



The BAP Handbook: The Official Guide to the Black American Princess

By Ginger Wilson, Kalyn Johnson, Tracey Lewis, Karla Lightfoot

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"Finally, a book about the Black American Princess! If you're already a BAP or just want to act like one, this book is for you!"

— E. Lynn Harris, author of *Not a Day Goes By*

In the bestselling tradition of *The Official Preppy Handbook*, here is a must-have manual for the BAP and those who love her.

Black American Princess: 1 : a pampered female of African American descent, born to an upper-middle or upper-class family **2** : an African American female whose life experiences give her a sense of royalty and entitlement **3** : BAP (*acronym*) : colloquial expression **4** : an African American female accustomed to the best and nothing less.

Drawn from hours of interviews, archival research, and frequent visits to Prada, *The Black American Princess Handbook* offers a rare behind-the-scenes look at this exclusive lifestyle. Your total guide to BAP speak, BAP style, and BAP history, this one-of-a-kind book explains everything you ever wanted know about living the BAP life—from breaking in a shop-a-phobic dad to planning a magical BAP debutante ball.

In addition, you'll learn why a true BAP cleans her house before the housekeeper arrives, what to do if your Baby BAP wants to play sports, and whether it's OK for a relative to sing "I Believe I Can Fly" at a BAP wedding. Also featuring spot-the-BAP checklists, suggestions for top BAP colleges, a Who's Who of famous BAPs, a glossary (including essential French phrases), actual diary entries and e-mails from BAPS of all ages, and crucial chapters such as "It's High Noon-Do You Know Where Your Groove Is?"

The Black American Princess Handbook is destined to become a coveted treasure for BAPs worldwide. And, published just in time for graduation, it's sure to be at the top of every BAP's shopping list.

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap

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THE BIRTH OF A BAP

The lights are bright, the camera is rolling, and both the baby BAP and her mother are screaming. Her parents, with the help of an expert team of doctors, escort her to center stage. It is her greatest entrance of all. This is why to this day she feels that those around her should celebrate her birthday as if it were a national holiday. Still protesting her untimely eviction from the womb—the ultimate condo—the baby BAP begins her quest to solve the major mysteries of her new life. With the abrupt end to her food supply and a totally unnecessary smack on the tush from a green-masked stranger, questions pop into her inquiring mind: What's going on? Where am I? How will I eat? Who will pay for my Ivy League education? Who will buy my clothes? I want Prada. I want Kate Spade. Jewelry? Cars? And my wedding? I want a Vera Wang wedding dress.

Amidst the commotion there is a moment of calm as father and daughter see one another for the first time. She gurgles and smiles as she is handed over to him; unbeknownst to both of them, she has just succeeded in wrapping him around her tiny little finger for life. At that very moment, her father vows that his little princess will have a regal existence and never want for anything.

Little does her father know that his pledge will cost him hundreds of thousands of dollars. Little does she know that her magical spell over him will result in a lifetime of zealous overprotection. Without enunciating a syllable, this demanding waif telepathically transmits her desires to her parents. Now, they will do anything to give her the "perfect" life—trips abroad, membership in the most coveted organizations, nice cars and homes, a closetful of beautiful clothes, and a top-notch education.

A creature like no other, she demands the Best and Nothing Less. She is the BAP, the Black American Princess!

BAPitude

BAPitude, the BAP mind-set, starts before she can even talk and only escalates after that. Her arrival home from the hospital marks the beginning of a life full of the Best and Nothing Less. Eager to provide their daughter with endless possibilities, her parents' first task is to ensure that she is fully equipped to meet life's challenges. So, the BAP's first housewarming gift is a solid value system.

The BAP is raised to be a respectful and considerate person. She may have a selfish moment or two (okay, or three or four) but she quickly learns that her parents will not tolerate it. Spoiled? Yes. Overindulged? Yes. Obnoxious and intolerable? No, never! Her BAParents, like the TV Huxtables, don't play that. Many-a-time she will be told, "That may be how those little girls you go to school with act, but that's not acceptable behavior in this household!" By hook or by crook, her parents instill their little girl with qualities that teach her to be a princess regardless of her material possessions and worldly experiences.

