

(Air Force) One Love

*It's not about men vs. women, not about the mall vs. the boutique.
Not even about Holyoke vs. Springfield.
It's One Love, people.*

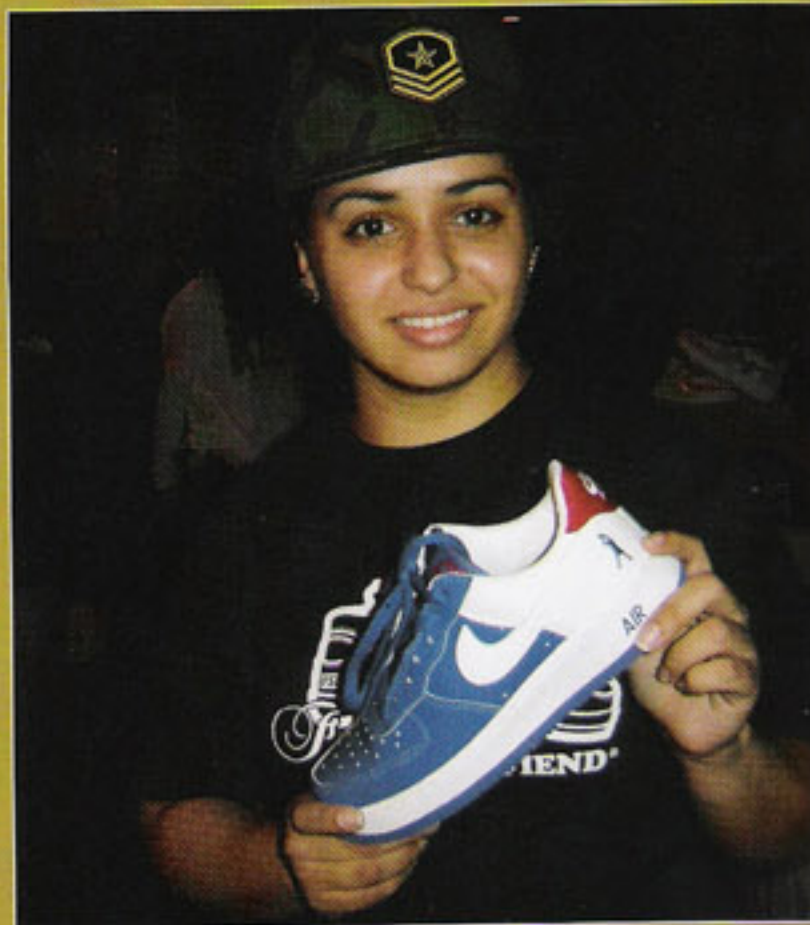
Words by Lori Lobenstine

I got my Air Force 1 schooling at the Holyoke Teen Center in gritty Holyoke, Massachusetts. Male or female, you didn't come into the Teen Center with much else. Jessica rocked her AF1s stylishly under her girly-fitted jeans. Daisy always had mids with the bright trim—most likely orange or yellow. Danessa wore hers with the tongue out, bunching her baggy jeans just so. Loca, always a low-top, white on white type, showed the younger girls how to lace 'em up with different colored shoelaces, so they would match anything. She says, "The #1 reason I love Air Force 1s is that they match with 99.9% of my outfits. And with the white on whites, you can dress them up or dress them down, so they go with *everything*. I mean everything." And you couldn't forget this, because she barely let you in if your gear didn't match, and she'd laugh you back out if your Forces weren't crispy clean.

Just down Route 91 is Holyoke's arch rival, Springfield. Currently known as the brokest city in the state, it has also been nationally ranked...in STDs. But on a brighter note, they love their Air Force 1s there too. Katrina went from raking lawns to managing McDonalds and raising two kids, and through it all, her paychecks went to the mall and her old-school, weekly AF1 habit. "You always gotta keep more than one pair of the white on whites, black on blacks, and there's some things that just aren't going to come out again. So you just gotta get two pairs while you can." She's not one to sleep outside for some Terror Squads, but this girl's got more AF1 colorways than a gay flag.

Speaking of Springfield: Jovon Eldridge—another fiend from the 'Field—has won awards for her collection and started her own sneaker-inspired streetwear line, Bare Sole. She now works for Vault, the newest sneaker boutique in Harlem, but she says it all started back in Springfield. "When I was younger, I always played basketball at the YMCA in a pair of mid Air Force 1s. I loved havin' the strap, to feel like I was getting great ankle support, and when I would wear them with outfits, it was always fun to wear the strap loose, so it would flop around."

Not only do Air Force 1s cross the rivalry between Holyoke and Springfield, but between different types of collectors as well. Whether male or female, mall shoppers or hypebeasts, Air Force 1 lovers are everywhere. Danessa and Katrina may never have been to an online sneaker site, but Jovon is just one of a growing number of females who are movers and shakers in our ever-growing international sneaker scene. "Sneaker Sandy" came all the way to the U.S. from New Zealand to sneaker shop. And what did she get? Air Force 1s. "I was in New York in August last year and I was at Flight Club, and they were just closing and Clark Kent just walked in. And I was just about to cop a pair of AF1 Mid Canadas. And everyone knows how much Clark Kent hates mids! He once said on *It's the Shoes* that he thought that mids were disgusting, so I asked him if he thought I was disgusting...he just looked at me like I was crazy and then he started to laugh. He said it was okay because I'm a girl!"



Then again, "Snkrgoddess" represented her state for all men and women in Sole Collector's Jordanhead Issue, and her AF1 collection doesn't miss a beat. Not to be outdone, Fetti D'biasi designs her own Air Forces, customizing with everything from mirrors to felt and electronics. Explaining the overwhelming popularity of Air Force 1s with her female customers, Fetti says, "Well, most girls have small feet, and the Air Forces just make our feet look perfect. They fit just right."

But is it about fit or flavor? Shanan Campanaro tells this story of her Air Force 1 triumph in England: "Basically, the Carnival AF1 came out in 2003 in two colorways to commemorate the Notting Hill Carnival. They were a limited release. I think they only made about 2,500...and I had to have them! I got them, and then for fun, I wore them to Carnival that year. Everybody thought I was crazy for wearing them! They still look really good to this day, and I am proud to say they were at the event they commemorate. I bet there's not that many Carnival AF1s that were actually there!"

The 25th Anniversary of the Air Force 1 has made us all reflect on the multitude of reasons why Air Force 1s are one of the best-selling sneakers of all time. What has my Teen Center AF1 education added to this? I think no one has any idea how many women and girls love and buy Air Force 1s. In our relatively small, online sneaker culture, men certainly dominate in terms of numbers, but we forget the wider world of sneakerheads—the kick lovers, young and old, who shop at malls, on Eastbay and at local mom and pop spots. And even as we look at this larger extension of ourselves, does Nike even know who buys what? In a survey of 1,000 femalesneakerfiend.com site users, 48% of the females bought mostly youth sneakers, 40% bought mostly men's sneakers, and only 12% bought women's sneakers. "Why's that?" you might wonder. Well, maybe folks' taste in color is moving faster than even Nike can keep up with. At Concepts, Boston's first spot for exclusive Air Force 1s, staff member Rob Heppler says, "All the guys want to buy the girls' AF1s, in like size 14...and all the girls want to get the guys' colors in ultra small sizes!"

In any case, Nike's got *something* right because those AF1s are flying off the shelves faster than the Invisible Woman. (And hopefully, the rest of us female sneaker fiends won't stay invisible much longer!) 🐣

