaguely about skin treatments that beautified and hair treatments that cultivated hair growth. Although many of the skin lightening advertisements in African American newspapers affirmed that their skin products addressed the health of African American women's hair and skin, their primary focus was championing lighter skin and straighter hair. Local beauty culturists such as Madame Mack placed their advertisements of African

American beauty products and services in a burgeoning discourse about black women's health and its connection to her overall appearance.[31]


SKIN SPECIALIST!

MME. G. A. FINNIE MACK

Is located at 1431 W ST., N. W. She treats and guarantees a cure for all Skin troubles; also the Scalp; terms reasonable. She has a preparation for growing the Hair, and cultivates the Hair in the same old way. Wil be pleased to have her former customers call and be beautified by h er new Skin treatment.

***The Colored American*, February 20th, 1899**

In response to the rapidly growing population of African American women and the increasingly diverse tastes of these women, a locally-based black beauty industry evolved. In neighborhoods such as Georgetown, Anacostia, LeDroit Park, and Howard University/Shaw, African Americans could patronize African American-owned salons that catered to African American women. The localized expansion of the black beauty industry in Washington paralleled the growth of beauty industries throughout the United States, specifically as it pertained to African American women. Advertisements for black women beauty culturists, black-owned salons, black women-manufactured products, and home-based businesses shared space in local black periodicals with established beauty products for skin lightening. In Washington papers such as the *Bee*, these advertisements captured the ethos of an African American women's subculture within African American beauty culture. Within the advertising sections, however, this black women's beauty subculture occupied a relatively marginal space in comparison to the subculture that lauded skin lightening.

Beauty culture provoked contentious discussions throughout the 1920s. Prominent African American intellectuals, activists, artists, and writers such as W.E.B Du Bois, Alain Locke, Mary Church Terrell, Zora Neal Hurston, and Marcus Garvey debated the meaning of skin lightening and what role these products and practices played in a New Negro consciousness. Well-known figures in the national African American community and in local black communities recognized the importance of the politics of appearance in political and social struggles of the decade, which included: Pan-Africanism, Garveyism, Intergrationism, Black Separatism, and Black Cultural Nationalism. Several of these New Negro movements decried the use of skin lighteners as self-hatred and under-developed racial consciousness. In the face of political and social movements that framed skin lightening as attempting white emulation, some black women throughout the U.S. continued to bleach their skin. These women connected this practice to asserting a modern identity, and not necessarily to an imperious white cultural hegemony that reified a race-social-class-color-gender hierarchical structure. Advertisements for skin lightening products and processes continued to flourish throughout the New Negro era, and yet, a rapidly growing number of African Americans opposed skin lightening and the number of advertisements for these products declined throughout the early to mid twentieth century.[32]

Conclusion

The bodies and representations of the bodies of African American women in Washington and other urban centers were a terrain in which the socio-cultural dynamics and competing notions of a New Negro ethos were magnified. What makes African American beauty culture during this era particularly significant, however, was its far-reaching implications and effects for African American women's culture, and more broadly, American culture. Through beauty culture, African American women both implicitly and explicitly accepted white constructions of feminine beauty, facilitated a multimillion dollar industry in which women were "valued" consumers, and situated themselves at the center of a public discourse of political, economic, social, and cultural significance. Many communities of women, including African American women embraced beauty culture as means to political, social, economic, and cultural freedom. Additionally, beauty culture provided a space in which African American women could connect with other black women through the experience of "re-making self." Furthermore, skin bleaching/lightening among a segment of African American women contributed to a New Negro politics of appearance. African

American beauty culture provides a space for us to critically consider the interplay of black womanhood, consumerism, and prevailing aesthetic ideologies that embodied distinct racial, gender, and class implications during the New Negro Era. As a product of modernity as well as an enterprise and a discourse, African American beauty culture was deeply entrenched in a politics of appearance that in many ways reified white cultural hegemony.

