

SPRING EDITION



BEAUTY
JUSTICE

News Better.

**WELCOME TO
THE SPRING
EDITION OF
BLACK WOMEN
FOR WELLNESS
BEAUTY JUSTICE
NEWSLETTER!**

IN THIS EDITION, WE DELVE INTO GLOBAL BEAUTY JUSTICE ISSUES. YOU'LL ALSO FIND NATURAL BEAUTY TIPS INSPIRED BY INTERNATIONAL INGREDIENTS AND PRACTICES. ADDITIONALLY, WE PROVIDE UPDATES ON OUR ONGOING PROJECTS, EVENTS, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOU TO GET INVOLVED IN THE MOVEMENT FOR MORE INCLUSIVE AND HEALTHIER BEAUTY STANDARDS.

THANK YOU FOR BEING A VITAL PART OF THIS IMPORTANT DISCUSSION!



Event Highlight:
BEAUTY JUSTICE
Conference

APRIL 21, 2025

THE CALIFORNIA ENDOWMENT

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WELCOME

Thank you for your time and joining us for Black Women for Wellness' inaugural Beauty Justice Conference. This was our first — of many to come — as we have much to discuss, work to do, resources to share, and culture to shift when it comes to defining beauty for Black women and girls.

Beauty Justice is about connecting the dots between beauty, justice, and basic human rights. It's about building a movement that acknowledges how unrealistic beauty standards affect the health, well-being, and lives of Black women and girls. It's about shifting the culture away from overexposure to toxic chemicals and toward the embrace of our natural beauty.

Earlier this week, I was speaking with a Black man who was confused after watching a dating show. On it, another Black man openly expressed a preference for women with long hair. Though a dark-skinned woman contestant was smart, personable, and attractive, he dismissed her because she didn't match his preference. My friend was baffled: Had there been a memo saying it was okay to casually discuss internalized colorism, classism, and racism on national television? Was this unconscious knowledge (the cost of living under white nationalism) finally being exposed for examination and change?

Black women know what color and class discrimination looks like. We feel it in the college admissions process, in job interviews, in our paychecks, in our housing options, and in our relationships. We are sick and tired of being sick and tired. We're also sick and tired of applying toxic chemicals to our bodies in hopes of accessing a better life, simply based on how we look. So yes, the fact that this Beauty Justice Conference is happening is both necessary and powerful. We are finally having open conversations about reducing toxic exposures, embracing our natural selves, and creating beauty routines that honor who we are.

In 1786, the Tignon Laws were passed in Louisiana, requiring Black women to cover their hair with a cloth. We complied and did so in high fashion. This was among the first documented laws of racial discrimination against our natural beauty. And still today, remnants of that fear persist.



Now, with legislation like the CROWN Act in New York and California, we are fighting back, making it illegal to discriminate against Black women for wearing our hair naturally. But progress has been slow. It took actress Bo Derek rocking cornrows in the 1979's film *10* before the wider culture gave the style even a second look. Sasha and Malia Obama wore braids so they could go swimming their first year in the White House and it caused national debate. And it wasn't until after her time as First Lady that we began to see Michelle Obama publicly embrace natural hairstyles.

I've traveled through Africa, and it breaks my heart to see chemical burns from skin lighteners and brighteners, and how harmful beauty practices continue to impact Black women's health and self-image, even in places rich with traditions of intricate and beautiful natural hairstyles. But I also find hope. It warms my heart to know that a group of Māori women in New Zealand chose to connect with African American women to explore natural solutions for their hair, rather than turning to chemical treatments that mimic European beauty standards.

This is a global movement: to respect and style our natural selves; to stop chasing impossible standards; and to reduce and ultimately eliminate our overexposure to toxic chemicals in beauty, hair, and personal care products (and yes, cleaning products too). Thank you for showing up. Thank you for your curiosity. And thank you for joining this movement to highlight and amplify the natural beauty of Black women in all its many forms.

Welcome to this movement. Beauty Justice will impact our lives, and the lives of our daughters.

Janette Robinson Flint

**Co-Founder and Executive Director
Black Women for Wellness**





Beauty Justice Department



Arnedra Jordan - Project Manager

Arnedra Jordan is the Project Manager at Black Women for Wellness, overseeing the Beauty Justice Initiative. With over fifteen years of experience in the breast health field, Arnedra has dedicated her career to advocating for the health and well-being of Black women and girls. Her work involves providing education on environmental health, beauty justice, and breast health education, where she focuses on addressing harmful ingredients in beauty products and promoting comprehensive breast cancer awareness and prevention strategies.

Madison Beckett- Environmental & Beauty Justice Coordinator

Madison is a recent UCLA Sociology graduate and currently serves as BWW's Environmental & Beauty Justice Coordinator. Originally from northern Connecticut, she moved to San Jose in 2020 to focus on grassroots community organizing and public health initiatives. Passionate about building an equitable future, Madison draws inspiration from Black thinkers like W.E.B. Du Bois, Angela Davis, and James Baldwin.

In her free time, she enjoys practicing Pilates, dance, or yoga, visiting neighborhood cafés, and taking road trips to the Bay Area to see friends. Madison can be reached at madison@bwwla.com.



Charity White - Senior Project Specialist

Charity Faye is a certified Wellness Chef and Healer. Currently, she serves as Program Manager of the Sisters in Motion program for Black Women for Wellness. As a chef with more than seven years of experience, she has developed a passion for assisting African Americans in overcoming the barriers that prevent them from living a healthy lifestyle. She seeks to remove all barriers to wellness by working with the Kitchen Divas and National Diabetes Prevention programs, increasing nutritional awareness, providing demonstrations of flavorful cooking, encouraging physical activity, and providing various healing modalities along the way.

Adia Ja'Nea James - Environmental & Beauty Justice Support Specialist

Adia is a second-year medical student and a PRIME LEAD-ABC Scholar at the University of California, Irvine School of Medicine. She was born and raised in Sweet Home Alabama, where her grandmother, a retired nurse, played a significant role in her upbringing as well as her passion for community-based healthcare and health education.

Outside of her studies and advocacy work, Ja'Nea loves to read, bike, kayak, longboard, skate, crochet, and FaceTime her baby cousins down South. Adia can be reached at adia@bwwla.com.





