

# POINT OF VIEW

## BETWEEN THE LINES

# As Oscar night fades black talent; recognition is still a whiteout

By A. Asadullah Samad

"Oscar Night" is supposed to be Hollywood's biggest night. The night when the industry's biggest and brightest stars are recognized for their artistic achievement. Only many of Hollywood's biggest and brightest weren't recognized: That was reserved for Hollywood's stannest and lightest. The entertainment industry's

"White Only" party. Well, except for Quincy (in the producer's chair) and Whoopi (at the host's mike). Everybody else watched from the balcony. I guess that was their insurance that we wouldn't act up altogether. Jesse and one day of protest they can handle. Then it's back to business as usual. There's no shame in Hollywood's game. They "do what they gotta' do."

But like last year and the year before, they'll have their annual "white only" party next year too, if blacks don't do more than just talk about it. And we really should be extra offended this year because 1995 was not an off year for creative excellence. We got shafted and it wasn't an "isolated incidence," an accident, an oversight, or anything like that. It was a straight-up

whiteout. Not the blackout People Magazine stated (even though they should "get props" for profiling this on their March 18th cover). In a blackout, everything goes dark and in total darkness, you can't tell one person from the next, black or white. But y'all remember whiteout, don't you (this might be a pre-computer age thing)? Whiteout was what you used to

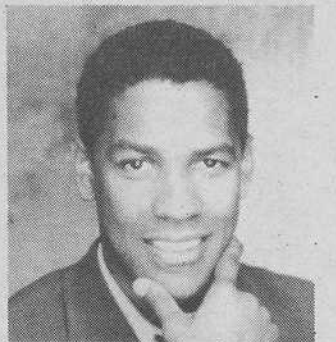
cover mistakes on a typed page. In fact, you could take out a line, and type over what was there...like it was never there. You might see a spot on the paper, you just ignored it. The best black talent was whited out on Oscar night, but their performances were still on the page. They were just ignored while they fronted our talent to run the show. How's that for being faded (as they say in the hood)?

I don't care what the academy said. I mean, I know this ain't hoops or football, or "Soul Train" dancin', but we know how to judge quality big screen performances when we see them. Black people are 12% of the population and 25% of the total movie-goers (we'll get back to that in a minute), we've seen enough movies to know what's what. We'll go see a movie twice if we ain't sure. We're not crazy. And they know that we know we ain't crazy. You can't tell me there was a better original score than Babyface's "Waiting to Exhale" soundtrack. But let the academy tell it, there were five scores that were better than Babyface. Bull\$%&! Hell, even white people are "Shoooping" around town it sounded so good. Multi-platinum (and we don't buy CDs twice). You can't tell me that Laurence Fishburne (my favorite actor, just based on the quality and intensity of the characters he portrays) in his role of Othello was not in the top five performances for leading actor performance of 1995. You can't tell me Angela Bassett (my



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favorite actress; for the same reasons I like Fishburne) was not in the top five leading actress performances. There were many more. Denzel Washington (my



DENZEL WASHINGTON

wife's favorite actor) in "Crimson Tide." Morgan Freeman in "Seven." Don Cheadle as best supporting actor in "Devil in the Blue Dress" (Denzel was also pretty good in this one). And that just in front of the screen. What about the countless efforts behind the screen? It's enough to make a "brova" holla'. But they're used to hearing us holla about something, but...what's next. Fade to black. If you want to talk about blacking out in our community, talk about doin' some follow-up. Then it's three blind mice, see how they run.

It's really time we as a people really examine our contribution to industries that not only exclude us, but defame our images in the process. Now its crazy to even imply that we oughta' step out of the movies. Anymore then one would insist we stop singin' and dancin' and playin' football or



ANGELA BASSETT

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## CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

# Locking up children and throwing away the key

By Bernice Powell Jackson

We were all shocked more than a year ago by the story of Eric Morse, the five-year-old child killed by two older boys, one ten and one eleven-years-old, who threw Eric out the window of their Chicago housing project when he refused to steal candy for them. We were shocked by the reality of children killing children.

Now we should be shocked by the sentences which the two older boys received and what it says about us as a nation. The younger boy becomes the youngest child locked up in a maximum security juvenile prison in the country. The older is also headed for prison.

Both of these boys are living, breathing examples of what happens when parents and all the institutions of society fail children. Both are living, breathing examples of what happens to children who do not know love at home and do not find caring in schools, social agencies or the criminal justice system. Both show us what happens when little children "fall between the cracks."

The younger boy has an I.Q. somewhere around 60. The older child failed every subject in the fourth grade, only to be passed on to the fifth grade by a system that had to know he was in trouble. Often a runaway, he had been picked up by police before but he had never been seen by a social worker. His father is also imprisoned. Both boys lived most of their lives in the Ida B. Wells housing project, one of the nation's toughest.

Before this horrible case appeared in the nation's headlines, children under 13 could not be sent to prison under Illinois law. Now that has changed so that children as young as 10 can be locked up in Illinois. It's a trend that is being followed in state after state. Said Jay Hoffman, an Illinois state legislator, "...That's my sense of what the public very much wants."

