

Absurd 'Airplane' rip-off perpetuates stereotypes

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

Every time it looks like Hollywood might finally accept the post-racial notion of color-blind casting, along comes another one of those mind-boggling movies like "Soul Plane," a picture in poor taste which dusts off every demeaning stereotype in the book. In the name of family comedy, Jessy Terrero makes one dismal directorial debut with this cringe-inducing minstrel show about the maiden voyage of an African-American owned airline.

Minstrelsy was invented back in the 1820s, when White men in Blackface began mocking African-Americans on stage for the enjoyment of all-White audiences. Typically, the skits sentimentalized slavery while presenting dumb, thick-lipped, bug-eyed buffoons, with names like Jim Crow, Zip Coon and Mr. Tambo, all of whom invariably butchered the language while making absolute fools of themselves.

Though the first talking picture, "The Jazz



Rappers Snoop Dogg and Method Man star in the forgettable, inane comedy "Soul Plane."

Singer" in 1927 featured a world-renown White minstrel named Al Jolson, the offensive practice continued unabated after Blacks

like Stepin' Fetchit began assuming the offensive roles. Sadly, in these supposedly more enlightened times, "Soul Plane" seeks to present African-Americans in terms of similar cartoonish caricatures.

Among the ensemble staring in this harmful production are some talented entertainers, such as comedians John Witherspoon, Mo'Nique, Tom Arnold and D.L. Hughley, gangsta rappers Snoop Dogg and Method Man. The demeaning script has a pretty simple plotline. Embarrassed traveler Nashawn Wade (Kevin Hart) decides to start his own Afrocentric airline with the \$100 million settlement he gets after a humiliating incident aboard a regular commercial flight.

The running joke in this one-trick pony is that Black people are trifling and irresponsible when left to their own devices. In this regard, they stand in sharp contrast to the shocked Elvis Hunkee (Arnold) and his family, who were unknowingly booked onto the otherwise all-Black Airline.

Let's see, the company's purple, "pimpish" jet has wheels that bounce as it taxis down the runway. Its pilot (Dogg) gets high on weed and hallucinogens in the cockpit and expresses an inclination to crash the plane into a mountain rather than pay any child support to one of his "bitches."

Most of the humor has to do with promiscuity. The co-pilot announces that every woman will be pregnant by the end of the flight. And to get the party started there's a nightclub on board outfitted with a hot tub. The garishly dressed stewardesses and a gay as they come steward serve Colt 45 and other cheap liquor while most of the clientele quickly fall in lust with each other or, as in the case of a blind man (Witherspoon), with a vegetable.

Scantly-clad women stroll around with dopey-bimbo expressions when not experiencing screaming, Mile-High Club climaxes and most of the men seem to have serious sanitation issues. The disgusting dialogue commits itself to referring to men with the N-word and to women with the basest of terms.

Overall, "Soul Plane" certainly sets a new low in self-hating cinema. I was aghast.

Poor (0 stars). Rated R for sex, expletives, ethnic slurs, drug use and advocacy of underage alcohol consumption and copulation.

Jackson cleared of '80s charge

LOS ANGELES (AP) - A two-month investigation uncovered no evidence to support allegations that Michael Jackson committed child abuse in the late 1980s in Los Angeles, police said last week.

The Los Angeles Police Department opened an investigation after a man whose name has not been released claimed to have been abused by the pop star as a child.

The allegation was separate from the child molestation case currently under way against Jackson in Santa Barbara County.

"After an extensive investigation, which included hours of interviews with the person making the allegations, detectives concluded there was no evidence that any crime occurred," Los Angeles Police Lt. Art Miller said in a statement. "No charges will be sought."

Police did not disclose the nature of the accusations. Legal experts have said the allegations would be difficult to prosecute because of questions about why the accuser did not come forward sooner, and the reliability of any testimony about events from so long ago.

Jackson's attorneys did not return calls

for comment.

In other developments, a judge has barred a New Jersey man from displaying or selling Jackson collectibles until the resolution of the singer's lawsuit over the costumes, letters, legal documents and other items.

Henry V. Vaccaro took the items, which had been in storage in Oxnard, Calif., as part of a bankruptcy proceeding involving Jackson's parents and his brothers, Tito and Jermaine. He then displayed them on a pay-per-view Web site.

Vaccaro, a construction company owner, said he was awarded the items after years of legal wrangling stemming from a failed business venture that wound up in bankruptcy court. Some of the items may play a role in Jackson's child molestation case, although it's unclear whether they would be helpful as evidence.

Vaccaro reportedly turned over the underwear and some handwritten notes to prosecutors in Monmouth County, N.J., who in turn handed them over to the Santa Barbara prosecutors. Jackson has pleaded not guilty.

Appeals court dismisses judgment on assault charge in P. Diddy case

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) - The North Carolina Court of Appeals has overturned a civil judgment ordering rapper Sean "P. Diddy" Combs to pay \$450,000 to a man who claimed he was beaten by bodyguards the rapper had hired.

The ruling came Tuesday in a lawsuit filed by Cedrick Bobby Lemon, who said he was beaten in June 1995 by bodyguards Combs hired to protect soul singer Mary J. Blige at a concert in Winston-Salem. Combs was Blige's manager.

Because Combs didn't re-

spond to the complaint within the time required by law, a Forsyth County Superior Court judge ruled in Lemon's favor and ordered a default judgment against Combs. But the appeals court found that Lemon didn't meet other requirements when he requested the default judgment and overturned it.

According to Lemon's lawsuit, he worked as a limousine driver and wore an identification badge that permitted him to stand backstage.

As two bodyguards tried to clear the area to escort Blige

from the coliseum after the concert, they punched Lemon in the head, kicked him in the back and broke his right ankle, according to the lawsuit.

Combs was negligent because he failed to train the bodyguards properly for their duties, the lawsuit said.

Lemon's attorney, Howard C. Jones, told the Winston-Salem Journal that his client hasn't decided whether to appeal the decision. He had medical bills of \$14,400, the lawsuit says and the attack left him unable to work as a limo driver.

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