Surprisingly, this overindulged young child who has been tempered by pragmatism and love blossoms into a well-balanced individual. She is taught that BAPitude does not give her license to run roughshod over others. Imbued with a sense of largesse, the BAP remains grounded and appreciative of her charmed existence.

Etiquette, Schmediquette

Etiquette, schmediquette, some might say. But etiquette is a sign of proper breeding, as any true BAP knows. BAPs don't broadcast who they are, what they have, or how they got it . . . such behavior goes against their earliest etiquette lessons from maman. As she grows up, the BAP discovers that her knowledge of etiquette rivals that of Miss Manners.

A BAP without good home training is like red beans without rice. The recipe for home training calls for a pinch of domestic arts (with a little help from the housekeeper), along with a cup of civic duty, three tablespoons of common sense, and a quart of maternal admonitions. The foremost ingredient in this recipe is to uphold the family name. To do otherwise is tantamount to committing treason on the most sacred of institutions, the BAP family. On the rare occasion when the BAP "shows out" at home . . . she might be able to get away with it. But one false move in public and you know the rest! The BAP's goal is to leave only good thoughts in the minds of those whose paths she crosses.

I Say Potato, You Say Po-Tah-Toe. . . .

Despite her parents' best intentions to give their child a worry-free life, the BAP is placed in the precarious position of living in two different worlds: one full of mashed potatoes, the other full of sweet potatoes. In her mashed potato world, whites are repeatedly awed and impressed by how "articulate" she is and usually fail to realize that, like them, she'd be at a loss in the heart of the projects. And unfortunately, in her sweet potato world, Blacks often view her as pretentious and elitist. No matter the choice of spud, the BAP always reigns triumphant. She refuses to allow the new potatoes of the world (or the old potatoes for that matter) to keep her eyes off the prize. Their misconceptions about the BAP only serve to intensify her focus.

The great unwashed masses' perception of the BAP is as twisted as Bob Jones University's dating policy. Simply because the BAP leads a privileged life, she is believed to be shallow and materialistic. In fact, you probably think that the only meaningful contribution a BAP can make to society is a perfectly color-coordinated, designer-label closet! Sure, a BAP loves the finer things in life—who doesn't? But the BAP is more than a "material girl," she finds time in her busy schedule to give back to her community.

The greatest misconception about BAPs is that these dynamic individuals are all alike. This belief is heresy in the High Holy Church of All Things Expensive! But for the unconverted, the sacred truth is that there are actually four different kinds of BAPs: two by birthright—the Betty and the Boho, one by ascension—the Butterfly, and one by misappropriation—the Bogus. As you read, please keep in mind that most BAPs do not fit neatly into one category.

BAP Oath

Membership is priceless. Before one becomes a platinum card-carrying BAP, she must memorize this oath and take it to heart:

I, , do solemnly swear to uphold the morals and ideals of my forebears; to have my hair done on a regular basis (special dispensation for Boho); to blaze new trails for BAPs everywhere, and to lift (those around me) as I climb (as long as no one steps on my Clegeries).

I also promise to abide by the Nine Nevers. I will:

NEVER embarrass my family, NEVER flaunt my wealth and privileges, NEVER wear holey underwear, NEVER accept less than one carat, NEVER wear nail decals, NEVER have gold teeth, NEVER date a man with a press and curl, NEVER let them see me sweat, And I Will Never Expect Anything Less than the Best!

