

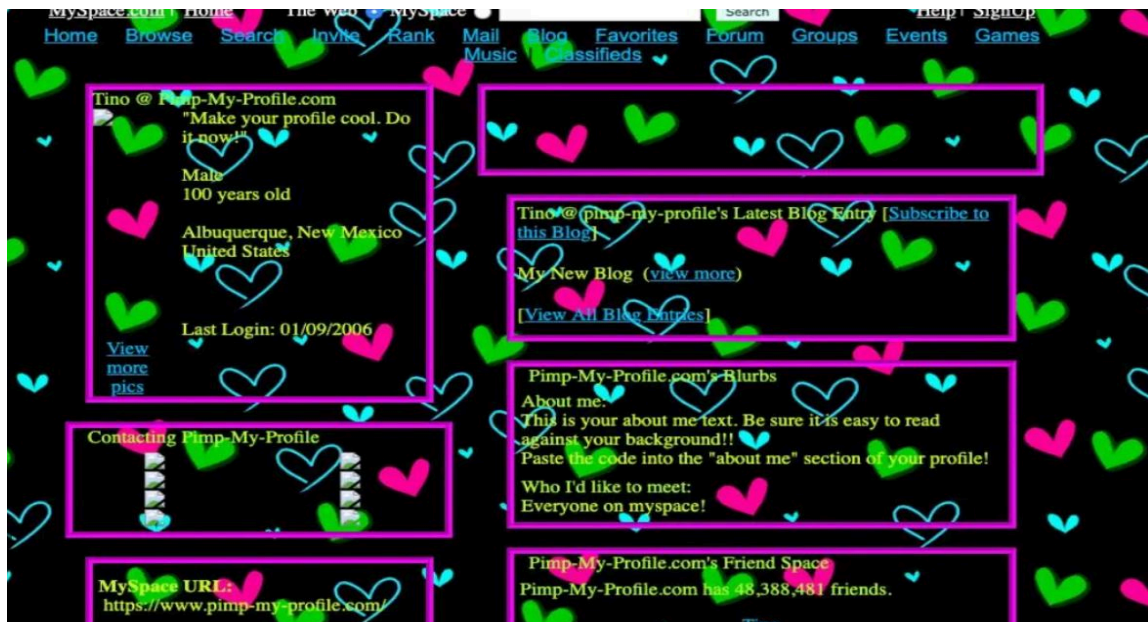
# We Really Had Something Special: A Love Letter to Growing up Black in the Early 2000s

By Tamara Thomas

It's 2006. I'm a latchkey kid, and it's 7 a.m. My mom is already at work, and my sister is off to school. I'm 12 years old, getting ready for another day. I turn on MTV and let the music flood the silence. I'm brushing my teeth, dancing between outfit changes, giggling to Kanye West's "Touch the Sky" video while Nia Long and Tracee Ellis Ross offer commentary. Life is good. I have no worries.

Growing up as a young Black girl in the 2000s, everything felt golden: our icons, our shows, our style, my moms infamous entertainment center. At the time, it was just normal life. Looking back now, it was legendary. This essay is my love letter to that era—the magic, the joy, the culture that shaped me.

Compared to now, the 2000s feel like a different universe. We weren't glued to our phones. We were present. We were playful. Life felt freer. We laughed from the gut, danced with no audience, and soaked in every moment like it was summer break. It was community. It was joy. It's worth remembering.



Before Instagram aesthetics and TikTok trends, there was code. Glittery HTML backgrounds, auto-playing music, blinking cursors, and dancing GIFs. If you knew how to center a layout, hide a song player, or match your font color to your mood, you were elite. MySpace wasn't just a

social network, it was an art form. A vibe check. A digital diary. Our Top 8s were sacred (and chaotic), shifting with every school hallway drama. A demotion could end a friendship. An upgrade meant real love.

Then there was BlackPlanet, a whole other level. It was where older cousins flexed grown energy, profile pics in fitted hats and thick lip gloss. You had to log in quick before your minutes ran out or someone picked up the phone. It was where Black online culture was born—flirtation, poetry, away messages, and love notes written in Comic Sans.

We didn't realize it then, but we were learning to build brands, design, write, curate. We were baby bloggers, DJs, coders, and storytellers. Our pages were loud, soft, messy, moody, and brilliant. Just like us.

This was the birth of online cool.



We had *Moesha*. *The Parkers*. *Girlfriends*. *Smart Guy*. *The Bernie Mac Show*. *One on One*. *Taina*. *My Wife and Kids*. *All of Us*. *Everybody Hates Chris*. *The Game*. *The Proud Family*. *That's So Raven*. *Eve*. The list goes on.

