

School Leaders Need to Pay Attention to World Afro Day

By Shawnta S. Barnes – September 15, 2018



Saturday, September 15, 2018 is the first annual World Afro Day, a day to celebrate black hair in its natural glory. According to the World Afro Day [website](#):

World Afro Day is a global day of change, education and celebration of Afro hair, culture and identity. Everyone is welcome on this journey. We have

two key focuses, which is an annual event, that will spotlight Afro excellence, raise awareness and create normalisation and aspiration relating to Afro hair. Secondly, our education programme for young people, teaches about Afro hair and society. This will benefit children of all backgrounds, through empathy, equality and empowerment.

When I think about the numerous black students who have received punishment for their hair at school or even had to transfer to another school because of their hair, I know this day is needed and long overdue.

From birth until seventh grade, my hair was natural. My mom would wash and style my hair in various ways such as twists, braids, or afro puffs. By the time seventh grade rolled around, my mom's arthritis was too bad. Not only did she take care of my hair, but she also had to deal with my two younger sisters' hair too. My mom and dad decided the best solution was to perm all of our hair. I had a perm from mid-seventh grade until my sophomore year in college. I have been natural ever since my sophomore year of college, but being natural and having the confidence to wear my natural hair was two different stories.

After I stopped getting my hair permed, I still had my hair ironed out a lot. Some people didn't believe I didn't have a perm anymore because I wore my hair straight so much. At times, I would rock braids or twist, but never the fro...at least not outside of my house or my parents' house. January 2017, I decided I would learn how to style my hair in an afro in different ways and go to work with my hair in that style. Even though I loved my hair, I had real fear about going to work with my hair in an afro. I have a lot of hair. It is really thick and my hair likes to do its own thing from time to time.

Once I finally worked up the nerve, I knew I had made the right decision. I was working in an elementary school at the time and I supervised breakfast in the morning before I went off to coach teachers in literacy. My hair became a focal point of discussion among the black students and the non-black students. Students loved to see how I would change up my fro or other natural hairstyles and we discussed their hairstyles. Our morning hair discussions brought a sense of pride and joy.

When your school kicks you out because the school leader deems your hair unacceptable, your joy and pride are ripped away. Your self-esteem and self-image are shattered. You start to wonder what is wrong with you. That is what makes me so angry when I hear story after story of school leaders kicking out black children because they don't understand black hair. They don't understand how important our hair is to us and our culture. When you sit in that chair or on the floor with your head in your momma's lap for hours, getting your hair done just right, you feel good about yourself. School should be the last place where that joy is stripped.

If you are a school leader and you don't understand black hair, get educated. If you are serving black children, and you find black hair problematic, World Afro Day is a good day to start learning the truth.