

COMPELLING COMMENTS

Christina M. Jenkins: Weaving the History of Artificial Hair Extensions

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The desire to have a full head of hair or wear a different hairstyle is not unique to the 21st century. In Ancient Egypt and Rome wigs were important social markers of attractiveness, health, and standing. Evidence also demonstrates that in addition to wigs, primitive sewn-in weaves were worn in Ancient Egypt (ca. 1300 BC),¹ suggesting our ancient counterparts similarly valued keeping their hairpieces in place.

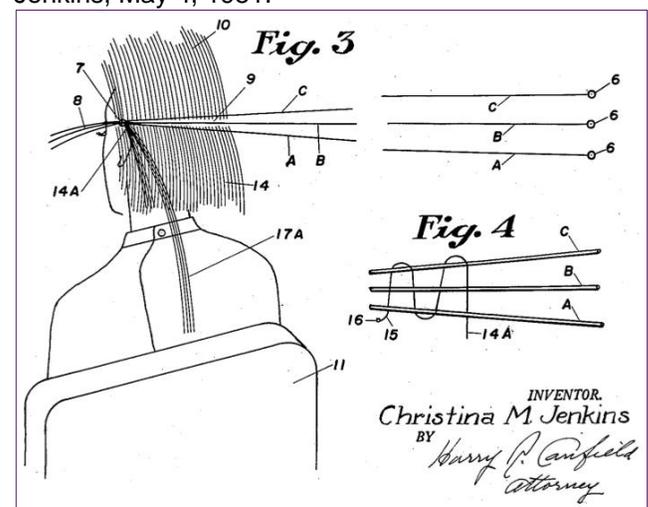
In 1952, an African American woman named Christina Jenkins solved this millennium old problem with the invention of “HairWeeve”. After working for a wig manufacturer, Jenkins patented “a method and apparatus by which commercial human hair [could] be securely attached to the live hair on the head” (Figure 1).^{2,3} By sewing hair weaves into braided hair on the scalp, Jenkins invented the modern weave. Given the demand for her invention, Jenkins opened a “Hair-Weev” academy and spent the next 50 years training cosmetologists from across the world.³

In the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s the popularity of weaves exploded as prominent black women like Janet Jackson, Lisa Bonet, Naomi Campbell, and Tyra Banks embraced artificial hair extensions. As weaves were brought into the mainstream, they helped initiate an ongoing national discourse on hegemonically defined beauty standards and

cultural authenticity, with Oprah Winfrey outspokenly advocating for natural hairstyles.

Today, enhancements like bonding, singeing, and access to hair of different color and texture have created more natural appearing products, while the well-publicized risk of central centrifugal cicatricial alopecia has created a movement toward improved safety profiles for hair weaves. As Jenkins’ invention adapts to modern values and demands, including a newfound appeal toward male users, the weave will assuredly continue to play an important role in hair.

Figure 1. “Permanently Attaching Commercial Hair to Live Hair” patent illustration filed by Christina M. Jenkins, May 4, 1951.



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