Beauty Justice Department

Valerie Monroe - Beauty Justice Community Outreach Specialist



Valerie Monroe is a dedicated advocate in the beauty and justice space, empowering Black women to thrive in wellness and self-expression. With her background as a graphic designer, canvasser, and outreach worker, Valerie combines her creative skills and passion for community engagement to make a lasting impact. Her work centers on creating safe, supportive spaces for Black women, encouraging wellness, and promoting justice. Through her community and outreach efforts with Black Women for Wellness, Valerie builds connections, raises awareness, and supports initiatives that uplift and empower. She is committed to fostering positive change, blending artistry and activism to champion the well-being and rights of Black women everywhere.

Rebecca Barry - Intern

Rebecca is a recent MSc Medical Anthropology graduate from the University of Oxford, currently working as a freelance journalist in the public health sector.

She is passionate about improving women's health and advocating for environmental justice through her own research and publications, as well as in collaboration with progressive and empowering organisations like BWW. She

would love for you to reach out and contact her at rebeccabarry04@gmail.com with any questions or for further discussions!



Food Justice

April Foster - Sisters in Motion Program Coordinator



April Foster is the current Program Coordinator for Sisters in Motion. She is a graduate of George Mason University in Fairfax, VA and originally from the DMV area. Throughout her career in event management she has worked for a range of companies in entertainment, corporate and nonprofit organizations.

Dear Black Women Around the World:

I see you & hear you!

Today I am writing this article on International Women's Day. I think about the undeniable bond we share across continents, cultures, and communities, a deep-rooted connection to beauty, resilience, and the fight for justice. Today, as a sister and advocate, I write to you in solidarity, standing at the intersection of beauty, justice, and reproductive justice. I recognize that our choices about our bodies, hair, and skin are personal and political. For far too long, we have been held to white European standards. We have the right to define beauty, and we must define our beauty on our terms while demanding safety, transparency, and justice in our products and the policies governing our health.

The beauty industry has and continues to exploit Black women marketing products to us that are filled with toxic chemicals that harm our health while profiting from Eurocentric beauty standards that deny our natural beauty. The very products we have used to care for our hair and skin have been linked to hormonal imbalances, reproductive health disorders, and even cancers. This is not just about beauty but our right to safety, wellness, and informed choices.

Reproductive justice means more than access to birth control or healthcare, it means the right to control our bodies, to have children if we choose, not to have children if we choose, and to raise our families in safe, healthy environments. But how can we make fully informed choices about our reproductive health when toxins in beauty and personal care products are silently disrupting our hormones, increasing risks of fibroids, infertility, and other reproductive health conditions? Our fight for reproductive justice must include the fight for beauty justice.

You are not alone in this fight. Black women are rising from Los Angeles to Lagos, Kingston to Ghana, Atlanta to Trinidad, reclaiming our beauty, and demanding justice. I am calling on all of us to stand together and:

- Educate ourselves and our communities about the harmful chemicals in beauty products.
- Advocate for policy changes that hold beauty companies accountable for safe, non-toxic products.
- Support Black-owned beauty brands committed to non-toxic, sustainable products.
- Speak up and share our stories, because our lived experiences are powerful tools for change.

When we work together, we will become unstoppable. Together, we will redefine beauty on our terms, we will stop the politics behind selling Black women the most toxic and harmful products and demand justice for our bodies, health, and future.

In Solidarity,

Arnedra Jordan

**Black Women for Wellness
Project Manager - Beauty Justice**





OUR PATHWAY TOWARDS A HEALTHIER BLACK BEAUTY INDUSTRY

BEAUTY JUSTICE *Conference*

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO JOINED US AT
OUR INAUGURAL BEAUTY JUSTICE CONFERENCE!
YOUR PASSION, INSIGHTS, AND ENERGY MADE IT
TRULY UNFORGETTABLE! WE'RE INSPIRED BY
YOUR COMMITMENT TO CLEANER, SAFER
BEAUTY FOR ALL.





OUR PATHWAY TOWARDS A HEALTHIER BLACK BEAUTY INDUSTRY



BEAUTY JUSTICE *Conference*



BEYOND THE BRAID: PROTECTING OUR SKIN, HAIR & WOMBS

SPEAKER: ARNEDRA JORDAN – UNVEILED THE HIDDEN HARMS IN BEAUTY STANDARDS AND HOW THEY INTERSECT WITH BLACK REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH.

BEAUTY JUSTICE & REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE PANEL

MODERATOR: TYLA ADAMS; PANELIST: CHELSEA VONCHAZ – EXPLORED HOW CHEMICALS IN SKIN LIGHTENERS, RELAXERS, AND MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS DISRUPT HORMONES AND THREATEN BODILY AUTONOMY.



COMMUNITY-LED ADVOCACY WORKSHOP

FACILITATOR: LAKISHA CAMSE – SHARED GRASSROOTS POLICY STRATEGIES FOR DISMANTLING HARMFUL SYSTEMS AND DRIVING COMMUNITY-DRIVEN CHANGE.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP & INNOVATION IN BEAUTY PANEL

MODERATOR: JONISHA GARCIA; PANELISTS: JASMINE BROWN, ROCHELE JONES, QUINNTONIA KIMBERLY THORNTON – HIGHLIGHTED HOW BLACK ENTREPRENEURS ARE BUILDING NON-TOXIC, CULTURALLY ROOTED BEAUTY BRANDS AND MOVEMENTS.



FILTERED REALITIES TALK

SPEAKER: MYEISHA ESSEX – DECODED THE DIGITAL MANUFACTURING OF BEAUTY VIA FILTERS AND ALGORITHMS AND ITS IMPACT ON BLACK WOMEN'S SELF-IMAGE.

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY FOR BEAUTY JUSTICE PANEL

MODERATOR: TIANNA SHAW WAKEMAN; PANELISTS: NIMAH MOORE, UNIQUE VANCE – BROKE DOWN RECENT POLICY WINS LIKE CA PROP 65 AND OUTLINED LEGAL STRATEGIES TO HOLD THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY ACCOUNTABLE.



BUILDING SAFE SPACES FOR BLACK HAIR CARE PANEL

MODERATOR: MADISON BECKETT; PANELISTS: KRISTIAN FRANKLIN, HANNAH MCCALL, JONISHA GARCIA, MARKEISHA MULLEN – EXAMINED HOW TO CREATE AFFIRMING, TOXIN-FREE ENVIRONMENTS FOR BLACK HAIR CARE PROFESSIONALS AND CONSUMERS.

