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## ABC NEWS NOW/PERSPECTIVES

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**GRAPHICS:** PERSPECTIVES

"BEHIND THE SCREEN" STORIES

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Hello, and welcome to 'Perspectives' where we give you a behind-the-scenes look at some of the top news stories. Now, today, a look at the conversation or debate or argument, if you wanna call it that depending on your point of view, that was sparked by radio personality, Don Imus, the protests, and ultimately, his firing last week. Many African Americans are asking, 'Now what? Where do we go from here?'

**GRAPHICS:** POST-IMUS, NOW WHAT?

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Now, today, we're gonna talk to the author of the children's book, 'Nappy.' It is a humorous story containing a powerful message about ethnic heritage, pride and self-esteem issues that were obliquely raised by the Imus controversy. Now, Charisse Carney-Nunes joins us from our bureau in Washington, DC. Thank you for being here.

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

Thank you for having me.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Now - when and why did you write this book? And, and why did you call it 'Nappy'?

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

Well, I wrote 'Nappy' last year. It was published last February. And I called it 'Nappy' because I wanted to promote a sense of healing, quite frankly. I wanted to boldly embrace the term nappy that some people have seen as negative. And, and, to - embrace it and to - give a message to my daughter and to girls out there everywhere that they should love themselves. They should love their hair. They should love their history. And they should embrace it. And they should embrace it as a symbol of strength. And so that's why I wrote 'Nappy.' And that's why I called it 'Nappy.'

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Well, and long before, obviously, the Imus controversy, that word had some pretty negative connotations not just to white people, but to black people. Why do you think that is?

GRAPHICS: "NAPPY" THE CHILDREN'S BOOK

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR

Well, I think that words can hurt, but they differ depending on how you use them. But the bottom line is, we've all heard the African American saying, the old African American saying that 'Nobody can steal your joy" or 'Don't let anybody steal your joy." And so what I did is, I thought it would be extremely powerful to take a word like that, that some people had used in a negative connotation, and to embrace it. To embrace it to make a statement that - our hair is a symbol of our strength. God gave us this hair. He gave us the natural curl, the lock in our hair to protect us, quite frankly, from - the damaging rays of the sun. And I wanted to teach my daughter, who at the age of 3 was already starting to get negative images about, about her nappy hair. She was - already starting to get a negative connotation as to what it meant to have her hair and to get her hair done. And I wanted to give a loud message to her that says, 'Love you, love yourself. Love the hair that God gave you."

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Well, you're saying at the age of 3, your own daughter was starting to pick up these negative connotations. Where does a child, at the age of 3, get that from? Where does that come from?

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR

Well, it comes from television. It comes from - media. It comes from images that she sees in magazines. It comes from talking to her friends. And actually, it also, unfortunately, came one day, particularly after a trying three-hour session that I had with her doing her hair. And it hurt. And it did hurt her. But I wanted her to know that - God gave her hair. And, yes, it hurt when I was doing her hair. And, yes, we may have broken a comb. And yes, she, she may have wished she had a perm. But, in fact, I wanted her to know that - there were so many black women in history with hair like hers, who came before her, who were strong, women like Rosa Parks, women like Ella Baker, Josephine Baker, Sonia Sanchez. And I wanted to just teach her about these heroines in history. So that she would know that she was strong and had the same kind of strength and fiber that they had.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) You talked about your daughter picking up those negative connotations now, but it's not just the media and outsiders, although I'm sure we deserve some of the responsibility. But black people ourselves have often, over the decades, used the expression good hair, which is great hair, and bad hair, which is nappy hair, right?

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR

That's right. That's right. And that's why I started out by talking about me wanting to promote a sense of healing. Yes, we - engage within our community in a lot of behaviors that demonstrate that we don't always love ourselves the way that we should love ourselves, and so that's what 'Nappy" really was about. It was about promoting self - a positive self-image and self-esteem, learning to love ourselves when in fact so many things around us try to teach us and give us messages that we shouldn't love ourselves, but we should, we need to and we have to love ourselves.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Charisse, let me ask you this. When you heard Imus' remarks 'nappy-headed hos,' what was your reaction? Was it, was it the H word which was offensive or the idea that he was embracing the notion that nappy-headed was somehow pejorative?

