

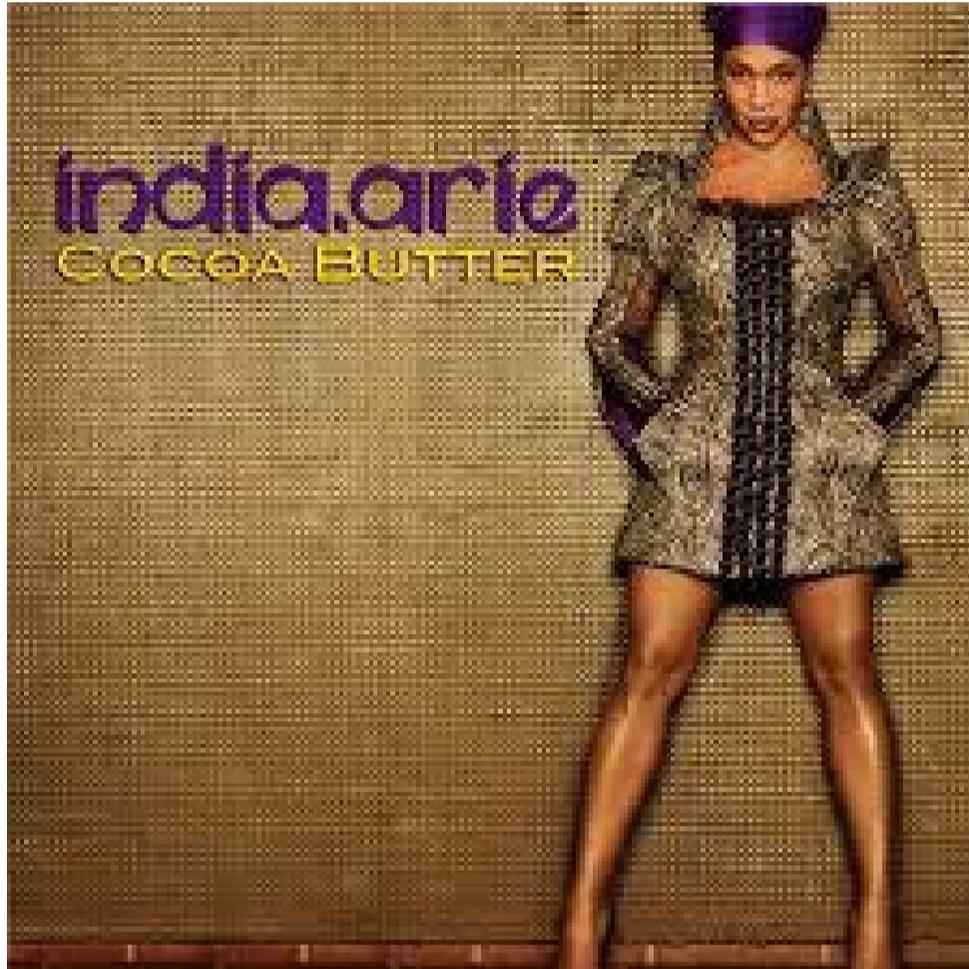
SONGVERSATION I AM LIGHT

My Thoughts On The
Skin Bleaching Allegations

A SongVersation on how we can heal.

Part Two: The Back Story

PT 2: NUANCE - THE BACK STORY



*I am not my hair
I am not this skin
I am not your expectations
no, no,
I am not my hair
I am not this skin
I am the Soul
that lives within*

- *I Am Not My Hair* from the album
Testimony Vol. 1 Life & Relationships

Why did I allow the Cocoa Butter photo to go out that way?

I titled part 2 of this SongVersation Nuance because this IS the issue at hand: celebrity culture, and social media culture do not allow for subtlety, humanity or nuance. Celebrities are generally stripped of their humanity. I DO know it's par for the course but I can't, I won't, accept that in this conversation now. The character assassination of "SkinGate 2013" was too damaging. Because of the importance this conversation to my integrity and to the community I love so much, it is vital for me to be ACCEPTED in it as a full human being.