BEAUTY ACROSS THE LIFESPAN & FACE MASK WORKSHOP

FACILITATORS: MOSI ODOM & APRIL FOSTER – GUIDED A DIY FACE-MASK ACTIVITY AND DISCUSSED BEAUTY NEEDS FROM ADOLESCENCE THROUGH MENOPAUSE.

INSIDE AND OUT PRESENTATION

SPEAKER: VALERIE MONROE – SHOWCASED THE POWER OF SELF-IMAGE, CULTURAL PRIDE, AND HOLISTIC BEAUTY EDUCATION IN FOSTERING CONFIDENCE AND WELLNESS.

Skin Lightening

A Global Beauty Justice Crisis

Written by Madison Beckett

Skin lightening is a popular cosmetic trend around the world. Creams, lotions, soaps that claim to “brighten” or “whiten” “even” the skin are often marketed to women of color, encouraging them to lighten their complexion in order to be more attractive. This toxic marketing message not only promotes unrealistic beauty standards, but also raises several health concerns. First, the ingredients in these products are often **highly toxic** and harmful to human health. Ingredients such as **mercury**, **hydroquinone**, and **steroids**, are often found in skin lightening products, and linked to serious health effects such as skin rashes, discoloration, scarring, and damage to the nervous, digestive, and immune systems. Furthermore, the marketing of skin-lightening products often **targets dark-skinned women**, reinforcing harmful beauty standards that portray dark skin as less attractive and perpetuating the false idea that lighter skin is more desirable.



In this article, we will explore what skin lightening is, the harmful effects of these products, and the underlying social forces driving their use—such as colorism, colonialism, and Eurocentric beauty standards. Finally, we will highlight the efforts of **beauty justice activists** around the world who are challenging the skin-lightening industry, removing the harmful products of the shelves, and **promoting the beauty of all skin tones**

Colorism, Colonialism, and Skin-Lightening Industry

The use of skin-lightening products is **not the fault of individuals** who use them. There are historical and social forces that drive their use. The use of skin-lightening products dates back to the **colonial era**, when whiteness was most strongly associated with power, privilege, and social status. Skin bleaching began during the **transatlantic slave trade** and continued as European countries controlled many African nations. As early as the 18th century, slaves in Africa used harsh substances like caustic cashew oil to lighten their skin, in an attempt to align with beauty standards imposed by European countries. These **Eurocentric beauty standards** dictated that lighter skin is more acceptable, beautiful, and linked to better social opportunities. Unfortunately, this belief continues to linger in societies around the globe. A recent World Health Organization survey found that **20% of people across Africa** who used skin-lightening products did so for social benefits, because they believe lighter skin will help them have better marriage prospects and job opportunities.

ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Banning harmful chemicals in lighteners has been an ongoing Beauty Justice effort across the globe.

In regions where skin lightening is common, such as **Gabon, Jamaica** and **Sri Lanka**, governments and advocates are working together to curb the use of these dangerous products. The three countries launched a combined **\$14 million dollar initiative** aimed to remove mercury from skin whitening products, while also **countering colorism** by launching campaigns to promote the beauty of all skin tones. There are also efforts against skin-lightening that are taking place in the United States that have global reach. Amira Adawe, Founder and Executive Director of the Minnesota-based **Beautywell Project**, has spoken out about the issue of skin bleaching in rural East Africa, stating, "They don't even have access to water, they don't even have access to food, but they have access to skin-lightening products. And they're buying all these skin-lightening products that contain mercury, hydroquinone, and steroids." Her organization Beautywell continues to lead efforts in advocating for policy changes, educating communities, and pushing for stricter regulations on the sale of harmful skin-lightening products, both in the US and internationally.

Addressing this problem requires both **policy changes** and **cultural shifts**. First, stronger regulations are needed to ban the most toxic ingredients, such as **mercury, hydroquinone, and steroids**, while also targeting the underground markets that continue to sell them. Second, beauty justice advocates emphasize the need for **media representation** and **messaging** that combats colorism. As one activist states, "We need campaigns that celebrate dark skin and show that one can be successful and wealthy and all that without changing one's pigmentation." By challenging harmful beauty norms and advocating for stricter regulations, we can work toward a future where all skin is valued and protected, and reduce the use of toxic skin-lightening products.



What Are Skin-Lightening Products and Their Risks?

Skin-lightening products work by inhibiting the body from producing melanin. This results in a lighter or paler skin tone. Lightening your skin tone through products such as lotions, creams, and soaps is problematic for your health. There are various **hazardous ingredients** that are common in these products.

MERCURY

One of the most dangerous ingredients that is found in skin-lighteners is **mercury**. Mercury is a highly toxic metal that can damage the nervous, digestive, and immune systems, as well as the kidneys, lungs, skin, and eyes.

While mercury has been banned in cosmetic products in the United States and several other countries, the market still remains **largely unregulated**, allowing mercury-containing products to persist. A study by WeACT found that some products containing dangerous levels of mercury are still being sold in local markets. Certain skin-lightening creams and medicated soaps purchased over the counter in New York City have been found to contain high levels of mercury – as high as **27,000 times the legal limit**. Furthermore, a study by the Zero Mercury Working Group tested 271 skin lightening creams sold online from 2020 to 2022, and found that about **48% contained dangerous mercury levels** that exceeded the regulation limits. Some products contained over 100 times the legal amount.



HYDROQUINONE

Another problematic ingredient in skin lightening creams is **hydroquinone**. This chemical has been linked to rashes, facial swelling, and permanent skin discoloration. Long term use of hydroquinone can lead to a condition that causes your skin to turn blue and black, which especially affects darker-skinned individuals. Some research also suggests that long-term exposure could increase the risk of skin cancer. Hydroquinone is regulated or **banned** in many countries, such as the US, the EU, South Africa, Rwanda, Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Kenya. Despite this, it is still sold in many **over-the-counter** skin-lightening products, often without proper warnings about the serious health risks.

STEROIDS

Some skin-lightening products contain **steroids**. Over time, these steroids **weaken the skin**, making it thinner, more fragile, and more likely to develop stretch marks and bruises. Steroids can also damage the skin's protective barrier, allowing harmful substances to get in more easily. In some cases, steroids are absorbed into the body, which can **weaken the immune system** and cause other health issues like high blood pressure, diabetes, and bone problems.