Notes

[1]"O-ZONO : Electric Skin Refiner," *The Colored American*, June 2, 1900

[2]Jurgen Habermas asserts that claimants of modernity refuse to take "their orientation from the models supplied by another epoch," in *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987) 7. This assertion in relation to African Americans specifically is echoed in Michael Blanchard, *"Afro-Modernity: Temporality, Politics, and the African Diaspora," Public Culture***,** 11, 1, (1999): 245-268; Joel Dinerstein, *Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture Between Wars* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); Houston Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1993).

[3] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1993) 17.

[4] Erin Chapman, "Prove It On Me: New Negro Women Politics and Popular Culture," dissertation, (Yale University, 2006).

[5] Several books discuss the impact of the Great Migration on urban centers such as Washington, Chicago, and New York. Eric Arnesen, *Black Protest and the Great Migration: A Brief History With Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003); Joe W. Trotter, Jr., ed. *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Alferdteen J. Harrison, *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991); Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1991); Carole B. Marks, *Farewell, We're Good and Gone: The Great Migration* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Robert H. Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America Since 1865* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008); James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and The Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

[6] In Sharon Harley, "Beyond the Classroom: The Organizational Lives of Black Female Educators in the District of Columbia, 1890-1930," *The Journal of Negro Education*, 51, 3 (Summer, 1982), Harley emphasizes both employment opportunities and the "lure of the city" as driving forces for the steady migration of black women in particular to Washington during this period. Census data from 1860-1930 substantiates the claim that a large of influx black women descended upon D.C. Washington and other cities in the urban upper south offered a large number of professional and non-professional jobs for African Americans compared to those available in the southern communities from which black women migrated.

[7] U.S. Department of Interior, Census Office, *United States Population: 1860,* Table 2, p. 588; *U.S. Census of Population: 1890*, pt. 1, Table 22; and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United State: 1930-Population,* vol. 3, Table 2, p. 99.

[8] This idea stems from what Lori Ginzberg calls the "horizon of latent possibilities." In Ginzburg's *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), she discusses the shifting political contexts and meanings of women's reform activism. Through this discussion, she illuminates how these women re-imagined and re-configured womanhood through their benevolence-based activism. For black women in Washington, several "latent possibilities" existed for black women to redefine their roles as authorial subjects and full participants in the modern world.

[9] Ingrid Banks, *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women's Consciousness* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Nowlie M. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996). Ayana D. Byrd and Lori L. Tharps, *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001).

[10] Not all light or brown-skinned men and women were sold as or worked as "house slaves." Color politics, however, did play an integral role in determining labor roles.

[11]Juila K. Blackwelder, *Styling Jim Crow: African American Beauty Training during Segregation* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003) 15.

[12] Ayana D. Byrd and Lori L. Tharps, *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001) 21.

[13] Washington had one of the most prominent "elite" black communities in the United States. Dating back from the late-eighteenth century, African Americans in Washington owned property, owned and operated businesses, and created a racially-distinct public sphere that included religious institutions such as churches, civic and social organizations, and social and cultural institutions.

[14] Prior to Emancipation, there was a population of more than 100,000 free blacks in the United States. Many of the free blacks, particularly those in Washington were the descendants of interracial encounters between African slaves and American whites (not exclusively slave owners). This "mixed race" population, though identified as African American because of their African heritage, often had lighter skin and more loosely curled hair. These features came to signify freedom, mobility, and greater acceptance, although very limited, by some whites.

[15] It should be noted that many blacks throughout the African diaspora engage(d) in skin lightening and hair straightening. Contemporarily, these techniques are most prominent in formerly colonized countries in Africa and in the United States. The skin lightening industry has increased in recent years after a decline during the mid-to-late twentieth centuries. Many African diaspora scholars attribute the continued usage skin lightening and hair straightening products to "mental /psychological" colonialism and enslavement and white cultural hegemony. For an in-depth discussion of this historical and diasporic phenomenon, see Obiagele Lake, *Blue Veins and Kinky Hair: Naming and Color Consciousness in African America* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003) and Ingrid Banks, *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women's Consciousness*.

[16] In my research of the *Colored American* and the *Washington Bee*, nearly every issue I examined from the time period of 1880-1920 contained three or more advertisements for beauty services.

