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OPINION

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to news@portlandobserver.com.

Thanks to the Academy: I'm thrilled 'Precious' didn't win big

BY STACEY PATTON

First, I'd like to thank members of the Academy for not awarding a slew of Oscars to what New York Press film critic Armond White called "the biggest con job of the year" — Precious: Based on the novel Push by Sapphire.



Call me a hater. I don't care!

I'm thrilled that director Lee Daniel's blockbuster hit did not win big at the Oscars.

Though the gritty film was nominated in six categories, it earned two Oscars — one for best adapted screenplay, and Mo'Nique took the prize for best supporting actress.

I give big props to Mo'Nique and Gabourey Sidibe for their courage and skill playing such harrowing roles. As one of my writer friends pointed out, when you are a black artist navigating Hollywood, sometimes you enter the door that's open. But while a parade of critics have heralded Precious for its triumph of social realism, it also crammed all the worst pathologies and stereotypes of urban poor black people into one film.

Scenes like the morbidly obese, twice-pregnant, illiterate teen running through the streets of Harlem while stuffing herself with a bucket of stolen fried chicken was a throwback to racist depictions from the antebellum South.

Daniels' film also depicted blacks as stupid, hypersexual, primitive, filthy, unhealthy, criminal, abusive, lazy, and violent. Need I say more about this perpetuation of toxic themes?

As I watched the glitzy and glamorous awards ceremony I cringed when Mo'Nique won. It's not that I don't think she deserved her award. I didn't want the content of the film to be celebrated.

In her acceptance speech Mo'Nique said: "I would like to thank

the Academy for showing that it can be about the performance and not the politics."

But Mo'Nique forgets that when it comes to films portraying black folks, the white-dominated Hollywood industry has consistently proven itself to

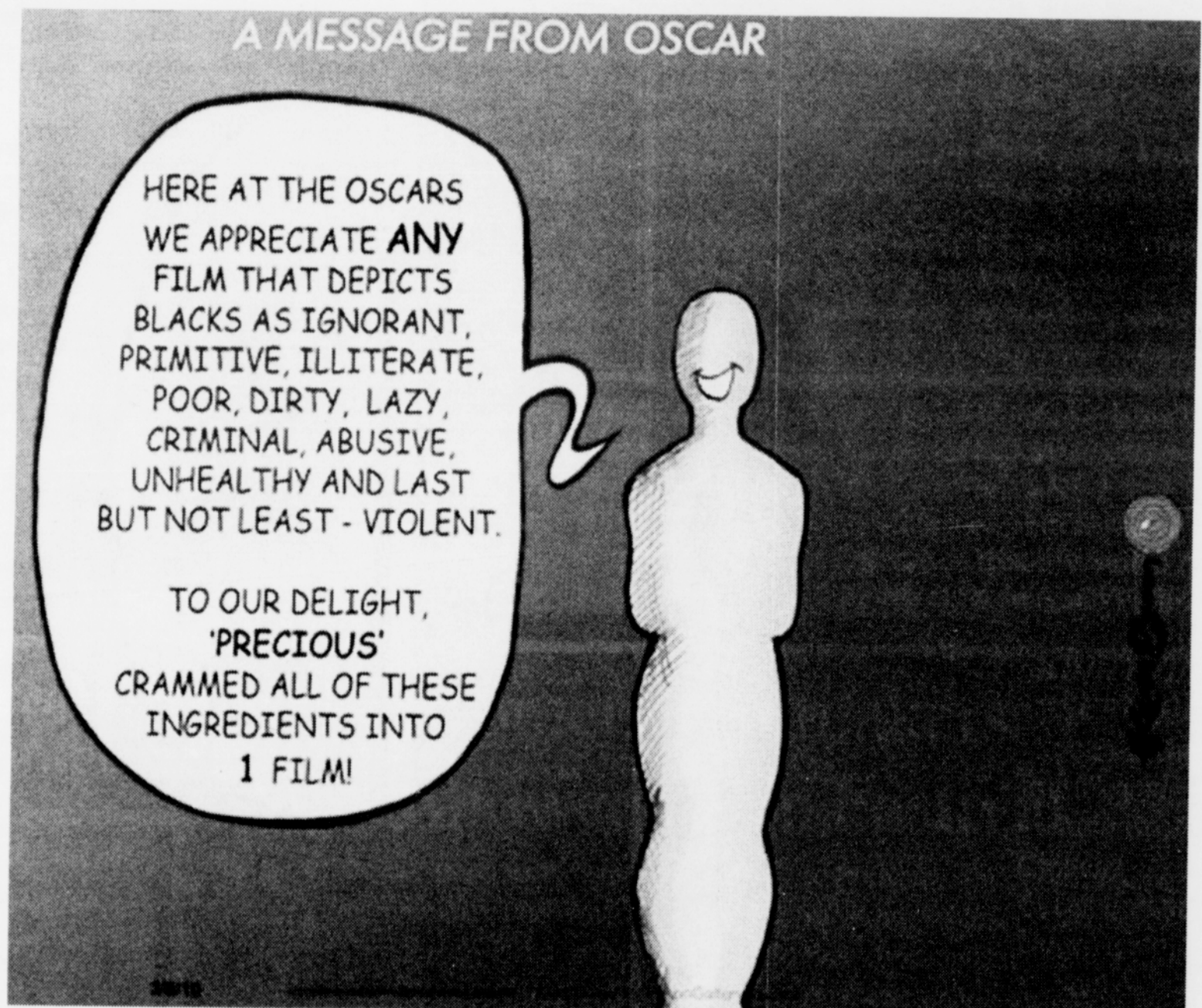
role as Leticia Musgrove, yet another Lee Daniels' film where a black mother at times abuses her morbidly obese black child who ends up dying.

The black fathers in both films are good-for-nothings and are killed off. Berry's graphic sex scene with the racist character played by Billy Bob Thornton stirred a great deal of dis-

with glimpses inside worlds some of us never encounter or don't want.

Films like Precious might provoke moral outrage and get people talking about important issues like child abuse and rape. But do they really help us understand that kind of suffering as well as the social context and strictures that breed such violations of vulnerable people?

Or do they simply reproduce stereotypes and cast blacks, the poor,



be an anachronism, never separating politics, race and stereotypes from our stories.

Mo'Nique won for playing a lazy, heartless welfare mother who sexually and physically abuses her own child.

Sidibe, the film's main protagonist, became the first black woman to be nominated for best actress since Halle Berry won in 2001 for her

cussion among African Americans.

The point is that even though more black actors and actresses are being nominated and winning at the Academy Awards, the kinds of roles they are cast for don't seem to be evolving. Audiences are still bombarded by distressing images that some have praised for their inspirational messages, redemptive qualities, and for providing Americans

and other people pushed to the margins as hapless victims with no future?

Stacey Patton is senior editor of The Defenders Online and writer for The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. Cartoonist Kevin Eason lives in New Jersey where he covers news events in politics, entertainment, sports and more.

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