TAKING STOCK STUDY



ABOUT THE STUDY

The Taking Stock Study is an intervention study designed to help Black Women make healthier choices in hair and personal care product use and support their natural hair journey! Participants received guidance from a chemist on choosing safer products, consultations with a hairstylist to support their natural hair journey and resources tailored just for them! Over the last four years, we collected valuable insights from participants through surveys, a product logging app, urine samples, and interviews. Stay tuned for what we learned!

Questions? Please email **Madison** at madison@bwwla.com, or **Arnedra** at Arnedra@bwwla.com

Elevating Health and Wellness



Through Safety Practices

Written by Valerie Monroe


At Black Women for Wellness, our commitment to Beauty Justice extends beyond a movement—it's a mission to safeguard the health and wellness of Black women. Beauty is more than skin deep, and the products we use every day profoundly impact our overall health. Unfortunately, racialized beauty standards and the widespread use of harmful beauty products disproportionately expose Black women to toxic chemicals that can lead to respiratory, reproductive, and cardiovascular illnesses, as well as cancers, including breast, uterine, ovarian, and endometrial cancers. These cancers are often linked to long-term exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) such as parabens, phthalates, and formaldehyde-releasing agents commonly found in hair straighteners, skin lighteners, and fragranced lotions.

The outcomes of these exposures are significant, with Black women facing higher rates of aggressive cancer forms and poorer survival outcomes due to compounded health disparities. Beyond physical health, these risks also carry emotional and financial burdens, deeply affecting families and communities.

However, Black women have a unique opportunity to redefine beauty by embracing safer practices that protect our bodies and align with our broader wellness goals. By educating ourselves on harmful ingredients, advocating for stricter regulations, supporting clean and Black-owned beauty brands, celebrating natural hairstyles, and prioritizing holistic self-care, we can mitigate these risks and reclaim beauty as a source of empowerment, health, and well-being.

Four Ways We Can Embrace Our Beauty

- 1. Educate Yourself:** Learn to identify and avoid harmful ingredients like endocrine-disrupting chemicals commonly found in skin lighteners, hair straighteners, and fragranced lotions. Look for natural alternatives and brands that prioritize safety and transparency.
- 2. Advocate for Change:** Join local advocacy groups championing stricter FDA regulations on beauty products. Every voice counts in demanding health over profit from the beauty industry. One such organization is Black Women for Wellness at www.bwwla.org, a Los Angeles-based group dedicated to the health and well-being of Black women and girls. Feel free to explore their invaluable resources and programs advocating for environmental and beauty justice. Together, we can create a healthier and safer environment, starting with the beauty industry.
- 3. Support Safer Spaces:** Frequent salons that adopt non-toxic practices. Los Angeles is home to a growing number of beauty professionals committed to creating healthier environments for their clients. You can identify a safe salon by asking about the products they use, checking if they prioritize non-toxic and eco-friendly options, and observing proper ventilation and cleanliness. Look for certifications or signage indicating the use of organic or chemical-free products, and don't hesitate to ask staff about their commitment to safety and health standards.
- 4. Build Community:** Join us for an empowering workshop that puts your health and beauty first! This is more than just a Zoom call—it's a movement toward safer beauty practices and community upliftment. Together, we'll share resources, knowledge, and actionable steps to protect our bodies and redefine beauty on our own terms. Don't miss this chance to connect, learn, and be part of a united effort to inspire change—[register now!](#)



Together, we can create a healthier and safer future for Black women—one where beauty truly uplifts and never compromises our health. Imagine walking into your favorite salon or picking up a product, confident that every choice you make is safe and empowering. Let's redefine wellness and beauty standards as a community. Take the first step by joining us in advancing Beauty Justice—[share your voice and experiences here](#). Together, we can make a lasting impact!

Hidden Dangers in Nails Salons

PROTECTING THE ASIAN COMMUNITY THROUGH EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Written by April Foster



Nail salons have long been a cornerstone of the Asian-American entrepreneurial experience, particularly among Vietnamese immigrants who now make up a significant portion of the nail salon industry in the United States. These businesses provide economic opportunities, but they also expose workers and customers to significant health risks. Part of that is due to prolonged exposure to toxic chemicals. Despite their prevalence, awareness about these dangers is minimal within the community, making education on the subject a vital need.

THE INVISIBLE HAZARDS OF NAIL SALONS

Nail salon workers, many of whom are Asian immigrants, are frequently exposed to a cocktail of hazardous chemicals found in nail polishes, acrylics, glues, and disinfectants. What has been dubbed the "toxic trio"—formaldehyde, toluene, and dibutyl phthalate—are commonly used in nail products and have been linked to serious health issues, including respiratory problems, skin irritation, reproductive harm, and even cancer. Prolonged exposure to these substances in poorly ventilated spaces only exacerbates the risk.

Customers, too, face dangers, particularly those with preexisting conditions such as asthma or allergies. However, because workers spend long hours in these spaces daily, they bear the brunt of these health hazards. Studies have shown that many nail salon workers experience chronic headaches, dizziness, and breathing difficulties, yet these symptoms are often overlooked or dismissed as part of the job.



BARRIERS TO AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

Many Asian nail salon workers are immigrants with limited English proficiency, making access to safety training and regulatory information difficult. Additionally, fear of retaliation or job loss prevents some from speaking up about unsafe working conditions. Even when regulations exist to protect workers, enforcement is often weak, and many salon owners may not be aware of safer alternatives.

Customers, too, are often unaware of the risks associated with frequenting nail salons with poor ventilation or improperly handled chemicals. Without community education, both workers and customers continue to unknowingly put themselves at risk.

EMPOWERING THE COMMUNITY THROUGH EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

To mitigate these risks, community organizations, policymakers, and health advocates must work together to promote safer working environments in nail salons. Here's how we can protect our community:

- 1. Education Campaigns** – Multilingual resources, including brochures, social media campaigns, and community workshops, should inform both workers and customers about the dangers of toxic chemicals and the importance of proper ventilation and protective equipment.
- 2. Regulation and Enforcement** – Stronger enforcement of workplace safety standards must be a priority. Routine inspections should ensure that salons are complying with safety guidelines, and workers should have access to protective gear such as masks and gloves.
- 3. Encouraging Healthier Alternatives** – Many brands now offer non-toxic, "5-free" or "10-free" nail polishes that omit the most harmful chemicals. Encouraging salons to adopt these alternatives can significantly reduce chemical exposure.
- 4. Community Advocacy** – Local Asian community groups can advocate for fair labor practices, improved health standards, and workplace protections for salon workers. Government-funded training programs should also be made more accessible to immigrant workers to educate them about their rights.

