

# A JOURNEY OF BLACK HAIR: 2024 Central Illinois Natural Hair & Loc Expo

By Mae Catherine Godhigh

*"Hair matters — and it matters to all of us — because it is a form of non-verbal communication," says social and cultural psychologist Johanna Lukate, Ph.D.*



Whenever I walk into Hairadox, located at 3815 N. Sterling Avenue in Peoria, I am greeted by a

disabled veteran by the name of Aishah. Behind the beautiful smile is a Trichologist, Senior Cosmetologist, Master Looician, Educational Specialist and Subject Matter Expert. On top of that, she is the black owner and operator of Hairadox. Born in France, Aishah hails from the Washington, D.C. area. Since 2018, she has been busy serving the hair clientele in our city. You should know there is nothing basic about the services she offers. Hair-dos are not her priority, but hair-health is. She offers a holistic approach and regimens for her customers. That is why I have sat in her chair for 4 years. Aishah is a visionary and her gift of hair is certainly trans-



**L-R: Alana Williams, Aishah Bilal-Ali & Adrienne Jones**  
*Photos Courtesy of HAIRADOX HAIR CARE CENTER*

formative. After your first encounter with her, you will know she is the TRUTH.

Saturday, September 14, 2024 was not just another ordinary day in the city of Peoria. Approximately 170 guests of Mrs. Bilal-Ali gathered at the Life Together Center, located at 3625 N. Sheridan Road to celebrate the 2024 Central Illinois Natural Hair and Locs Expo. Many guests from various parts of the country flew into Peoria to support the Hair & Loc Expo.

What we all need to know about our "Hair History" is before the Crown Act, there was this: According to Byrd and Tharps, during the transatlantic slave trade, an estimated 12 million men, women and children were enslaved. One of the first things slave traders did was shave the heads of those they captured. "Presumably, the slave traders shaved the heads of their new slaves for what they considered sanitary reasons, but the effect was much more

insidious — it was the first step the Europeans took to erase the slaves' culture and alter the relationship between the African and his or her hair. Arriving without their signature hairstyles, Mandingos, Fulanis, Ibos and Ashantis entered the New World, just as the Europeans intended, like anonymous chattel.

*"The best way to fight an alien and oppressive culture, is to embrace your own." – Afrikan Proverb*

The Edict of Good Government (also called the Tignon Laws) forced Black women to cover their hair when in public. In 1786, the governor of Louisiana enacted these laws, which "prohibited Creole women of color from displaying 'excessive attention to dress' in the streets of New Orleans." They were forced to wear headscarves called tignons to cover their hair and visibly communicate that they were a part of the slave class.

In the '60s and '70s, the Afro became a symbol of resistance during the Black liberation movement. Institutional bias

against Black hairstyles continues to exist today.

In 2019, The Crown Act was created as the first piece of American legislation to protect against discrimination of black hair by way of prejudice hairstyles by extending statutory protection to hair texture and protective styles such as braids, locs, dreadlocks or knots worn in public schools and the workplace. This includes protective hairstyles including twists or dreadlocks.

During the expo, a panel of professionals addressed topics such as hair discrimination, black pride, and redefining beauty norms. They were Nikki Romain, Brett Brooks, Alva Tobias, and Mrs. Bilal-Ali. Also representing beauty were pageant winners: 2024 Miss Juneteenth Alynceia Boyce and 2023 Little Miss Illinois Earth USA Zoey Jones.

The volunteers, her proud husband, Mr. Bashir Ali, and family members made the magic happen. A team of experts, consisting of photographers, DJ Cushman, and the