

## Chris Rock doc gets to the root of Black hair issues

Written by Kenya Vaughn, Special to the NNPA from The St. Louis American

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(NNPA) - It's hard to know what to expect when you hear "Chris Rock," "documentary" and "good hair" used together within a film synopsis.

But the actor/comedian/filmmaker/producer takes an idea inspired by his little girl and transforms her insecurity into a film that is as eye-opening as it is compelling.

"Daddy, why don't I have good hair?" Rock quoted his three-year-old daughter as the introductory credits roll. And so the film – and a historical overview of Black women and their love/hate hair relationship – begins.

Although it starts with the historical concept of texture, Good Hair quickly unravels into several aspects of the cosmetic practices that come with the territory of Black hair.

Good Hair goes from relaxers, the business of Black hair care to weave – including the thoughts from the women who wear them and the men who hate, deal with or love them.

The candid film is an unlikely offering by Rock, but he makes the most of his wit as he enlists everyone from women considered to be the standard for Black beauty to ordinary Black women attempting to feel beautiful by any means necessary.

Rock presents a balanced and surprisingly extensive study of the ups and downs as Black women attempting to feel pretty from head to toe – starting with the head.

Video model Melyssa Ford; Black actresses Nia Long, Lauren London, Raven Simon, Salli Richardson-Whitfield; Black community heroes Dr. Maya Angelou and the Rev. Al Sharpton; and rap group Salt-n-Pepa are among those who offer opinions that are blended together to discuss Black hair from every perspective.

In Good Hair, Rock interviews women and men from all regions, age groups, walks of life, from esteemed to ordinary, getting perspectives and delivering laughs and "a ha!" moments along the way.

The topic of good hair has been an ongoing debate within the Black community for generations. A symbol of status for some, a source of resentment for others and the unattainable aspirations for those in between – like Rock's daughter.

But in an ingenious expansion of the concept, Rock goes beyond the surface of the age-old "good hair" vs. "happy to be nappy" debate.

What is probably most refreshing about the film is that Good Hair doesn't point any fingers or take sides.

There is no moment in Good Hair where Rock demands – or even merely encourages – women to revert to styles that showcase Black pride. However, the film does manage to promote self-love and appreciation, whether our hair is relaxed or natural.

The film manages to be radical and inspiring by successfully illustrating the fact that the

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elaborate (and, in some cases, unhealthy) hair practices are a symptom of the systematic inferiority complex imposed on Black people for so long that somewhere along the way it was eventually embraced.

The film exposes the lengths (pun intended) Black women impose upon themselves in an effort to camouflage and conform to Eurocentric standards for beauty. Rock reveals the ravaging effects of relaxers and the main straightening ingredient sodium-hydrochloride – yes, he breaks it down to a science. He also offers a behind-the-scenes observation within the multi-billion dollar Black hair care industry, tracing weave from its origin to the scalp of an unsuspecting, overcharged Black woman.

Through the legendary Bronner Brothers (BB) 60th Annual Hair show and its world champion style-off in Atlanta, he shows that Black beauty can be an ugly business.

By visiting the Dudley Hair Care product plant and cosmetology school in North Carolina, he shows the promise and prosperity among Black entrepreneurs and stylists.

But he also illustrates through interviews and footage that Blacks – the sole consumers within the Black hair care market – are getting the short end of the stick when it comes to profits. Dudley and the Bronner Brothers are the exception to the rule as African American manufacturers in an industry oversaturated by Asian and major mainstream companies such as Revlon.

Typical of Rock, in *Good Hair* he breaks all of the rules and taboos when it comes to the secrets of Black hair care and puts them right on front street.

For example, the financial bind of a weave is real, but rarely discussed in public. A Black man saying how he feels about a woman's weave out loud could end a relationship and possibly lead to injury, but Rock uses charm and humor to get the guards of his subject permanently down.

A few of the points – especially the seemingly never-ending drama as contestants prepared for the Bronner Brothers hair competition finale – seemed to be dragged to death, but the film was otherwise a triumph.

Brilliantly using the “The first step of solution is admitting there is a problem” method, Rock bravely displays five-figure hair weaves, insecurities imposed from infancy, and potential poisoning by lathering the scalp with toxic chemicals. In this way, he uses *Good Hair* as an exposé into healing.

*Good Hair* opened in theaters nationwide on Friday, October 9. The film is rated PG-13 with a running time of 95 minutes.