A Call to Action



The success of Asian-owned nail salons shouldn't come at the cost of workers' and customer's health. It is time for the community to recognize the dangers lurking in these workplaces and take proactive measures to protect both employees and customers. By spreading awareness, advocating for stricter regulations, and supporting safer alternatives, we can ensure that nail salons remain a source of empowerment rather than harm. Education and action can save lives—let's make the nail salon industry a safer place for all.

SIMILARITIES OF WORKPLACE DANGERS FOR ASIAN NAIL SALON WORKERS AND BLACK HAIR SALON WORKERS

Both Asian-run nail salons and Black hair salons expose workers and clients to potentially hazardous chemicals. The similarities in chemical dangers include:

1. Exposure to Toxic Chemicals

- Nail salons: Workers are exposed to toluene, formaldehyde, and dibutyl phthalate (often called the “toxic trio”), which are found in nail polish, glues, and acrylics.
- Black hair salons: Stylists frequently handle relaxers, dyes, and keratin treatments containing formaldehyde, ammonium thioglycolate, and other harsh chemicals.

1. Respiratory Issues

- Both environments involve airborne chemicals that can be inhaled, leading to asthma, bronchitis, and long-term lung damage.
- Nail technicians inhale dust from acrylic nails and fumes from solvents, while hairstylists breathe in fumes from relaxers, dyes, and sprays.



BEAUTY
JUSTICE

ALL ARE WELCOME

**JOIN THE BLACK WOMEN
FOR WELLNESS**

BEAUTY JUSTICE COALITION

Black Women for Wellness' Beauty Justice Coalition is a collective of individuals, organizations, and activists united in the fight for the health and well-being of Black Women and Girls. Our mission is to address systemic inequities in the beauty industry focusing on harmful chemicals and toxic exposures that disproportionately affect our communities.

The coalition meets quarterly, virtually.

Anyone is welcome to join!

For more info, contact Madison Beckett at

Madison@bwwla.com

**NEXT MEETING IS
AUGUST 12TH, 2025
10 - 11 AM PST ON ZOOM**

**LEARN MORE &
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A Call for Beauty Justice

UNMASKING HARM AND REORIENTING THE INDUSTRY

Written by Rebecca Barry

Underneath the glitz and the glamour, the beauty industry harbours some ugly flaws. Beauty products and procedures are often pushed to consumers as a pathway to attain whatever aesthetic trend is currently popular. By painting certain appearances as beautiful, and others as repulsive, social messaging and marketing fosters a need for individuals to adhere to these doctored images of beauty.

The social impact of existing outside of perceived cultural beauty norms can be huge in a society that places so much value on our looks.

Some beauty ideals come and go as trends, like certain makeup styles or idolised features. However, many dominant, long standing perceptions of beauty often have deep racial, ageist, and ableist roots. Recreating these ideals only further reinforces existing societal discrimination.

Profit can be generated from maximising our insecurities, demonising differences, and projecting 'solutions'. The perpetual striving to achieve, or maintain, an accepted image of beauty keeps women spending money to 'fix' and 'improve'; lining the pockets of industry stakeholders.

The beauty justice movement seeks to rectify this. Beauty doesn't have to take one form, or be driven by self hatred, or involve the aesthetic homogenisation of women. It can celebrate difference and promote inclusivity and value in the limitless forms beauty can take. Women should be engaging in beauty practices for reasons like cultural heritage celebration, creativity, and self expression, not because they have been conditioned to feel flawed and inadequate. It can still be a profitable industry - just not one that capitalises on feelings of inadequacy.



B for Below the Surface

We've established that beauty pressures can be damaging; psychologically, culturally and disproportionately. This isn't a new revelation. But there's a deeper damage that the beauty industry is arguably partially responsible for.

Potentially even more sinister than the psychological toll that the pressure to be beautiful creates is the physical harm that is being inflicted by the use of some beauty products.

Personal care products on the market today contain numerous harmful ingredients; endocrine disrupting chemicals, PFAS, parabens and phthalates, to name just a few. These chemicals have the potential to - and often do - seep into our bodies and build up in our tissues. They can disrupt our hormones, our growth and development, and interfere with multiple biological processes (Faber, 2020).

Of course, the type and duration of exposure, the concentration of product, and other environmental and genetic factors play into what biological effects are produced, and to what extent. But the sheer fact that the harmful effects of certain products are known, but these products are still on the market, is shocking. It speaks of a society that doesn't value our collective wellbeing, especially the wellbeing of women, seeing as women are the dominant consumers.

The global regulation picture varies; the EU and UK have much more stringent regulations and claim to have banned personal care products known to cause harmful effects. The adequacy of these regulations are questionable. As recently as 2023, the BBC reported finding PFAS in popular makeup brands (Stallard, 2023). If protective legislation exists, but is not being enforced, it's merely performative. Again, where's the protection for the buyers?

The FDA regulates US products with significantly less caution. The law does not require ingredients or products to have FDA approval before they go on the market (apart from color additives) (FDA, 2022). Because of this, many states have imposed their own regulations to try and protect consumers, but these are arguably ineffective seeing that harmful products are still so widely used.

C for Cosmetics and...Cancer?

With the average American woman using 7 personal care products a day, exposure is far from a small issue. In fact, the frequent and long term use of these personal care products may even be a factor in the notable increase of breast cancer amongst young women in US and UK.

Women under 50 have breast cancer rates rising faster than women over 50 (BCRF, 2024). This implies that the environments (exposures and lifestyle behaviours) that young women today grew up with were significantly different to that of older women, enough to cause a rise in cancer rates. Is the rise in personal care product use to blame? Maybe. From birth to thirty, has the accumulation of lotions and potions taken its toll?

There will be other factors at play for the rise in observed breast cancer rates, of course. Lifestyle factors like diet, exercise, living environments and increased screening could all contribute to these rising rates. But increased exposure to chemicals through personal care products is still a concern, and needs to be taken much more seriously.

D for Disproportionate

Another intrinsic part of beauty justice is the fact that black and ethnic minority populations are disproportionately exposed to these harmful products. Why? The longstanding cultural messaging that has glorified European beauty standards mean that women of colour are more likely to use products to change their appearance (Clean Beauty Justice, 2024).