When we see ANYone as less "human" it give us reason to TREAT them as less. We are seeing it all over the United States right now with black men being treated like animals by law enforcement.

ARE WE NOT ALL mind, body, spirit and emotion?

We all have different lives, but we are sharing this human experience and there are certain aspects of life that are just the human condition.

From the most famous, to the most anonymous,
we were created from the same grains

- from the interludes from Testimony vol 2

What I'm saying is, reducing me to JUST THE SKIN I AM IN creates conversations like this skin bleaching accusation, when in REALITY, there are several nuanced layers to this story. These nuances, need more than a tweet to be explained thus THIS SongVersation. I want to start here!

There are very specific challenges of being the public persona that is India.Arie:

1. Image vs. the real me
2. Growing (up) in the public eye
3. Being a Black person and Black WOMAN in the public eye.

All of this COMBINED WITH the multidimensional nature of being human

Physical

Spiritual

Mental

Emotional

So this is not the journey of “India.Arie” but the Journey of India Arie Simpson, the FULL me.

In this SongVersation I want to get really human, and really real because it's what's TRUE.

IMAGE VS THE REAL ME

There is a public persona/image/brand, that is India Arie, and then there's the REAL me. These two sides of me are so closely connected, that many people feel they know me, which is not completely true or UNtrue. The real me and the artist me are so closely aligned my audience *does* know me, at least as much as someone can a public person.

I'm not saying this is the best way to be, there is definitely something protective about having an alter ego that walks out onto stage. I give a lot of my REAL self to my craft and it hurts me sometimes. BUT, even with the confessional, personal, emotional quality of my music, there are always those things you can never know about a person you've never really met.

GROWING UP IN THE PUBLIC EYE

The next layer to this is, being a public person. In the music industry, we sell brands, images and product, and the consumer is MEANT to interact with an artist, not as a person but as an IMAGE, or a PRODUCT. This results in a celebrity being stuck in time in the public's mind. For example my first album Acoustic Soul was released in 2001, Voyage to India, 2002, Testimony Vol. 1 2006, Testimony Vol. 2 was released in 2009 and SongVersation, 2013. My record label wanted me to keep making Acoustic Soul over and over again, which would never have worked because, I ceased to be that person the moment that album was released, because life changes us all.

We ALL have changed over the years. Imagine if people kept holding you to who you were 15 years ago! This matters to the story of this image we are discussing, because, the time between 2009 and 2013 were the *most* transformative years of my adult life. As whole beings, when one part of our being changes the other parts change TOO. We are again, all interconnected, mind, body, soul and emotions. I say this to say, there is more to the Cocoa Butter image than meets the eye.

BEING A BLACK. WOMAN. IN THE PUBLIC EYE

This is a HUGE psychological weight, because you are hit from so many angles. Every celebrity woman has to navigate a magnified version of the issues of sexism and misogyny like; objectification, unattainable beauty ideals, expectations of moral perfection (the madonna), or the exact opposite of moral perfection (the whore), and there is no in between. To BE something in between you have to fight HARD to make your own space. There are issues of sexual discrimination and denigration. All women in the music industry have to navigate these issues.

NOW, add BLACK to female celebrity and you have issues of racism; being seen as less than my white counterparts, given smaller budgets for projects, artist like me are LITERALLY CALLED “black music” by record labels. Black people in American society generally have to work harder to get less or equal to our white counterparts, and this is par for the course for the average black artist in the music industry as well.

THIS is where it starts to get **Nuanced**: THERE IS YET ANOTHER LAYER. I am a BLACK female celebrity, who is CARRYING the message of black women in my music and criticizes the the very mercenary culture we live in, and speaks up for love and spirituality, diversity, God, empowerment of women, respect for girls and hope for love.

I was SO naive when I released my first album, and it's been a serious struggle all of these years. It's A LOT of weight, a lot of pressure, and there has been a lot of disappointment. While it's been the journey of a lifetime, exciting, transformative, powerful, special, rare, full of love and respect and appreciation, it's dark side has been a great physical and emotional and spiritual burden.