Now stand up, raise your MAC lipstick tube to the sky, and repeat the following:

Say it loud, I'm a BAP and I'm proud! Say it loud, I'm a BAP and I'm proud! Say it loud, I'm a BAP and I'm proud! A BUPPY Is Not a BAP

Another general misconception is that every Black educated professional woman is a BAP. The terms BAP and Black Urban Professional (BUPPY) are not interchangeable. A BAP may also be "categorized" as BUPPY, but a BUPPY is not necessarily a BAP. BAPitude is about one's lifestyle, a way of thinking. Some argue that one's professional status catapults one into the BAP lifestyle, but such advocates are misguided. Being a BAP is about more than one's job or the size of one's bank account. There is not enough money in the world to purchase BAPitude.

Top 10 Maternal Admonitions

1. Oh no! You aren't going out of the house looking like that! 2. Don't embarrass me. 3. Don't act out. 4. Is that how you're going to wear your hair? 5. Now what do you say? (Thank you.) 6. I'm talking! What do you say? (Excuse me.) 7. (When visiting a friend.) You better show them you were raised properly and clean up after yourself. I didn't raise any heathens. 8. Cross your legs at the ankles. 9. You'll be grown soon enough. Go upstairs and wash that eyeliner off before someone sees you. 10. Stand up straight. Hold your stomach in. Tuck your butt under.

What Kind of BAP Are You?

Betty

Betty: Mirror, Mirror, on the wall, who's the BAPpiest of them all?

Mirror: Why you are my dear with your perfect life, let's just hope you don't crack before you become a wife!

bet.ty ?de, 'bete, -i n., usu. cap B [short for continuous betterment]: a. A BAP by birthright who strives for perfection in everything she undertakes. b. A BAP whose life expectations are based on a sense of entitlement. c. The quintessential BAP.

Perfection to her is quite essential She has to live up to her potential. She works real hard, all day and night, To get it And do it, 'Cuz the Betty wants it right!

No pretender to the throne, Betty is the BAPpiest of all. Firm in the belief that her lifestyle is a right guaranteed by birth, her demeanor is infused with a regal air. As a child of privilege, Betty has always received and expected the Best and Nothing Less. Her birthright guarantees unlimited access to the world.

Betty's vanity, her compulsive shopping, and workout schedule give some the impression that she is a narcissistic shop-a-holic, but nothing could be further from the truth. Well, there might be a modicum of truth here. . . . A few Bettys have made curler confessions. Yes, they admitted to putting curlers in their hair once their boyfriends had fallen asleep. And believe it or not, they woke up extra-early to take them out (if they admitted to this, imagine what they won't 'fess up to!).

Nevertheless, despite this teeny-tiny flaw, Bettys are overachievers who recognize that they are fortunate to live the lives they do. Non-BAPs see Betty's existence as one of excess, but Betty is not embarrassed by her lifestyle or how others may perceive it; this attitude is often mistaken for arrogance or snobbery. Put simply, her parents raised her to believe that the world is her oyster, and Betty simply cannot imagine living any other way.

Betty lives by the Four P's: Precision, Perfection, Patience, and Persistence. She constantly strives for precision and perfection using patience and persistence in everything that she does, and she always comes out on top. She expects the Best and Nothing Less from everyone she encounters: skycaps, waitresses, salespeople, and of course her family and friends. Betty may not see immediate results, and she may even face a few setbacks, but she knows it's just a matter of adhering to the Four P's. Whether it is the "perfect" job, "perfect" house, "perfect" vacation, or "perfect" man, Betty is on a constant quest for, what else? Perfection.

Neurotic? Anal? Compulsive? All three are fair descriptions, but these qualities also endear Betty to those who know and love her. She is used to getting what she wants, when she wants, and how she wants it. This

demanding attitude is the result of her overindulgent childhood. What else is a little girl supposed to think when her mother refuses to buy her another pair of funky jeans, but her shop-a-phobic father brings them home a day later? Naturally, she believes "I want" equals "I get."

Betty is burdened with numerous expectations, namely: securing a suitable career and an acceptable life mate. The quest for these Holy Grails begins at a young age with a strong emphasis on academics and proper socialization. Her mother helps her design the obstacle course to her heart. Meanwhile, her father, as overprotective as ever, suggests that she choose a career that will make her self-sufficient. (For the Betty who does not heed this advice, please see the Boho section.)

