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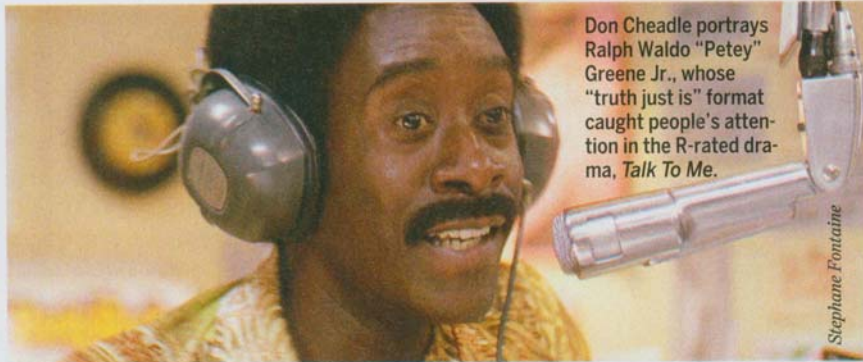
On 'Hairspray' Role, Hollywood's Racism
And The Hip-Hop Controversy

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Don Cheadle portrays Ralph Waldo "Petey" Greene Jr., whose "truth just is" format caught people's attention in the R-rated drama, *Talk To Me*.

Stephane Fontaine

'Talk To Me'

From The Jailhouse To The White House, Controversial Deejay's Story Hits The Screen

By Sylvia P. Flanagan
JET MAGAZINE

Ralph Waldo "Petey" Greene Jr., an ex-con-turned-deejay who provided a "tell it like it is" format during the mid-1960s, was a vital force in Washington, D.C., aka the "Chocolate City," in giving a voice to the Black community during that turbulent time.

In the summer film, *Talk To Me*, Academy Award-nominee Don Cheadle portrays the real-life deejay and activist who shook up the airwaves and challenged the system.

Greene, who was born in 1931, lived a few blocks from the White House. Raised by his grandmother, he began breaking the law, drinking and doing drugs at a young age. He enlisted in the U.S. Army

and later served in the Korean War. In 1960, a conviction for armed robbery landed him in jail, where he began to change for the better. His grandmother sent him records to play while in prison, and he honed his disc jockey skills in a work program in Virginia's Lorton Prison. There Greene was allowed to address prisoners over the public address system in "shifts" of 20 minutes each. After he was released from prison, he pursued a disc jockey career in Washington, D.C., at radio station WOL-AM, where program director Dewey Hughes took a chance on him.

During his career, Greene won two local Emmy awards and attended a dinner at the White House under President Jimmy Carter. He died of cancer in 1984.



▲ The cast includes Cheadle, Chiwetel Ejiofor (c), who plays program director Dewey Hughes, and Emmy Award-winner Martin Sheen, who is radio station owner E.G. Sonderling.

“Everyone did this movie because they loved the story and wanted to be a part of telling it,” says Cheadle, who is also one of the executive producers on this film. The cast includes Chiwetel Ejiofor, Cedric the Entertainer, Taraji P. Henson, Mike Epps, Vondie Curtis Hall and Martin Sheen.

Greene’s persona was one that many people could relate to, director Kasi Lemmons says. “You don’t have to be a Washingtonian, or Black to appreciate someone who was this dynamic. Here was a man who was the voice of his community, and who said things so many of us would like to say.”

The relationship between Greene and Hughes provided the foundation for the movie. Says screenwriter Michael Genet, who is Hughes’ son: “When I was writing the script, I knew I had to stay true to

the voices of these two men... What I found in telling their story was that there is a love shared between Black men that we almost never hear tell of. You won’t find it defined in any text books or dictionaries, yet it exists.” □

About Petey Greene

- Won two local Emmy Awards 1970s
- Attended dinner at the White House in March 1978 for President of Yugoslavia, during Jimmy Carter’s presidency
- Hosted “Petey Greene’s Washington” a TV program broadcast locally and later nationally by BET
- Honored with naming of The Ralph Waldo “Petey” Greene Community Service Center in southeastern D.C.
- Life story published, *Laugh if You Like, Ain’t A Damn Thing Funny*, in 2003