This business, it's harsh. Stevie Wonder once said of me, “She is so lovely and this business is so NOT.” I worry every time I see a new young woman come into the business, because, I GET IT. And I never wonder when I see artists leave the business because ...I get it.

Nuance: ADD to ALL OF THAT, a layer of expectation from the general Black community, loving me all these years for what I represent, but quick to reprimand and even turn on me for not living up to their ideal of me. When “SkinGate 2013” happened, it moved me in a different way, because I'm USED to the music industry struggle, but I NEVER had to defend myself against the very people I sing for.

No, I don't think I deserved the benefit of the doubt, I felt I had EARNED the benefit of the doubt. And so I'm writing this SongVersation in the name of the REAL ME, India Arie Simpson, the multidimensional, physical, spiritual, mental, emotional, FULL ME. I want to clean this conversation up and unburden myself of this attack on my integrity AND truly connect with those who appreciate what I am about.

Nuance: Once I signed with a major label at 22 years old, I quickly, like the VERY FIRST

DAY, learned that there are as many opinions and intentions and life views as there are people, and I had the job of bringing them all into *my world*. This is *CRITICAL* to keeping the message I was about to share with the ENTIRE WORLD, on track.

The talent scout who took me to meet the label put my songs onto a cassette (yes cassette tapes were in common use back then lol) in the order *they* wanted. It bothered me that someone else was choosing how to present me. I was always very particular about the order I presented my songs in, but this time the talent scout chose the order and I didn't agree, but I wanted her to do whatever she had to do to get me a record deal, so it didn't matter THAT much. Little did I know that this was the beginning of this ongoing compromise of my vision that I would make in order to keep the peace and be successful. The talent scout even asked me to dress different that day ... LOL! Thank God for my mother defining my style... THAT is one area where I did NOT continue to compromise after that day.

This forced collaboration intensified as my career developed. So much of how I was presented was out of my hands. There were so many different people, and departments, and focus groups and polls... a machine really, whose JOB it was to present *me*. Bringing them into MY WORLD would become the hardest part of my work all of these years.

GENERALLY speaking, I'd say this worked out for the best. Sometimes it was a struggle getting there, but in the end I'd be able to stand behind every song on every album.

There was the periodic misstep and each time I didn't get it right it hurt. These missteps hurt so much because it wasn't just the issue of keeping my musical career on track. For me, it was about keeping my LIFE'S MISSION, my MESSAGE on track, and so a remix I didn't like, an album cover I didn't choose, being asked to change the bass and drums on records, was scary.

Sometimes the changes I would agree to were true for me, sometimes not. The machine was churning forward at such a powerful force, I couldn't stop to recover. My heart got so tired that the weight of the machine *caused* THREE major break downs.

The FIRST one I slept over the weekend and went back out on the road.

The SECOND break down, I just walked away -- for a while, and then I released Testimony vol. 2 about 3 years later.

The THIRD break down - was my breakthrough.

It happened In the fall of 2009, after a year of too many missteps from which to recover, after a DECADE of too many heart breaks, I'd hit rock bottom. I looked up and was living someone else's version of *my* life. That scared me more than *anything ever had*. More than ANYTHING! The fear of looking 10 years *forward* and having a life that was "off track" was something I KNEW I could NOT allow to happen and I could not BLAME ANYONE but me if I did let it happen. So I went on a journey to find MY life.

I believe in open Door
I've take off the screen
What did not demolish me
Simply policed me
Now the clearer I can see
I will no longer be defined by
What someone else believes that I am
Now that i have dropped the weight
I am light as a feather
It's time to Elevate

-*SoulBirdRise* from the album *SongVersation*

I tell much more of this story on my June 2013 Super Soul Sunday interview with Oprah
[Link Here](#)

I define giving your power away as “giving someone, or *something* else, the power to dictate how you *feel* about yourself.” I was giving MY power away to a world whose values I neither adhere to, *nor* respect. It was all out of fear... and it was out of alignment. In the end it made me sick. I was literally “go to the doctor, blood tests, am I facing my mortality?” sick.