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

I think it was quite frankly the way that he, he used it. I mean, he used 'nappy-headed hos' to indicate black women that were hos. And so it was really the, the ho part that made it so bad. But the...

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) But when he kind of laid it on with the, with the adjective nappy-headed, right? It wasn't just a ho by itself.

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

Oh, of course, and - yes, that is very true and that's why it really was a racist, sexist comment that it's really difficult to break it apart. It's sort of like being a black woman. I mean, I see myself so much as both, and so you really can't distinguish. He clearly intended it as the - just a depraved insult to black women everywhere.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Now, your book - I'll hold it up if I can, I think we have a graphic that induced anyway. But in your book 'Nappy,' you've taken it around and, and read it, I believe, at - to third and fourth graders in recent weeks.

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

Yes, yes.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) What kind of reaction do you get from them?

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

I get an overwhelmingly positive reaction from them. I went last month to a school in East Orange. It was, it's called Fourth Avenue School in East Orange, New Jersey. In New Jersey, ironically. I'm actually originally from New Jersey. And they adopted this book for their book of the month because it was women's history month. 'Nappy' is actually the first book about hair that ties in the story of history and hair and relate it together. And the children got it. They were so excited, first of all, to even just meet an author, someone who's actually published a book.

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

And they really understood the concept of, of strength and hair and not being defined by hair, but also understanding that they could find their strength in their hair. When I already left the school, I received the following week, pictures of, of bulletin boards that they had done. They did a bulletin board and it said, 'I'm happy to be nappy,' was one of the bulletin boards. Another bulletin board said, 'Our strength is in our hair.' Their principal Sharon Vincent made sure that the, the kids, kids as young as kindergarten, actually did reflections. Some of the kids talked about different challenges that they have had, and God didn't give us anything we couldn't handle, which is one of the themes that's in the book. Another...

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) I wanna, I wanna pick up on that, but we're gonna take a break right here, Charisse.

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR

Okay.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) And be right back shortly. We're gonna talk again to Charisse Carney-Nunes when we return on 'Perspectives.' Please stay tuned.

COMMERCIAL BREAK

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Welcome back to 'Perspectives.' And we're talking to Charisse Carney-Nunes, author of the children's book, 'Nappy.' It's a humorous story containing a powerful message about ethnic heritage, pride and self-esteem. Now, you were telling us you visited that school in New Jersey...

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR

Yes.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) ...third and fourth graders, and they were happy to see you and, and embrace the ideas behind this book. But did you get the sense that they, too, shared the negative image of having what we used to call bad hair, nappy hair?

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR

They did not exhibit anything like that of the sort, actually. They really were, there was nothing but joy and - happiness. They really understood the, the connections that I was making to history. They embraced it. It just really, when I walked into the school, there was a bulletin board with all different kinds of, of African American hair actually hanging off of it. So they had a bulletin board with, with locks on it. And then, they had, they had relaxed hair on it. They had an afro on the - actually hanging on the bulletin board that they and their teacher had designed.

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR

And so, quite frankly, they really did get it, that their hair is something that they can embrace, and that they should embrace, and that it's a source of strength, just like all of the strong women in history that came before them.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Charisse, what happened to the afro, by the way? I'm old enough to remember when it was in, and it was, not just a hairstyle but a matter of pride, but many, if not most, African American women are back to straightening their hair, are they not?

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR

Well, a lot of women do. And some women are actually, I, I, there's a resurgence in - all different kinds of natural hairstyles. There's a lot of, lot of people wearing locks now, and you have a lot of brothers that are actually out there braiding and locking their hair now. I think, really, and the message that - I'm trying to - put forward with 'Nappy,' and with all of

the of the work that I do, is it's about embracing what God gave you and - being sure of yourself and loving yourself, whoever you are.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Charisse, this conversation, which has taken place in the aftermath of the whole Imus affair has also...

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

Yes.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) ... touched on, I'm - as I'm sure you know, the lyrics in popular hip-hop music. What is your view about that, and don't these rap artists have as much a responsibility as Imus to not be sexist, not be pejorative in their language?

