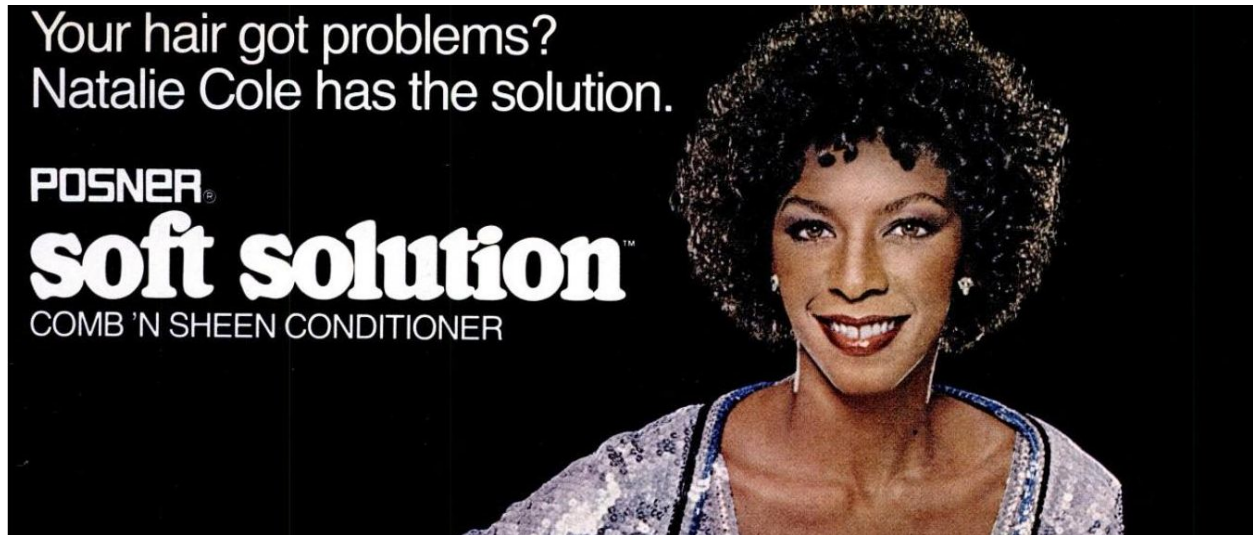


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The screenshot (which should be sent as an attachment of my email) of this ad from an issue of *Ebony* magazine of November 1980 (which was the special 35th anniversary issue), is not immediately visually striking nor would it particularly stand out amongst other more obviously enthralling ads, but it quickly caught my eye as I scrolled through several issues of *Ebony*. First, there is the fact that it is an advertisement about ethnic hair care products—which, in my experience, are sometimes problematic in and of themselves and which are usually marketed in a way that promotes straightened or relaxed hair, rather than the natural Afro. It seems problematic—to some—just to call such hair products ethnic. I've been personally asked on several occasions whether or not I was offended that most pharmacies or superstores had separate aisles for ethnic hair care and I never really seriously considered the question. One of

my friends jokingly said that it seemed like its own form of segregation to him, which I did not give much thought to at the time, but which seems horrid to me now.

I come from New York City and live in a neighborhood on the cusp of an Orthodox Jewish community and a West Indian and Hispanic community. I am used to going to small, locally owned stores that specifically sell only ethnic hair care products, often with the prefix Afro- in their names. I am not sure when pharmacies like Rite-Aid or superstores like Target started selling such products, but it does make me slightly uncomfortable that such corporations feel the need to specify that these products are meant for hair of a coarser texture than the accepted American beauty standard of straight hair. It might seem slightly hypocritical to buy from locally owned stores that specialize in ethnic hair care products and then get upset when pharmacies attempt to market towards a specific customer, but I figure it is similar to restaurants—you go to an Italian restaurant because you want Italian food, but you would not go into a supermarket and expect the owners to separate foods by the ethnicity or culture they are most closely associated with.

Again on this specific advertisement, I thought it was most important that a star of the Black community such as Natalie Cole was the face of the company and featured in the ad. But what really caused me to choose this ad in particular is the text on the image that seems to desperately try to reach out to a stereotype in the Black community in a sad attempt to be “hip”. “Your hair got problems?” the ad asks, the very first words on the page. I don’t have to use much of my imagination to hear this question being asked in a stereotypical black female’s voice, likely a female from the “hood”. The lack of grammar structure and use of Ebonics in advertisements aimed at a Black demographic is and always has been appalling to me, especially because it only helps to perpetuate a stereotype that discourages education in the Black

community. When companies (or people in general) try to use such speech in order to “relate” to Black people, it is irritating and honestly, quite insulting. The fact that such an ad seems to be proudly displayed in a magazine for the Black community is a little worrying, but perhaps *Ebony* was also trying to “relate” to their audience.