I wanted a FULL life where I could feel FULLY, not a NUMB life. So I prayed, literally on my knees, prayed. I prayed for healing, to be free, to have a career I enjoy, and a base line feeling of well being, and for a while there I achieved that.

I left the public eye in the fall of 2009 and returned in the spring of 2013. Those four years comprised an EPIC SOLO journey, a quest to really find MY life. During that time I even recorded an album that was never released.

What came out of this quest with were these truths:

The spiritual challenge: The consequences of NOT living MY truth made me ill.

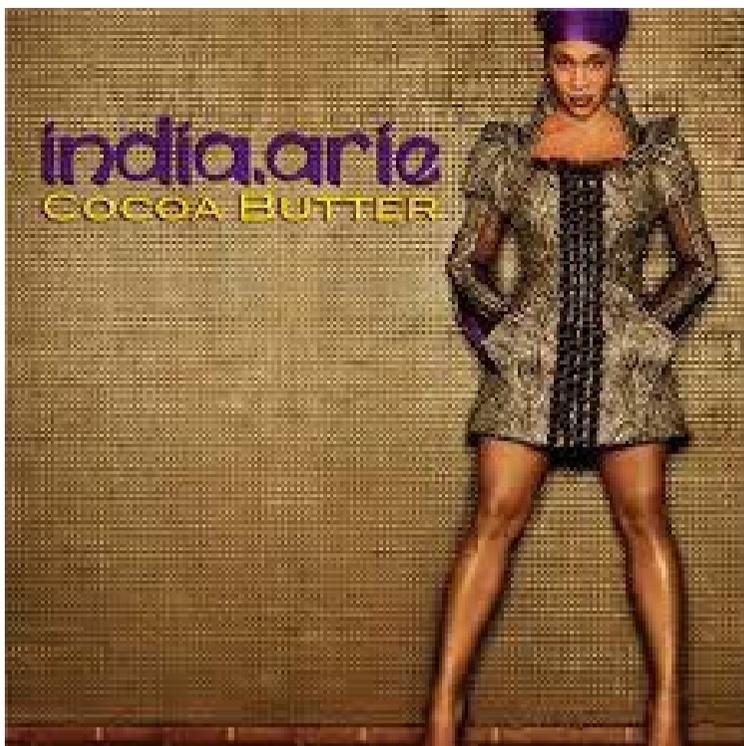
The emotional challenge: I had to stop playing the victim! Time to take 100% responsibility for myself and face my challenges head on.

The physical challenge: Detoxing from unhealthy habits and stress. Shedding weight and cleaning up my diet which led to a detox *through* my skin.

The mental challenge: Correcting negative thinking and sarcasm that was taking a toll on the quality of my life. The skin break out/detox is the part of the healing process that matters MOST to this *SongVersation*

I came RIGHT out of this hiatus into “SkinGate 2013” .

So, Finally, let's talk about this photo, the *Cocoa Butter* single cover.



AS IT PERTAINS TO THIS PHOTO:

AGAIN, Physical, spiritual, mental and emotional - *This Cocoa Butter* photo and how it came to be, has to be looked at from each of these perspectives, in order to REALLY understand it. So, let jump into this...

THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL NATURE OF THIS IMAGE

Physically: In general, my health was steady but what I was dealing with in this photo was the HEALTH of my skin, NOT the COLOR of it. More about that to follow.

Spiritually: I'd grown so much in the four years since I had last been seen. I experienced more than a transformation, it was a TRANSMUTATION. It was healing in the true sense of the word. Healing is defined as being returned to a state of ONENESS. I left fragmented and confused, and came back WHOLE, not feeling splintered, not feeling fearful. I came back ready to be ALL of me; spiritual & sensual, cerebral & sexy, lion & butterfly, artist & business woman. I didn't have to *choose AND I didn't have a choice. It was time to put everything I'd grown to be, into practice.* I WAS STRONG!