Climbing the ladder of success does not daunt Betty in the slightest, to her there is no such thing as a glass ceiling. With that worldview, it's no wonder Bettys are found in high-powered positions in business, law, politics, and medicine. Naturally, she gravitates toward these positions—how else could she live in the style to which she's become accustomed?

Betty's lifestyle requires that she look the part of whatever role she's thrust into, from the boardroom to the bedroom. The key word in fashion for Bettys is "understated." Whether a Betty is a classic, funky, or chic dresser, she always wears the right thing. With her wide circle of friends and endless events to attend, she must look good at all times.

Despite her cool, calm, and always well-dressed demeanor, Betty can be one stressed-out sister in her constant quest for perfection. However, Bettys learn to deal with this stress quite well—so well, in fact, that no one has any idea of the amount they deal with on a daily basis. Betty has received subtle and not-so-subtle hints from her parents that others should think that her life is "perfect." Attempting to please her parents and appear "perfect" can be taxing on even the Bettiest of Bettys, but she suffers in silence. Don't get her wrong! Betty has an unfailing wellspring of inner resourcefulness, and, trust us, she does know how to blow off some steam and party!

Betty is usually so busy "bettering" herself that she rarely takes the time to listen to her inner voice telling her to slow down . . . think . . . do what she wants. Finding a balance between doing the "right" thing and enjoying herself is something Betty learns to master as she matures. Growing up, going to college, her first job, or, for some, marriage gives Betty the opportunity to shine on her own without the aid of her loving parents. As their influence wanes, she begins to trust her inner voice. Perfection, while still important, takes a backseat to happiness.

Vanity is her vice, Tiffany & Co. is her friend. Perfection, punctuated with hard work and determination, afford her this end!

Boho

Boho: Mirror, Mirror, on the wall, who is the most free-spirited BAP of all?

Mirror: You are dear with your lifestyle choice, you always listen to your inner voice!

bo.ho È-ho n., usu. cap B [diminutive of bohemian]: a. A BAP by birthright who lives an unorthodox lifestyle. b. A funky-fresh sister with a decidedly unique if not outrageous approach to life. c. A majorette in her one-woman band.

Boho marches to the funky beat of a different drummer. Upon first glance, one may be tempted to call Boho

"granola" or "artsy-fartsy." And she is. But that's only half the story. Her mellow demeanor, eclectic tastes in clothing and hair, and bohemian lifestyle are just as much a testament to her BAPPiness as her parents' bank account! So, despite the exterior, what's the difference between Boho and Betty? Although Boho enjoys all the rights and benefits that accrue to platinum card-carrying BAPs, she remains untethered by the earthly demands of her sister, Betty.

But how can Boho claim BAPHood when she refuses to toe the party line? It's easy. She's a free spirit whose notion of perfection comes from within. Boho is determined to find what truly makes her happy, and not what her family or friends expect. This often compels her to defy authority. "A rule?" she asks, "What's that?" Following directions has been problematic for her from day one.

In the Boho war for independence, childhood is the first battleground where parent and child face off. It starts with a small skirmish. Say the baby Boho refuses to wear a new Oililly dress without a pair of shorts underneath. She and her mother will duke it out before her mother concedes (one for Boho, zero for the BAParent). From there, the battles escalate to where she wants to go to camp or college. When it comes down to it, the battles center around Boho's freedom of expression. Her prowess on the battlefield shows Boho that the world does not come to a screeching halt when she fails to follow her parents' rules. So, breaking one rule leads to breaking another and another and another. And, before you know it, Boho is the victor!

Hair is another avenue of self-expression for the Boho. While thoroughly trained in the ways of BAP hair as a child, as a young adult Boho openly rebels against the Hare Krishna-like hair indoctrination of her youth. She now renounces the insidious invasion of chemicals in her hair. Instead, she prefers to let it reign in all its natural glory whether it be "free" or in braids, twists, or locks. These hairstyles are problematic for BAP mothers, who feel their daughters are rejecting their mantra: "Your hair is your crown and glory." Boho merely feels that her crown should express her roots!