For example, natural kinky and curly black hair was widely perceived as 'unprofessional', and even unsuitable for the workplace, in western society for years, stemming from prejudiced colonial beliefs (Dabiri, 2019). Black women were pressured to style their natural hair in accordance with white ideals. These styling techniques evolved into chemical straighteners, perms, and products that may well smooth the curl, but work at the detriment of black womens' overall health. The promotion of clear, youthful, white facial complexions motivated the market of chemical skin lighteners. These creams are toxic to all users, but again, women of colour display increased exposure (WE ACT for EJ, 2025).

This may all seem trivial to some - just don't use the products and save on any risk. Surely beauty isn't that important? But the truth is that the cultural pressure can be so pervasive that pursuing beauty norms doesn't feel like a choice, it feels like a necessity. Also, beauty practices can represent more than just glamorization, and so shouldn't be dismissed as vanity alone. They can represent history and tradition, provide a way to bond and socialise, and to express creativity and confidence. The answer isn't to halt all beauty practices, it's to change underlying motivations, and make products safe.

Another key point is that many of the harms of these products are not well known or discussed, and so a lot of women are engaging in beauty practices without even being aware of the potential damage to their health.

So - where do we go from here?

WE PURSUE BEAUTY JUSTICE!

Firstly, we work to eradicate the existing beauty frameworks that are rooted in racism, ableism, ageism and fatphobia. Idealistic, yes, but a goal to work towards nonetheless. It does all women a disservice to engage in the idea that beauty can't hold multiple forms. We are more intelligent than to succumb to marketing and close minded ideologies like that. Beauty practices should be engaged with from a place of positivity. This cultural shift will effectively reduce the heightened toxic exposure that marginalised groups and women of colour face - as well as putting us on the path to a better society.

Secondly, we lobby and fight for more stringent and enforced regulation. Supporting relevant research bodies, campaigns, and petitions will go a long way in changing legislature to protect women, and all those who use beauty products. 'Clean beauty' is on the rise, prioritising non toxic ingredients, but products are often aimed at white female demographics and neglect dark skin tones and curly hair. Boycotting toxic products and putting our money where our mouth is will show manufacturers what we want. Increasing demand for safe and natural products will increase supply, and push toxic products off the shelves.

Breast Cancer & Toxics

Written by Tianna Shaw-Wakeman

My mother - a Black woman in her early 50s - was diagnosed with an aggressive breast cancer two years ago. At a recent going away party, a friend asked me about the best thing that has happened to me in the last six months and I noted that my mother completed her breast cancer treatment; my family and I are hoping she will soon be in remission. To my surprise, the gentleman before me raised his eyebrows & looked at me with pure shock. As it turns out, his mom - also a Black woman - completed treatment for her second bout of breast cancer in 10 years. This too was his 'best thing.'

We commiserated about our sadness & laughed in joy, but while this experience was coincidental, I know that it highlights a sad truth. According to the American Cancer Society, Black women and White women have a similar breast cancer incidence rate, but Black women have a [40% higher death rate](#). And while breast cancer rates among women under 50 are rising for all, young Black women have a 50% higher breast cancer death rate than their young White women counterparts.

These devastating realities can't be explained by genetics alone. This we know. And while in some ways it's comforting to hear that Black women don't have some genetic curse looming over them, it's heartbreaking to realize how many women who have died of breast cancer could be alive today if not for the myriad of environmental factors & healthcare inequities that persist.



At Black Women for Wellness, we support efforts to address both environmental racism in the built environment of Los Angeles & in the world of beauty. I've learned that there are over 10,000 chemicals used in cosmetics and the US only restricts 11 of them. I learned that compared to White women, Black women, especially Black hairstylists, have higher levels of beauty product related chemicals in their bodies & that the cosmetics industry markets the worst of the worst products to Black communities. Black folks are also inundated by plastic which can leach chemicals; studies have isolated 150 chemicals that can go from plastic bottles & packaging into food and beverage.

Some of these chemicals are endocrine disruptors so they disrupt the body's natural hormonal processes. I educated myself and others about the reality that these injustices can be compounded by experiencing toxic pollution in other parts of life - living near a highway, going to school near an active oil well, renting an old home with lead paint or pipes - and by other inequities like a lack of healthcare access, colorism, hair discrimination, limited access to affordable and healthy foods, and so much more. Research more directly connecting the dots to understand how these considerable factors affect breast cancer incidence and mortality rates is sorely needed, but the good news is that we're getting there.

A 2019 study conducted by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences found that Black women who regularly dye their hair face a 60% increased risk of breast cancer. And Black women who regularly straighten their hair have a 30% increased risk of breast cancer.

A 2022 study conducted by the National Institute of Health found that women who regularly used hair straighteners were at a higher risk for uterine cancer.

Recently, in 2024, a study conducted by the Silent Spring Institute found more than 900 chemicals used in plastics that could have breast cancer risk factors, and were able to isolate 175 of those 900 that are likely breast carcinogens. According to PlastChem's State of the Science on Plastic Chemicals, there are at least 16,000 plastic chemicals in plastics. The majority of which have no hazard data.

While I'm ecstatic that my mom's breast cancer journey is in a bright spot, this is not the story for everyone. Many needles across many issue areas need to be moved to improve breast cancer outcomes, but for now, the data we have clearly highlights the need to drastically regulate the chemical industry. There are more studies to explore & these alone don't create causality, but chemicals of concern show up in far too many parts of our lives, and it doesn't have to be like this. We don't have to be test subjects for industries who put profit over people.



Global Beauty Secrets

NATURAL TIPS AND TRADITIONS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Written by Madison Beckett

Break away from conventional beauty products with a laundry list of toxic chemicals like **parabens**, **sulfates**, and **phthalates**. Instead, embrace natural alternatives with four powerful ingredients from around the world that have been used for generations to nourish and protect skin and hair!