These were our comfort shows. Family tradition shows. The kind where you'd finish dinner at the table and rush to the couch before the theme song hit. We saw ourselves in the mannerisms, the humor, the style, and the rhythms of everyday life. The characters looked like our cousins, our aunties, our neighbors. Black families, Black love, Black struggle, Black joy on screen, front and center. These shows weren't just entertainment, they were a mirror.

Representation *mattered*. Seeing Black families, friend groups, and couples on TV who *looked like us*, that was healing. That was affirming. It felt good to be seen.

They taught us about relationships, womanhood, heartbreak, and healing. I learned I didn't have to have everything figured out. I learned to laugh at myself. I learned to be proud of who I am and where I come from. And let's not act like they didn't have the flyest fits, cue Nicki Parker in a fur-trimmed jacket, heels clicking down the hallway!

*One on One* was a favorite. I didn't have the words for it then, but it felt like real life. The way Flex and Breanna navigated life, it mirrored what I saw around me. It was like watching my older sister and her friends on TV. It made me feel seen, grounded, and connected to something bigger.



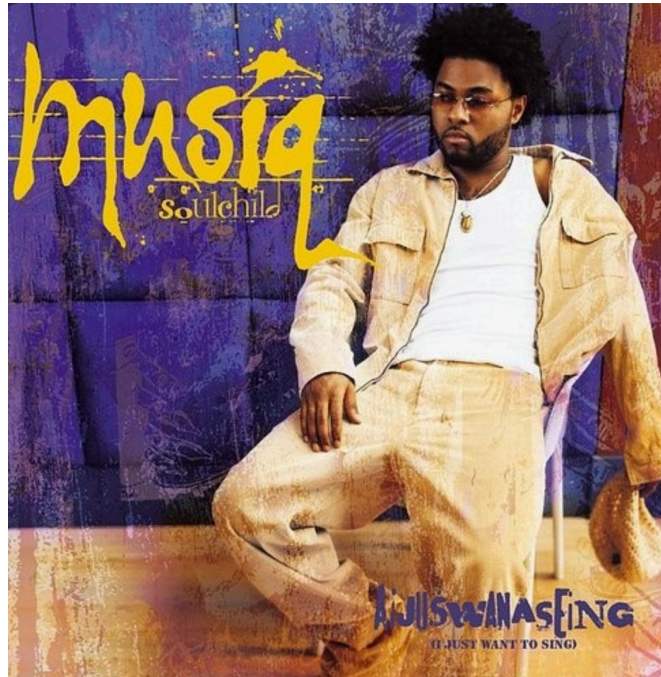
Let's talk style. Picture this: it's 2007. I've got "the hump" hairstyle, a denim mini skirt over leggings, a heart-shaped jewelry set from the flea market in Miami and golds on the bottom row. Yes, I know—I was that girl.

*The micro braids, thin brows, \$20 full sets, nameplate belts, the Coach messenger crossbody and Dooney & Bourke bags, Von Dutch fits, Baby Phat, Juicy Couture and Apple Bottom Jeans. Growing up in Florida meant everybody had a mouthful of golds, and my dad rocked a huge Jesus piece like it was a badge of honor. The boys with their oversized tees, the patchwork jeans. My sister had a pair—I wanted them so bad.*

Filas. Big beaded necklaces. Limited Too. Wet Seal was heaven. Forever 21 and Charlotte Russe were gold mines. Kitten heels clacked in the school hallway. Low-rise jeans showed off rhinestone belts.

And the way we talked? *"You got me bent," "That's tight", "Open like a bag of chips."* Our slang was poetry. Sharp. Hilarious. Real.

And the music? A whole playlist of memories: Ashanti. B2K. Destiny's Child. Musiq Soulchild. Ciara. T.I. Missy Elliott. The Neptunes. Soulja Boy. Bow Wow. Amerie. Ja Rule and Murder Inc. G-Unit. T-Pain. Omarion. Beyoncé's *Dangerously in Love*. Monica's *So Gone*. Keyshia Cole's *Love*. These were the songs that played in the background while we got dressed, fell in love, danced at middle school parties, and cried in our bedrooms. Every song a timestamp. Every lyric a memory.



The 2000s raised us. They gave us a blueprint on how to show up, how to express ourselves, how to love being Black out loud. The magic of that era wasn't just in the clothes or the music or the shows, it was in the freedom. The confidence. The culture.

We didn't need to go viral. We *were* the moment. And even now, with all the noise of modern life, that spirit still lives in us. In the way we reminisce. In the songs we still play. In the way we pass down style, slang, and stories to the next generation.

So this is my thank you to the 2000s. For raising me. For teaching me. For giving me something sacred to hold onto. For letting a little Black girl feel fly, feel free, and feel home.