Mentally: I was prepared to defend showing so much skin! Explaining to my audience who was used to seeing me "all wrapped up" AND ready to defend myself against the OTHER side; non fans who insult anything that falls outside of conventional beauty ideals. I PROMISED I wouldn't shy away from those conversation ANY more. I WAS READY!

Emotionally: Where I'd been wounded before, I was STRONG, going from 2009 being completely broken to 2013 actually having a PHOTO SHOOT! I was ready to speak my truth, tour, sing, interview, write, talk, ALL of it. I assumed this picture would spark conversation, because it comes with GROWING UP in the public eye. I was equipped to walk in MY TRUTH. I was EMPOWERED.

The confluence of all of that created THIS picture.

I just didn't think the color of my skin would be THE conversation.

For that, I WAS NOT PREPARED.

As I said before the ONLY question that mattered to ME in this conversation was,

“Why did I let that image go out that way?”

NOW LETS DIG IN DEEPER.

I'm going to get a bit technical. Please stay with me, it will all make sense.

The Challenge of being a Black Woman in the public eye.

Lets talk about SHADE.

For lots of different reasons, most people don't know what I really look like, that includes what my body really looks like and what COLOR or what *shade* of brown I *actually* am. Here again is a nuance of being a black woman in the public eye.

Nuance:

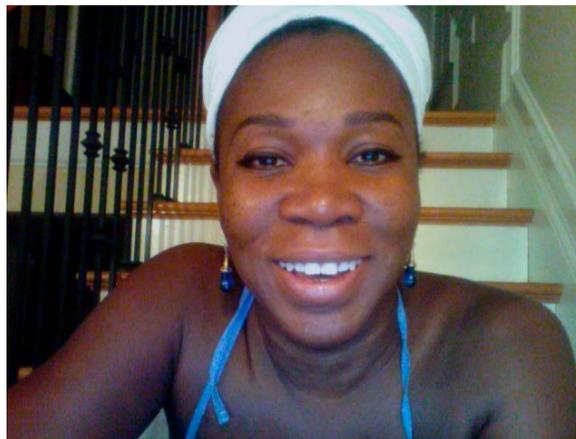
1. My ACTUAL skin tone.
2. Trying to match my skin tone with makeup, which is particularly difficult for women of color in a culture that is not geared towards women of color.
3. Missing the mark with makeup color (it just happens sometimes) with skin tones like mine.
4. What lighting combined with makeup does to the skin tone (this is why sometimes Black people look “grey” on television).
5. How certain Brown skin tones photograph and translate through the camera. Oprah is known for having the BEST cameras for Black skin. I LOVE being translated to television through her camera's lense.
6. My image, brand and what people EXPECT.

This explanation begins with ME. Not my image, not my brand, but the REAL ME.

BROWN SKIN

YOU KNOW I LOVE YOUR BROWN SKIN.