Like much of the national debate around crime in this nation, public emotion and sentiment are often used as the rationale for get-tough laws. Make no mistake about it. The murder of a five-year-old is a

heinous crime. But it was a crime committed by children, no matter how angry or defiant or hardened they may seem to be.

Indeed, much of the debate around these two child murderers centers around whether punishment or treatment should receive priority. The judge in their case seems to have weighed in on the side of punishment. But those who are studying children and violence believe that while they should be punished, that intensive psychiatric care and old-fashioned nurturing must be a significant part of what happens to them if they are to change.

Moreover, the same laws which imprison ten-year-olds also mandate that the children must be freed by the time they turn 21. As Dr. Bruce Perry, a psychiatrist at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston said, "These children have to get out of prison eventually. And when they do, if they haven't received intensive treatment and help, they will be the most remorseless, angry and skilled predators imaginable. What else can we expect of someone who

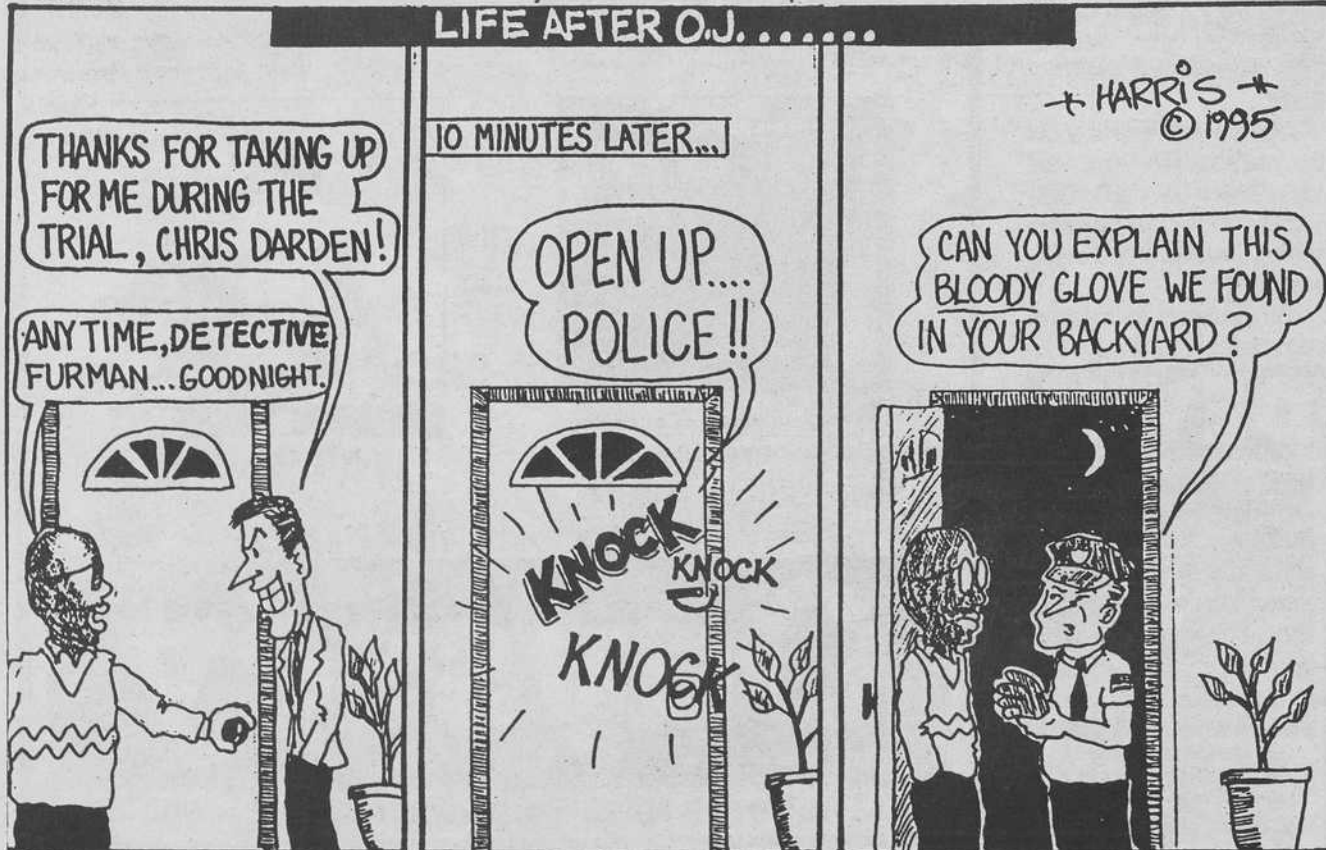


Bernice Powell Jackson

has grown up in prison?"

The boys' lawyers fear that they will end up in prison with 200 or more inmates and one part-time psychiatrist, guaranteeing that they will receive little help. Said Michelle Kaplan, the lawyer for the 13-year-old in a recent New York Times interview, "There's this history leading up to this child being in crisis and no one has ever intervened. Now the system has finally intervened and they want to throw him away."

We're in trouble in this country. A nation where children are killing children must deal with what has created murderers out of children. A nation that locks up its young and throws away the key can only create more murderers and more Eric Morses.



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