than ever, black women say they continue to struggle to find the right tones—and to avoid the ones that are too pink or have too much titanium dioxide, which casts an ashy wash over brown skin.

"Just coloring a white makeup brown doesn't do it," says Connie Jackson, a Chicago management consultant. After years of mixing two or three shades to cut red undertones, Jackson finally found a foundation that works: Prescriptives custom-blended All Skins. She only wishes that cosmetics companies would offer more gifts-with-purchase that contain products for black women. She's received too many samples of beige foundation and pink lipstick. "I can't use that," she says.

Those women with the darkest skin tones—the deep chocolates and rosy eponies—have the hardest time finding makeup to match. "Even the best lines have gaps," Roxanna Floyd says. "In the darker tones, a wonderful foundation is usually available in either a cream or a liquid formula, but not both." The new, expanded color schemes notwithstanding, she still finds herself mixing two or three shades to get the right tint. "Colors right out of the bottle can go on too red, which isn't necessarily flattering on a dark-skinned person," she says. "And blushes can be too powdery, without enough pigment in them, so that they fade on black skin." Among drugstore brands, she likes Posner, Revlon ColorStyle, Maybelline, and Astarte. Her favorite department-store brands are Bobbi Brown and Flori Roberts.

When it comes to bad-judgment purchases, the issue doesn't divide along race lines. Black and white women both have top drawers full of barely used eye shadows, lipsticks, and foundations. But for black women, frustration is shaded with skepticism, a distrust that has built up after years of dissatisfaction and neglect.

"Many black women are scared of makeup," says Sam Fine, who's spent hours in stores advising black women about yellow undertones and generally schooling them in "the beauty of brown skin."

**Color Me Beautiful**

Ten years ago, my friends and I were hanging out in a Virginia mall when a blue-haired lady with well-plucked eyebrows invited us into her store for free makeovers. I cheered on friends after friend as each was penciled and brushed and glossed. Then came my turn. Though my back was to the mirror, I knew something deadly wrong was happening when the woman reached for the tube of pink lipstick she had used on my white friends before me. Every so often, she would step back and study my face as if she were Picasso and I her canvas.

Once done, I couldn't believe what I saw: My mahogany-colored skin was dull and ashy, like deadwood; the eyeliner on my bottom and top lids was so thick I resembled a raccoon; neon lipstick was surrounded by a halo of bloodred liner that had been drawn inside the lip line ("to make the lips look smaller"). If Bozo had needed a female sidekick, I'd have been hired immediately.

Now, all grown up and living in Los Angeles, I am back in the cosmetics chair, ready to try again. There is no blue-haired lady, just a brunet Texas belle named Joy Dee. I nearly balk—I've seen the makeup on those Dallas Cowgirls—but I'm no coward, so I stay. She asks Russell, the Prescriptives Sir Mix-a-Lot, to make some foundation and powder that will match my skin exactly: he does. But I am convinced that they've rigged the lights so anything looks good. I take the mirror outside. It looks even better in the sunlight. Settling into a lazy bliss, I spot Russell grabbing a tube of pink lipstick! I am prepared for the worst as I swirl my chair toward the mirror, but I can't believe what I see. I like it all—even the pink, which was mixed with a plum color. While bagging my purchase, the cashier says, "You look beautiful." As I turn to walk away, I say to her, myself, and everyone in earshot, "Black is beautiful." —MERI DAKWAH

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**BLACK BEAUTY**

Cosmetics companies have wised up and are tapping into the dark-skin makeup market, which certainly isn't hurting profits. Fully a quarter of the country is now other-than-white. Foundation and powder shades like coffee and walnut have become staples in city department stores and drugstores. In the suburbs, retailers are slowly catching up.

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Mary Kay has come out with 18 new shades of foundation.

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Bobbi Brown lipsticks range from Burnt Red to Brown Shimmer.

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Revlon's ColorStyle line was launched in 1993.

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Iman's top sellers include ink black mascara and an oil-control lotion.

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Prescriptives blush and concealer for All Skins

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Fashion Fair is forging ahead with new colors.

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Mary Kay has come out with 18 new shades of foundation.