- Brown Skin - From the album Acoustic Soul

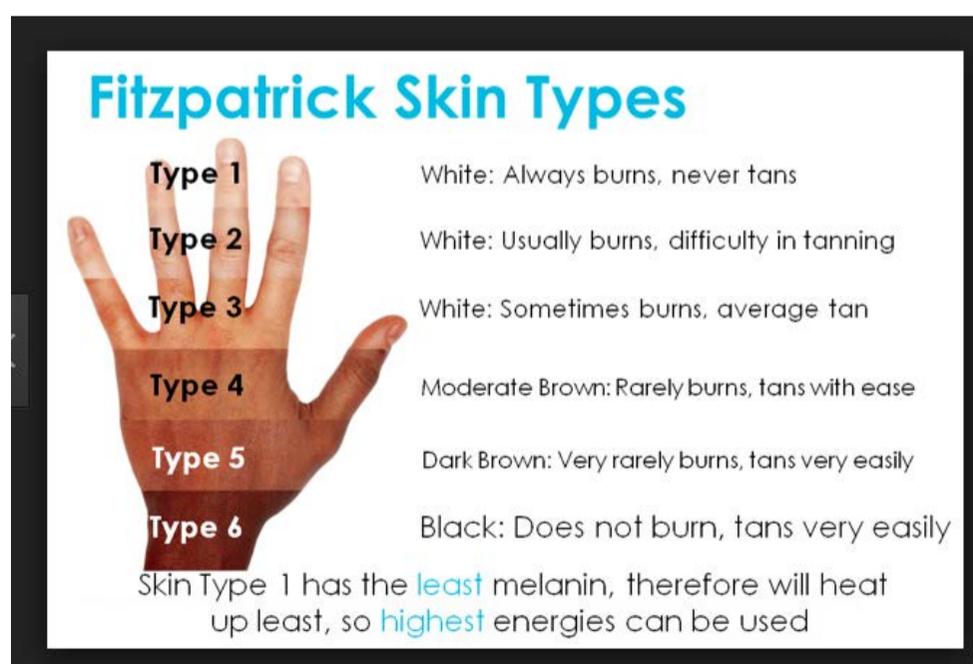


Me with NO make up 2012

For those of you reading this who are removed from Black culture, I am what in colloquial terms, we in the Black community call “BROWN skinned,” as opposed to “dark skinned”. For the sake of this conversation, I want to go to a book by Aleish Pierce (Facebook.com/askaliesh #askaliesh), called “Treating Diverse Pigmentation”.

Aleish was my first ever makeup artist in the industry, turned aesthetician and writer. Her book is a textbook, and it sounds really TECHY, but it’s also just relatable and easy to understand. The book explains something called the Fitzpatrick Skin Typing Scale. I learned so much about my skin from *this* section of the book.

Fitzpatrick Skin Typing Scale



I am a Fitzpatrick Type 5: characterized by, brown to dark brown, tans easily, scars easily, rarely burns.

Most people THINK I am a Fitzpatrick Type 6: dark brown, rarely tans, never burns (like we say, the miracle chemical melanin).



My friend Reggae star Gramps Morgan (left) is Dark skinned (Fitzpatrick Type 6). Next to each other I am more “Brown” or for the sake of this conversation Fitzpatrick Type 5.

If I’ve been sun worshipping, which I do twice a year at least and more if I get to go to a sunny location while touring, I TAN EASILY, to a DARK BROWN (Fitzpatrick Type 6) skin tone. I LOVE it when I look like this. It never lasts long enough.

What I learned is, THIS is why my skin tone would change so much more than most of the friends I would visit the beach with. They would turn red or gold and I would turn dark brown and my skin would look very EVEN in color, because all of my blemishes are hidden by the activation of my melanin. I LOVE looking like this!



July 2013 just at the release of SongVensation. I flew in from Hawaii THIS very morning after swimming in the wild with dolphins for 2 hours. It was so AWESOME and i was SO DARK.



Self photo in Polynesia 2010

I had been there for a month (crying a lot) and sun worshipping. This is actually a self photo shoot - I just used my camera timer and posed fast LOL! because I looked so dark and pretty.

Nuance: When I'm not in the sun at ALL (another layer to this conversation) which happens more often these days because I live in two different states, (one very sunny, one very NOT) I'm on the lighter end of brown.



I came straight from my NOT sunny home base, to this event. But the flash is making me lighter.

Seconds later, different flash





This is an accurate representation of what I (and my mom) think I looked like that day.

But of course depending on how a person WANTS to see me, any of these can then be “right.”

Now, more to the point...

Nuance: There have been many MANY times, when I want to participate in an awards show or something televised and my label won't give me the financial support to attend, (again politics of the music industry) so I get makeup done at my hotel. Because I don't have anyone there to touch me up before I go on stage, I use the make up artists available backstage.

MANY times I've had professional makeup artists matte my face with powder that is TOO DARK because they don't REALLY know what color I am, even while looking at me, or maybe seeing me in the dark at the side of the stage. Or maybe, they've seen me as a certain color in a photo and assume I'm *that* color on *that* day.



Feb 2007: If you notice my face is darker than my body and I have no high light under the eyes.

