

## ‘Barbershop: The Next Cut’ Does Their Take on ‘Chi-Raq’

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The Barbershop series of films have always prided themselves on following the “Seinfeld Rule” – they are essentially about nothing. But with this go-around – like the recent “Chi-Raq” – the gang at the shop takes on the Chicago neighborhood violence around them, in “Barbershop: The Next Cut.”

It’s still light hearted fare, and Cedric the Entertainer is still the one man Greek Chorus as Eddie, but like many neighborhoods in Chicago, the fictional south side environs of the barbershop are facing up to the wild west-style shootings that seem to happen on a nightly basis. Through this serious subject, they try to work it out and actually do something for their people. It’s a lot more noble, and it’s effectively woven (pun intended) into the Barbershop series zeitgeist.

Calvin (Ice Cube) is still running his south side barbershop, with the usual hustlers, hangers-on and regular customers. His fellow cutters are Jimmy (Sean Patrick Thomas), Rashad (Common) and the always unpredictable Eddie (Cedric the Entertainer). The twist on this on is that Calvin shares his business with a beauty shop, run by Angie (Regina Hall) and featuring Draya (Nicki Minaj) on one of the chairs.



The Cast of ‘Barbershop: The Next Cut’

*Photo credit: Warner Bros.*

When more shootings start to occur in the neighborhood, Calvin contemplates buying a new shop on the safer north side, and actually lines up something through “One-Stop” (J.B. Smoove). Calvin and Rashad are worried about their sons (Diallo Thompson and Michael Rainey Jr.) and



their interests in gangs, while Rashad is also having problems of his own as Draya is tempting him outside his marriage to Terri (Eve). Not to worry, though, because J.D.(Anthony Anderson) is still around, but is he still scamming?

These films have almost become like the black “Big Chill” – it has a large ensemble cast, interaction between the sexes, and problems to be solved. But instead of wondering if he should give his friends insider stock tips, Calvin has to worry whether his son will survive the night. The film is dead serious about taking on the Chicago violence issue, and seeks to remind people that there are things they can do. It’s admirable, and a tribute to the work of screenwriters Kenya Barris (creator of TV’s “Blackish”) and Tracy Oliver, plus the sure workmanship of director Malcolm D. Lee (“The Best Man”).

Among the seriousness, though, is the usual barbershop banter, which – depending on the joke or subject – is hilarious or goes over like a lead balloon. J.B. Smoove has taken over the heavy lifting of the comic relief, even more than Cedric the Entertainer, but he was a perfect example of the laugh/lead opposing forces. Nicki Minaj got all the laugh lines on the beauty shop side, and with that voice and bearing, proved herself a sure comedian.

Ice Cube is the centerpiece of the shop chaos, and revels in his role as the moral arbiter. It’s been quite a year for the rapper-turned-actor, with his story in “Straight Outta Compton” taking the spotlight during the diversity issue at the Oscars, and then using the Barbershop series to address issues of the Chicago street killings. It’s interesting to see his development, and he does a straight domestic role in this film, portraying a Papa Lion protecting his realm. It’s a remarkable evolution from Compton to Calvin.



Eddie (Cedric the Entertainer), Draya (Nicki Minaj) and Calvin (Ice Cube) in ‘Barbershop: The Next Cut’

Photo credit: Warner Bros.

This is an African American cultural film, as the barbershop is the traditional gathering place and conversation center of neighborhoods that are like the one in the film. There is a bit of misogyny that goes with the atmosphere, which is a negative in a very positive scenario, to go along with the lame jokes. It is doubtful that Cedric the Entertainer would have to shake his backside in the manner of Nicki Minaj during a notable segment in the story, and it just seemed weird.

Many of the actors in “Barbershop: The Next Cut” are very socially conscious – Common, for example, runs a very successful foundation in his hometown of Chicago. So this is an ensemble cast and story that is trying hard to increase the peace, in a hopeless situation, in a hopeless time.

*“Barbershop: The Next Cut” is currently in theaters everywhere. Featuring Ice Cube, Cedric the Entertainer, Regina Hall, Eve, Anthony Anderson, J.B. Smoove, Nicki Minaj, Deon Cole and Common. Written by Kenya Barris and Tracy Oliver. Directed by Malcolm D. Lee. Rated “PG-13”*



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