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

Yes. Absolutely 100%, the answer is yes. There's no equivocation there. But with that being said, there's also something else we have to look at because we can't blame rap artists, and we can't, also, we can't paint them with a broad brush, because I think, specifically, we're talking about gangster rap here. But, you know, they, they didn't cause Don Imus to say the comments that he said. The comments that he said were wrong, pointblank simple. He's paying the price for them. But - the - gangster rappers aren't really the problem, either. Quite frankly...

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) What is - wait. It's not just the gangster rappers. Kanye West, who I would not consider a gangster rapper, uses the H word and the B word pretty, pretty loosely.

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

That's true. That's true. And I think that the, the, I agree with you. The point is, is that we all have some responsibility to bear. I don't think that it's - correct to let the rappers off the hook. But I also don't think it's correct to let us off, off of the hook, either. Those of us who may have heard a creative hook on the radio and bounced along to it - been at a party and danced to it, and to those corporate conglomerates, quite frankly, that are making millions of dollars off of that gangster music...

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Wait.

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

...or off of Kanye West music.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) If you had your way, would you encourage, no, I don't think you'd wanna censor people. I don't think so. Would you encourage these musicians not to use that language? And would it have any effect if you encourage them, and I did, and 10,000 other people did, anyway?

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

Of course. No, I don't believe in censorship per se, but we don't have to lift up certain kinds of images and certain language within our community. The bottom line is this. I'm a member of an organization club, the **Jamestown Project**. And one of our advisers is Professor Cornel West at the Princeton. I think he really said it best. He said that there is a nihilism in our society, in our community, in our nation. And it can only be tamed with love and care. And so, I think that what happened with Imus or, or even with gangster rappers, or even, quite frankly, with what happened at Virginia Tech the other day, it's, it's a simple, it's a symbol at the whole that is in the - moral soul of - us as a country, as, as the black community, as a nation.

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

And so, I think that the answer is, yes, it has to be tamed with love and care. It's about the way that we treat each other. It's about strengthening our families, it's about strengthening our personal relationships, and it's about loving ourselves. And that's why I always come back to what my passion is and what my passion has been with 'Nappy,' which is to promote self-love and self-esteem.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Well, in the book, in a couple of, it's a short book, it's a children's book, twice you say, 'God didn't give us nothing we couldn't handle?' What...

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

Yeah.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) What's the, the lesson you're trying to communicate in saying that not once, but twice?

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

Right. The, the message that I'm trying to give there is to embrace our - ourselves and to embrace our history. When I say that God didn't give us anything we couldn't handle, I, I'm talking about my - the first time I said, I'm talking about my daughter's negative image of getting her hair done. And so, I said, 'You know, our hair is super naturally nappy, and it may be break-the-comb nappy, and it may be pull-out, twist-out, coil-out, kink-out nappy, but you know what? God didn't give us anything that we couldn't handle because you are strong.'

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

'You are strong like all these black women that came in history before you. And so our hair is really back-of-the-bus nappy. It's underground-railroad nappy, ain't-I-a-woman nappy.' And then, I just call forth the images of all of my heroines that came in history before my daughter. And so I want her to know that her strength comes from - from the very fabric of the legacy of these women. And so that's what I mean, to embrace our history, to embrace the truth in our history. I also talk about things that aren't necessarily pretty in our history. But it's - but it's about embracing our history, ourselves and, and just loving ourselves.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Well, the, the positivity certainly comes through in the book. I wish you a very good luck.

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

Thank you.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) We do hope it...

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

Thank you so much.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) ...hope it sells very well. And I guess, Imus sort of inadvertently, at least, put the word nappy...

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

Yes.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) ...out there, in the public conversation. So, may be that will, it'll have some benefit for you. Anyway, I wanna thank you for being with us.

CHARISSE CARNEY-NUNES (AUTHOR)

Thank you. Thank you so much for having me. I appreciate the opportunity.

RON CLAIBORNE (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) I appreciate it. And thank you for watching 'Perspective (sic).' I'm Ron Claiborne in New York. Stay tuned to ABC News.

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