I didn't leave the hotel this way, I was powdered dark. In fact, I saw Oprah's makeup artist, Reggie, backstage and he said “you look a little dark.” Not only was I powdered dark, but the powder also oxidized with the oil in my skin and got darker over the course of the night.



From testimony Vol. 1 Era

In some of my FAVORITE images (especially black and white ones) I *appear* far darker, and MAYBE WAS darker. I LOVE the idea of that combination. But of course this doesn't trigger the colorism issue. Because of my image brand and message, people EXPECT me to be this darker color.



Feb 2012: on the left: My make up artist and I argued this day because my make up was too dark.



Right: same week. Make up matches my neck and chest



The day the picture on the left was taken, I was interviewed for CNN and several people from my team and family called (as always when I'm on television) and said I looked dark. Oddly enough this picture showed up a lot as the "standard" comparison for how much lighter I was in the *Cocoa Butter* cover photo.

Nuance: On top of ALL THAT the picture on the right is OBVIOUSLY lightened, because this is what people do for a sensational story. Sadly it often has to be at the expense of another person's reputation.

This is called a media spin.

Now, check this out: All 3 of the following pictures were taken in the same week.



Again Feb 2012, same week, same hair, same bag (Mom's bag) , different skin tones.



Feb 2011: This is a balanced representation of my skin tone. Relaxed from sun exposure, face, neck and chest matching in color. I did my make up this day and this was before the BIG SKIN break out.

Same era - 2011 - this is from my Atlanta TEDX Talk AND - anyone who wants to hear some songs from that UNRELEASED album - you can click it [HERE](#).

So, are you confused? Are you clear? What?

*I am not my hair, i am not this skin
I am not your expectations no, no.
I am not my hair
I am not this skin
I am the soul
That lives within*

- *I Am Not My Hair* from the album Testimony Vol. 1

I reiterate my points:

1. My ACTUAL skin tone.
2. Trying to match my skin tone with makeup, which is particularly difficult for women of color in a culture that is not geared towards women of color.
3. Missing the mark with makeup color (it just happens sometimes) with MY skin tone.
4. What lighting, combined with makeup does to skin tone.
5. How certain Black skin tones photograph and translate through camera.
6. My image, brand, and what people EXPECT.

In this PARTICULAR instance, what the the lighting is doing, **combined** with the makeup, and **combined** with what shade *I am at the time*.



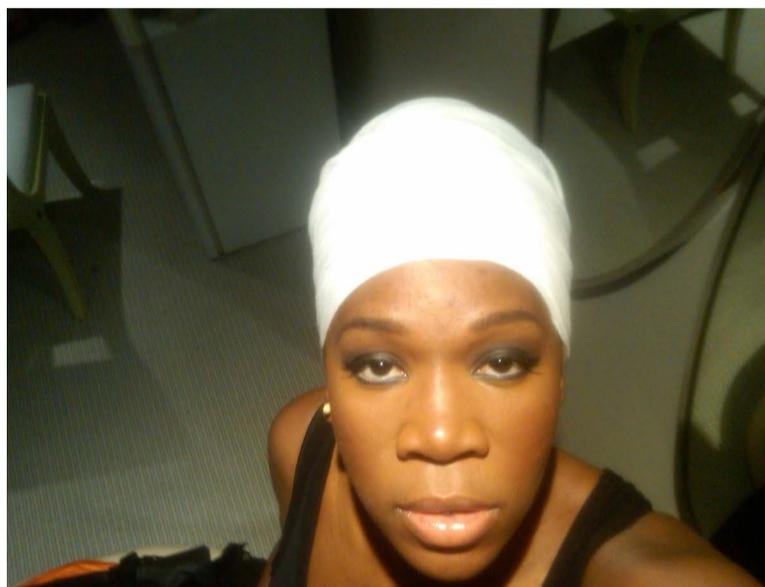
The confluence of it ALL that I naturally, actually, authentically am created both of these images.

NUANCE: Neither one of these images look like me TODAY.

AGAIN: Physical, spiritual, mental and emotional - I am, we ALL ARE, multi dimensional human beings who are constantly changing!

