

IT'S 2016...

# Where's My Foundation?

When it comes to face makeup, women of color are still looking for their match.

BY ANDREA ARTERBERY



IT'S LIKE it happened in slow motion. I fumbled my MAC foundation and watched my NW40 shatter on the floor. I was back visiting my East Texas hometown, and there wasn't a MAC counter for miles.

I headed to the local Walmart for an alternative, but nothing matched my skin tone. I'm a black woman but light-skinned (think Beyoncé). While there were dozens of shades, not one suited my olive undertones. I knew from years of trial and error that, once applied, those pale shades would give me that "trashy ashy" look.

My frustration grew as I searched for darker colors that I could mix with a lighter shade. Combing the aisles, I wondered why the darker shades were stashed on the bottom shelves, collecting dust. And really, why am I mixing my own makeup? Today, we can book a blowout via an app, but *this* is still a struggle? The longer I stood in the check-out line with my three (!) shades of liquid foundation to mix into a perfect fit, the angrier I became.

Days later, Nykhor Paul, a South Sudanese model, raised the issue on Instagram.

"Why do I have to bring my own makeup to a professional [fashion] show when all the white girls don't have to do anything but show up?" she asked.

Considering that the U.S. Census Bureau predicts that the majority of the country will be minorities by the mid-2040s and African-Americans alone already make up almost 15 percent of the U.S. population, you'd think beauty brands would *want* to keep pace with the marketplace.

## So What's the Holdup?

I called about a dozen major brands, from CoverGirl to Clinique, to get to the bottom of the problem. Part of it is geography—retailers stock a wider variety of shades in Los Angeles than they do in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

I wondered if it was a case of the chicken and the egg. If a retailer believes these customers don't exist in their region, they're less likely to allocate shelf space for darker foundations.

Perception is one part of the equation, agrees Karen Grant, global beauty industry analyst at The NPD Group, which tracks retail trends. Yet, look at MAC: "They offer a wide range of skin tones at their stores [located across the U.S.], and women buy them," she says, adding it's the number one prestige brand in the country.

As for foundation itself, creating it is more complicated than you might think. Balanda Atis, a scientist with L'Oréal USA (which owns L'Oréal Paris and Lancôme, among others), explains. "While brands might succeed in making darker shades, they didn't always get the undertones or the depth right," says Atis, who is African-American. Typically, there are four pigments used to create one shade: white, yellow, red, and black. To create deeper hues, some chemists mix in too much black pigment, which can leave skin looking bruised. For a caramel hue, there may be too much red or yellow, which can leave skin looking orange. Sometimes, chemists add titanium dioxide, a pigment used in many cosmetics to add coverage. Result: an ashy finish. So even when dark shades are available, many of them haven't been very good.

## Next-Era Foundations

The landscape is still far from perfect (although shade-matching apps and online shopping options have improved). But there have been advances.

In 2014, Atis created L'Oréal's Women of Color Lab, a team devoted to formulating cosmetics for different ethnicities. A recent win: The lab identified an aquamarine blue pigment that has the ability to create deep, pure color, to create the perfect foundation match in Lancôme's Teint Idole line for their newest face, actress



1. MAC Studio Waterweight SPF 30 Foundation in NC45, \$33, [maccosmetics.com](http://maccosmetics.com)
2. BLACK UP Sublime Powder in NPS03, \$37.50, [blackupcosmetics.com](http://blackupcosmetics.com)
3. CHANEL Perfection Lumière in 114 Ambré, \$58, [chanel.com](http://chanel.com)
4. ESTÉE LAUDER Double Wear All-Day Glow BB Moisture Makeup SPF 30 in Intensity 6.0, \$38, [esteelauder.com](http://esteelauder.com)
5. YVES SAINT LAURENT Le Teint Touche Éclat Foundation in B90, \$58, [yslbeautyus.com](http://yslbeautyus.com)
6. COVERGIRL Queen Collection CC Cream in Golden Honey, \$8.99, drugstores
7. DOLCE & GABBANA The Lift Foundation in Soft Sable, \$73, [saks.com](http://saks.com)
8. COVER FX Total Cover Cream Foundation N120, \$42, [coverfx.com](http://coverfx.com)
9. LANCÔME Teint Idole Ultra 24H in 560, \$46.50, [lancome-usa.com](http://lancome-usa.com)

Lupita Nyong'o. In addition to 555 Suede (Nyong'o's match), the brand also added a darker hue (560) to the collection, a plummy brown (see left). This month, Lancôme is expanding its top-selling Teint Idole Ultra Stick collection to 20 shades. It's comparable to Bobbi Brown Skin Foundation Stick—a favorite among women of color for years—which has 24 shades, with five deeper shades launching in April.

Nick Gavrelis, vice president of global product development for MAC Cosmetics, says the brand relies heavily on its makeup artists to alert them to which shades are needed most. He recounts how the makeup artists in one of the Paris stores were inspired by the black women of Africa's Ivory Coast who shopped there. "We came up with a plan that helped us in our expansion into Africa, and as a result of this, shade NW58 [a warm chocolate] was brought to North America."

Make Up For Ever—known for its bases—recently launched Ultra HD Foundation in 40 shades, while Clinique has 41 in its Even Better line. Chanel is also prioritizing the issue—expect a wider range of liquid foundation shades by the middle of the year.

For mass-market options, you'd be hard-pressed not to find your shade between L'Oréal Paris True Match (which Atis helped create) and Revlon ColorStay Makeup Collection. Those have 33 and 32 shades, respectively.

But perhaps the bigger sign of progress is that some brands are finally starting to realize that black women aren't all the same shade...nor are we a niche consumer. When we finally have more sophisticated options on the shelves—even in my tiny Texas town—that's when I'll be a truly happy customer. ■

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