Being a Boho is not as simple as she makes it appear. She's capable of weathering high-pressured situations or graduate school, but finds her muse sagging under the weight of societal and familial expectations. See, Boho doesn't thrive on stress . . . it's not her thing. Everyone deals with stress in her own way; Boho just chooses not to deal with it if she can help it. So rather than suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, her inner percussionist leads her to a world filled with peace, love, and soooooou!!!!

This present-day flower child can be found working in any area that has a relaxed dress code and a less corporate atmosphere. Often you will find Bohos as writers, teachers, producers, artists, social workers, public defenders, or in any job that bucks the system or has a cause behind it. This calling to serve the public assuages her guilt for inheriting the first pew at the High Holy Church of All Things Expensive. Although Boho expects to live a comfortable lifestyle, she isn't focused on making a ton of money—just enough to purchase as many Birkenstocks as her little heart desires!

Just because she wears Birkies doesn't mean she renounces her BAP membership. She simply wouldn't be caught dead without the requisite Boho trappings or her BAPitude. When it comes to clothing, Bohos either shine or fail miserably. While no particular theme resonates throughout her wardrobe, one note is loud and clear . . . it must appear as if she did not spend an inordinate amount of time or money on her outfit. While the exact opposite is usually the case, a casual observer would be none the wiser. Mothers, of course, pray that their Boho's eccentric taste in clothing is a phase that will eventually pass.

So, traversing through life composing her song, Boho must remain steadfast and carve out her own niche. Let Boho march to the sound she hears, however measured or far away, just as long as she keeps the beat.

Butterfly

Butterfly: Mirror, Mirror, on the wall, who is the most grounded BAP of all?

Mirror: Why you are dear with your realistic life, you've persevered and excelled in spite of strife!

Butterfly: ?ter.fli n., usu. cap B: a. A BAP who evolved from a dormant state at any point during her life. b. A BAP who is often presumed to be a Betty. c. A BAP who may protest the categorization.

If Cinderella were Black, she'd be a Butterfly. The Butterfly knows what life is like after the clock strikes midnight—no ride, no man, no fly glass slippers. While she isn't born dripping with diamonds, she is born with a huge dose of steely perseverance. Through sheer will, accented with a little good fortune, she turns into a lovely BAP. Her two delightful sisters Betty and Boho are there to guide her each step of the way. While college usually provides the catalyst for the Butterfly's metamorphosis, the crux of her story begins at birth.

See, Butterfly is born to be a Betty, but she didn't grow up with the same fairy-tale beginning. Don't be mistaken. Just because she's a late bloomer doesn't mean she is a second-class BAP. Au contraire! In fact, Butterfly has an advantage over starry-eyed Bettys and Bohos; her humble beginnings nourish a grounded, mature BAP. Raised in a home with chitterlings, spice, and everything nice, Butterfly is often confronted with life's realities. She knows the value of a dollar and works for her allowance, unlike Betty and Boho, who, with the help of the housekeeper, merely go through the motions to collect their weekly stipends.

Butterfly's parents also want the best for their little girl, it's just that providing it sometimes proves to be difficult. Nevertheless, Butterfly is reared with the belief that a college education is the "equalizing elixir," the stepping-stone from obscurity to influence and power. Going to college grants her the opportunity to become whatever she wants: a doctor, lawyer, professor, accountant, the list is endless. Her achievements are limited only by her dreams. She goes to college and acquires the BAP knowledge.