Let's put to rest that ANY of these images capture the ONLY me. These are all SIDES of me and the *Cocoa Butter* image is no different. This is only PART of the answer to why I let that picture go out that way. Much more to say about that...

Today right now as I type this, I am closer to the color of the *Cocoa Butter* photo (add a flash and it will be very light, see where I'm going with this?).



Me sitting here right now; everyday make up, over head light. Relaxed from sun exposure.

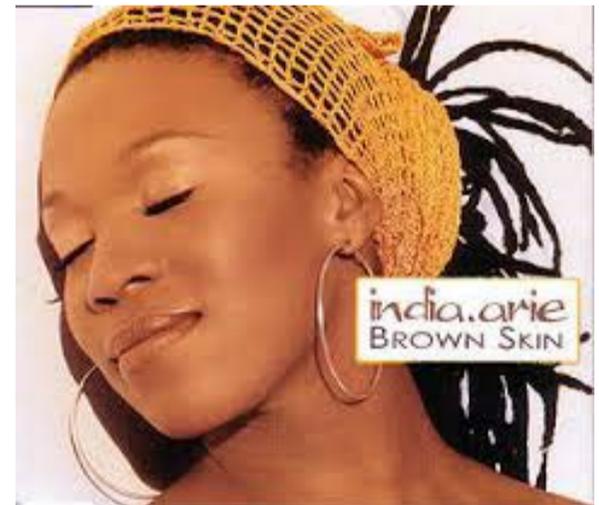
A few light pictures between 2001 and 2013



2012 Grammys



2011 BET honors



2000 Brown Skin photo

THESE IMAGES, Are not as far a stretch from the *Cocoa Butter* photo.

A few darker pictures - between 2002 and 2012



2003



2012



2006

IF YOU LOOK AT IT THIS WAY:

2009 - my last promo pictures before I took my 2009 to 2013 hiatus



My first promo pictures back in 2013 after my hiatus



Then yes, this “lighter” 2013 picture of me is a VERY different representation of my “Image”.

IF YOU LOOK AT IF FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WHO I HAVE BEEN OVER THE YEARS - and when you take that FULL ME into ACCOUNT!! this cocoa butter image is just ANOTHER aspect of ME and why CAN'T it be?

Saying I bleached my skin or that I was TRYING to look LIGHT is a misperception AND an OVERSIMPLIFICATION. What I did was, hit a nerve and triggered a cultural pain in the Black community. The fact that a nerve *can* be triggered by something that is an illusion, a digital distortion, THAT! is the crux of THIS conversation for me. THAT is what I *really* want to talk about...Our EMPOWERMENT!

The fact that the mainstream media picked up on it, after all the love I've shown for the black community? WELL THAT has nothing to do with ME.

I think this conversation is a sign of the times we live in. Black people, and people from so many walks of life, are fed up with not being accepted for who they are. And LISTEN! I GET IT. Trust me! LOL! I'm IN THE LIONS DEN with this conversation as it pertains to race and gender in the music industry. This is why I've written so many songs about self acceptance over the years. Because in a society that doesn't value, or appreciate you, self acceptance *must* come first.

When issues are coming up to be healed, it generally gets worse before it gets better, that is why I support this conversation. The possibility of healing is HERE, and how exciting!! I wrote THIS SongVersation TO MAKE IT CLEAR, WHAT SIDE I STAND ON. I STAND FOR LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE FOR ALL PEOPLE. period.

The TRUTH is! That I was fighting a VEEERRY different battle than “SkinGate 2013” would suggest.

Again, the challenge of bringing people into MY world...

coming up next, SongVersation I Am Light part 3: My REAL struggle

I can be gracious and tenacious
Progressive and patient
Everything
And everything in between
A soldier and a mother
The flower and the power
Everything and everything in between
I see my color and i hear my roar
Because of you i am so much more.
I am a lion and a butterfly
You showed me that i can be it all
She is a lion and butterfly
She showed me that i can be it all

- *Lion and Butterfly* from my forthcoming album
"The Value of Life"