INDIA



BULGARIA



MOROCCO



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INDIA

TURMERIC

Turmeric is a widely cherished spice in Indian cuisine, but it is also great for your skin. There is scientific evidence that turmeric/curcumin products and supplements, both supplements and topical, may provide therapeutic benefits for skin health. This is due to its anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antioxidant, and anti-neoplastic properties



INGREDIENTS

- ½ teaspoon turmeric powder
- ½ teaspoon organic apple cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon of raw honey (ideally also local and organic)
- ½ teaspoon milk or yogurt
- 1 drop lemon essential oil or fresh lemon juice



Instructions

- Wash face and hands first to remove impurities and any make-up.
- In a small bowl or jar, mix the turmeric powder with the apple cider vinegar, honey, milk or yogurt, and optional lemon oil. Try to get a consistency that will stick to your face. Be careful not to make it too thin as it may drip.
- Apply the mask carefully avoiding your eyes.
- Allow the mask to sit on your face for 15–20 minutes.
- Rinse with warm water.

Bulgaria

ROSE WATER

Research suggests that rose water has properties that may help reduce: wrinkles, sun damage, oxidative stress, which can lead to skin damage. Rose petals and rose oil contain several powerful antioxidants, which may help protect cells from damage caused by oxidative stress (Aremu & Preiato, 2024).



INGREDIENTS

4 tablespoons rose water
2 tablespoons witch hazel
1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar



Instructions

- Add all ingredients to a mixing bowl and stir to combine. Decant into a clean atomizer (spray bottle). Use to spritz your face in the morning and allow the skin to dry before applying face oil.
- 4 tablespoons rose water, 2 tablespoons witch hazel, 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- Keep the toner in a dark, cool place for up to 6 months.

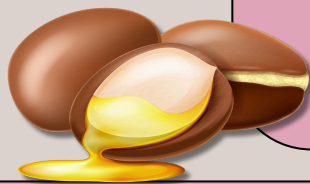


Recipe Source

Morocco

ARGAN OIL

Argan oil is a staple in Morocco. It has a wonderful nutty flavor used in many traditional dishes. But did you know Argan Oil can be a beneficial addition to your beauty routine? Argan oil has both antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, making it helpful for slowing the aging process. Several research studies suggest that argan oil can also be applied to your skin to reduce inflammation caused by injuries or infections. Some human studies show argan oil — both ingested and administered directly — to be effective for increasing skin elasticity and hydration in postmenopausal women.



INGREDIENTS

- 1 Tbsp. organic argan oil
- 1 Tbsp. organic jojoba oil
- 1 tsp. pomegranate seed oil or castor oil
(optional, for dry/coarse hair)
- 5 drops organic rosemary essential oil
- 5 drops organic lavender essential oil

Instructions

- Combine carrier oils and essential oils in a 1 oz. glass dropper bottle.
- Screw on cap and roll bottle between palms to disperse essential oils.
- How to Use Leave-In Conditioner
- For dry hair: Place a couple of drops onto fingertips, run through midway to ends of hair. Avoid adding oils to the scalp directly, as this is where oil can tend to build up.
- For wet hair: Place a couple of drops into finger tips and run through midway to ends of hair, brush through while still wet, and style as normal.

Recipe Source

West Africa

SHEA BUTTER

Nicknamed “womens gold,” Shea butter comes from the nuts of karité trees that grow in the Sahel region extending from West to East Africa, from Guinea and Senegal to Uganda and South Sudan. Shea butter brings many benefits, such as providing moisturization, preventing acneanti-bacterial, anti-fungal, anti-oxidant benefits. Beyond its bountiful beauty benefits, the Shea Butter industry provides employment and income to millions of women across the continent. According to data from the United Nations, an average of three million African women work directly or indirectly with shea butter.



INGREDIENTS

Cocoa Butter

Shea Butter

Coconut Oil

Avocado Butter

Jojoba Oil

Tapioca Starch or Arrowroot Starch

Instructions for an Easy Whipped Body Butter

- Combine all ingredients into a bowl and use a hand or stand mixer to mix all ingredients all together
- Can use a kitchen scale to equally fill your chosen jars

Recipe Source

Beauty through the Ages

REVITALIZING RITUALS

Existing in our society today has us submerged in countless beauty and wellness practices. Many involve the latest technologies and chemical cocktails; we've got retinol and red light therapy, chemical scrubs, and adverts for some form of injection on every street corner. The modern age of beauty Springs on.

Even as practices evolve and innovate, we can draw wisdom from the past. Throughout history, civilizations around the world have developed unique beauty and wellness practices, many of which are still cherished today, or have been given a modern twist.

For the most part, these ancient rituals weren't just about outward appearances; they embodied holistic approaches to health and well-being that recognized the deep connection between the mind, body, and spirit. Many of the elements of beauty practices signified something deeper; a relationship or connection with nature, a deity, or the community. A lot of contemporary western beauty practices (though not all) stem from European colonialism, and so can focus on obscuring or changing black features, including hair texture and skin colour. Many of these traditional beauty practices, though, can hold great benefits for black women's wellbeing and promote a healthy appearance.





GREEK AND ROMAN WATER THERAPIES

The ancient Romans and Greeks were masters of bathing rituals, believing that both physical and mental well-being could be enhanced through water. The communal baths, known as *thermae* in Rome and *balnea* in Greece, were elaborate centers of relaxation and rejuvenation. Visitors would enjoy a sequence of hot, warm, and cold baths, designed to detoxify the body, improve circulation, and relax the muscles.

Greek women, in particular, used natural ingredients like olive oil for massages and skin treatments. The oil was believed to nourish the skin and keep it hydrated, which also contributed to the Greeks' ideal of a healthy, radiant appearance. Roman women also used lead-based cosmetics - best to keep this one in the past.

EGYPT

Ancient Egyptians were pioneers in the world of beauty and wellness, creating luxurious skincare routines that have influenced generations. Cleopatra, perhaps the most iconic beauty figure of all time, was known for her use of milk baths to keep her skin soft and radiant. The lactic acid in milk acted as a gentle exfoliant, removing dead skin cells and revealing smoother skin.

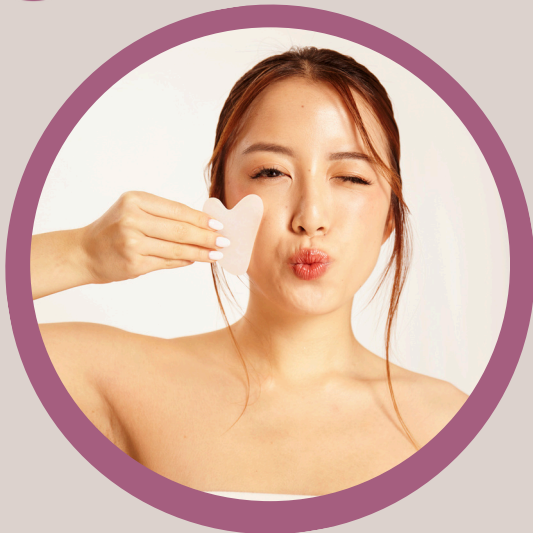
In addition to milk, the Egyptians used a variety of natural ingredients, such as honey, oils, and plant extracts. They were also among the first to use c to line their eyes, creating an alluring look while simultaneously protecting the eyes from the harsh glare of the sun and the spread of eye infections.