Butterfly's metamorphosis usually begins in college (but it can start as early as junior high school or for the fortunate Butterfly in elementary school). Butterfly attends the "right" schools, hangs out with the "right" crowd, joins the "right" sororities, and dates the "right" men. The Butterfly's exposure to many of these experiences is by happenstance. Perhaps it is the friendship she strikes up with her college roommate, the interest she has in art history, or the young man who takes her to the theater. She watches how those around her dress, wear their hair, and carry themselves. An inquisitive soul, Butterfly is not afraid to ask for advice when she truly needs it. Her questions may range from "What should I wear to the Black and Gold Ball?" to "What's the difference between brie and camembert?" Her motto in life is "There's no such thing as a dumb question," and she's right. Her experiences and friendships increase Butterfly's base of knowledge about herself and the world.

While Butterfly's training on the ins and outs of BAPdom is top-notch, she regresses from time to time. To keep her in the proper BAP mind-set, Betty and Boho jokingly chastise her occasional misstep, but in the end, however, she passes her finishing lessons with flying colors.

Nevertheless, Butterfly will protest until collards are no longer green that she is not a BAP, but she is. Her outcry signifies that Butterfly never forgets where she came from, acts pretentious, or tries to pretend that she, or her family, is something she is not. Butterfly makes no apologies for her modest background and resents those who do. This honesty and integrity distinguish Butterfly from Bogus.

Beyond the age of twenty-one, it can be difficult to distinguish Butterflies from Bettys. Four years of college acclimates and comfortably ensconces Butterflies in the BAP lifestyle; they've got more BAPitude than some Bettys and Bohos (but hey, they learned from the best). Just as the fairy godmother's magic wand transforms Cinderella, college graduation allows Butterfly to emerge from her cocoon, spread her wings, and take flight.

Bogus

Bogus: Mirror, Mirror, on the wall, who's the most genuine BAP of all?

Mirror: Not you, not you, not you, my dear. You're too busy hiding behind your expensive gear.

bo.gus È-ges n., usu. cap B: a. An imposter who is not an authentic BAP. b. Her BAP status is a figment of her imagination. c. A greedy gut.

(Based on the nursery rhyme "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary")

Bogus, Bogus, quite misleading
How do you get through life? With overextended credit, you just don't get it
We sure hope Bogus isn't your wife!

The story of Bogus BAP is a pathetic one! Hers is a tale of woe. Bogus gives BAPs a bad name because she personifies the stereotypes that haunt BAPs. (You know, all of the things you thought about BAPs before you started reading this book.) Bogus, as her name connotes, doesn't understand the first thing about being a BAP. She defines herself by her appearance and her material possessions. She just doesn't have a clue!

When Bogus is born, her parents, like most, want to give her the world. She too is treated like a princess, but her parents' misguided priorities send Bogus the wrong message. She may grow up with a closet full of nice clothes and the latest video games, but check out the family homestead. Instead of repairing the toilet that runs incessantly or the plaster that's falling off the walls, they spend their money on "things" for their daughter. They want her to be like other BAPs and believe that if she has certain items, her social status will rise. As a result, keeping up with the Joneses and social climbing, at any cost, are Bogus's only extracurricular activities. Too bad the Joneses don't care (and neither do the Johnsons, the Smiths, the Browns, the Lewises, or the Woods. . .).

What's important to Bogus other than her appearance and material possessions? Why, proclaiming who she knows, what she has, when she got it, where she got it, and why she thinks it's important. The fact that you have no interest in her or her stories never registers. She's just busy chatting away, hoping to leave a lasting impression. She generally does, albeit a negative one. Her talk is cheap!

While she may look, act, dress, and have the same job as a Betty, watch out, she's really a counterfeit. This poor, misguided soul is truly a wolf in sheep's clothing. The next time you go out, just look for the most ostentatious person there. She's probably wearing insignia-drenched designer clothing and is busy looking everyone up and down. Have no fear you've found her . . . she's just like the best imitation Chanel bag you've ever seen!

Today, Bogus leaves her dining room table set with fine china and crystal for all to see—but take a look in her garage. Why is her garage door always shut? Why does she always catch a ride with someone else? Is her car truly in the shop? Or is that new Jeep she just bought a figment of her imagination? Or does she really have a "jacked-up hoopty" that she only drives late at night?

Users Review

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