[17] This figure reflects my extensive research in the Black Press archives and the Library of Congress' Newspaper Collection. I examined available issues of both of these newspapers to calculate an approximate number of beauty advertisements.

[18] A significant amount of the scholarship on the African American experience in Washington examines the black elite class in Washington D.C.: Jacqueline Moore, *Leading the Race: The Transformation of the Black Elite in the Nation's Capital, 1880-1920* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999); Audrey K. Kerr, *The Paper Bag Principle: Class, Colorism, and Rumor in the Case of Black Washington, D.C.* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006); Nelson F. Kofie, *Race, Class, and Struggle for Neighborhood in Washington, D.C., 1860-1880* (New York: Garland, 1999); Allan J. Johnston, *Surviving Freedom: The Black Community of Washington, D.C. 1860-1880* (New York: Garland, 1993); Kathleen M. Lesko, ed., *Black Georgetown Remembered: A History of Its Black Community from the Founding of the "Town of George" in 1751 to the Present* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991); Letitia W. Brown, *Free Negroes in the District of Columbia, 1790-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Lawrence O. Graham, *Our Kind of People: Inside American's Black Upper Class* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999); William B. Gatewood, Jr., "Aristocrats of Color: South and North The Black Elite, 1880-1920," *The Journal of Southern History*, 54, 1 (Feb., 1988): 3-20.

[19] "Black Skin Remover: A Wonderful Face Bleach," *The Colored American*, February 15th, 1902.

[20] Before the Great Migration, interstate manufacturers played a small role in black beauty culture because the primarily localized nature of the industry. Black consumers purchased and bartered for products from within their respective communities.

[21] "Hartona: Positively Straightens," *The Colored American*, February 15th, 1902.

[22] Both the *Washington Bee* and the *Colored American* ran advertisements for products that perpetuated similar ideals about black feminine beauty. Black-No-More (a skin bleach/lightener), The Magic (a comb that when heated straightened hair), Nelson's Straightine (a hair straightening product), Ozono (a hair straightening product), The Chemical Wonder Company of New York Products (a line of products for both skin lightening and hair straightening), Ford's Hair Pomade (a hair straightening product), Hair Vim (a hair straightening product), Kink (a hair straightening product), Me-Lange (a hair straightening product), and Black Skin Remover (a skin bleach/lightener) are all examples of advertisements that recurred in these newspapers throughout the New Negro era. The constant theme of these advertisements was that straight hair and light skin were the ideal for black women. Most of these advertisements also presented kinky or tightly curled hair and dark skin with being undesirable.

[23] *The Washington Bee,* March 1909.

[24] *The Washington Bee,* March 1909. The contents of this advertisement are similar to the content of another prouct for which advertisements frequently ran in the *Colored American*, Nelson's Straightine. This product guaranteed to straighten "knotty, kinky, curly hair." The manufacturers of Nelson's Straightine also connected straight hair to beautifying black women and improving the quality of life for these women as well.

[25] Lake 54.

[26] By 1905, the United States Post Office barred the sale through the mail of skin lighteners such as Black-No-More that had history of causing severe skin damage. A market for these products, however, remained in tact despite these legal proscriptions. Local manufacturers continued developing concoctions that promised drastic effects such as Imperial Whitener and Mme. Turner's Mystic Face Bleach.

[27] Nannie H. Burroughs, "Not Color But Character," 1904.

[28] Katherine Williams, "Betrayers of the Race," *Half-Century Magazine*, February 1920.

[29] "Skin Specialist," *The Colored American*, February 1899.

[30] The U Street Corridor was a prominent African American neighborhood in Washington during the early twentieth century. Many of the most well-known African American cultural institutions, businesses and families resided in or near the U Street Corridor.

[31] As previously mentioned, these kinds of advertisements were printed far less frequently in Washington's black periodicals; nevertheless, during the early twentieth century these kinds of advertisements circulated more often. On average one to two advertisements for local beauty specialists ran in the *Washington Bee* on a daily basis.

[32] Contemporarily, skin lightening products and processes targeted at people of color comprise a multi-billion dollar industry. Although not as popular among blacks in United States as they were during the early twentieth century, African Americans are among the consumers who continue to support this industry.