ANCIENT INDIAN AYURVEDA

Dating back thousands of years, Ayurveda is one of the oldest holistic health systems in the world, originating in India. This ancient practice focuses on balancing the mind, body, and spirit through personalized wellness regimens. It emphasizes the importance of diet, exercise, meditation, and was incorporated into beauty rituals.

Ayurvedic beauty practices often involve the use of natural oils and herbs. For example, the rejuvenating properties of coconut oil are well-known in Ayurvedic traditions. It is used not only as a moisturizer for the skin but also as a nourishing treatment for the hair and scalp. Turmeric, with its anti-inflammatory properties, has been used in face masks for glowing, blemish-free skin. These practices have endured for centuries because of their focus on internal health as well as external beauty.





CHINESE BEAUTY AND WELLNESS PRACTICES

In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), beauty and wellness are deeply tied to the balance of yin (the feminine, nurturing force) and yang (the masculine, energetic force). Ancient Chinese beauty practices often focused on maintaining this balance, using herbal remedies, acupuncture, and facial massage.

One of the most revered practices was gua sha, a method of scraping the skin with a smooth-edged tool to improve circulation and reduce puffiness. This practice has had a notable resurgence in western beauty culture in the past few years, becoming a common practice for sculpting the face and promoting a youthful glow. Additionally, herbs like ginseng and green tea were widely used for their anti-aging properties and ability to promote vitality.

Chinese medicine also placed great importance on internal health, with a focus on maintaining digestive health and balancing the body's internal energy (known as qi). A healthy diet, along with acupuncture and herbal treatments, was thought

JAPANESE RITUALS

In Japan, beauty is often seen as a reflection of inner harmony and simplicity. Traditional Japanese beauty rituals include the use of gentle, natural ingredients like rice bran, seaweed, and green tea. Geishas, renowned for their flawless skin, often used rice powder as a natural sunscreen and facial cleanser. Rice bran, packed with antioxidants and vitamins, was also used in exfoliation treatments, removing dead skin cells while keeping the skin hydrated and soft.

The Japanese practice of onsen (hot spring bathing) is another long-standing wellness ritual that continues today. These mineral-rich baths are believed to promote relaxation, improve circulation, and detoxify the body.

Another noteworthy practice is shirin-yoku, or "forest bathing," which involves immersing oneself in nature to reduce stress and increase overall well-being. Research has shown that time spent in forests can improve mental clarity, lower blood pressure, and boost immunity. A healthy body often promotes radiance as a byproduct.





INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS

Indigenous cultures around the world have long looked to nature for beauty and wellness solutions. Some Native American tribes, for example, often used herbs and plants for both beauty and medicinal purposes. Echinacea and sage were common herbs used for skincare, while cedarwood was prized for its cleansing and healing properties. Indigenous Communities often have much greater ties and respect for the land and natural resources than our western extractive consumerist culture demonstrates.

In Africa, the use of shea butter dates back centuries, as it was known to hydrate the skin and protect against the harsh sun. This rich, natural product continues to be incorporated into beauty treatments worldwide. Similarly, the Maasai people of East Africa have long used red ochre as a natural body paint, which provides both aesthetic beauty and protection from the sun's rays.



ANCIENT BEAUTY SECRETS: FROM NATURE TO MODERN RITUALS

Many of these ancient beauty and wellness practices have formed the basis of modern-day skincare and self-care rituals. There is a strong argument that western culture has ultimately commodified and appropriated many of these practices, dropping the holistic meaning of wellbeing and instead focussing solely on appearance driven results.

Nevertheless, reflecting on historical practices allows us to revive ancient wisdom and potentially reconnect with more natural resources and traditions through our beauty practices. Black women today can explore and revitalise these practices to enhance their own health and appearance.

**Written by,
Rebecca Barry, Medical Anthropologist**

Rebecca holds an MSc in Medical Anthropology from the University of Oxford, and she currently works in the field of children's health and reducing harmful environmental exposures. Additionally, Rebecca is a freelance journalist and writes about topics related to health and wellbeing.



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International Women's Day 2025

On International Women's Day, Black Women for Wellness gathered at the Feminist Majority Foundation to celebrate the theme:

"For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment."

The event brought together powerful voices and community leaders to advocate for equal rights and opportunities for women and girls everywhere.



ETHIOPIAN COFFEE CEREMONY

The morning kicked off with networking and an authentic Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony, hosted by Meron Shita, as attendees enjoyed light bites and refreshments



International Women's Day 2025



WELCOME ADDRESS

BWW Executive Director Janette Robinson Flint and Rev. McKenzie opened the session with welcoming remarks, setting the tone for a day of impactful conversations and inspiration. The keynote speaker, Nora Vargas, delivered an energizing speech on the importance of accelerating action for women's rights and empowerment.



PANEL SESSIONS

The **Youth Breakout Panel:** Highlighted youth activism and community impact, featuring speakers from the UCLA Reproductive Health Interest Group, UCLA's Palestinian student union, and the Latine Graduate Student Association.



The **Mature Breakout Session:** Moderator Professor Marissa Montes from Loyola Marymount, this session focused on wellness and advocacy for women, refugees, and asylum seekers.



International Women's Day 2025

BRUNCH & POWER TALKS



International Women's Day speakers included Janette Robinson Flint, Arnedra Jordan, Carla Macal, Anthnette Drone, Adia James, Xochitl Lopez-Ayala shared insights on advancing women's rights and addressing systemic challenges.

CLOSING CEREMONY

The event concluded with a Closing Ceremony, where attendees pledged their commitment to advancing women's rights and took part in discussions on next steps for policy and community action.



CALL TO ACTION

Thank you to everyone who made this day a success! Let's continue to [#AccelerateActionForAllWomenAndGirls](#) and build a feminist future where no one is left behind.

