

Subcultures collide in racially charged 'Crash'

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

If this country is as dysfunctional, divided and downright demented as suggested by the relentlessly unsettling "Crash," then Heaven help us all.

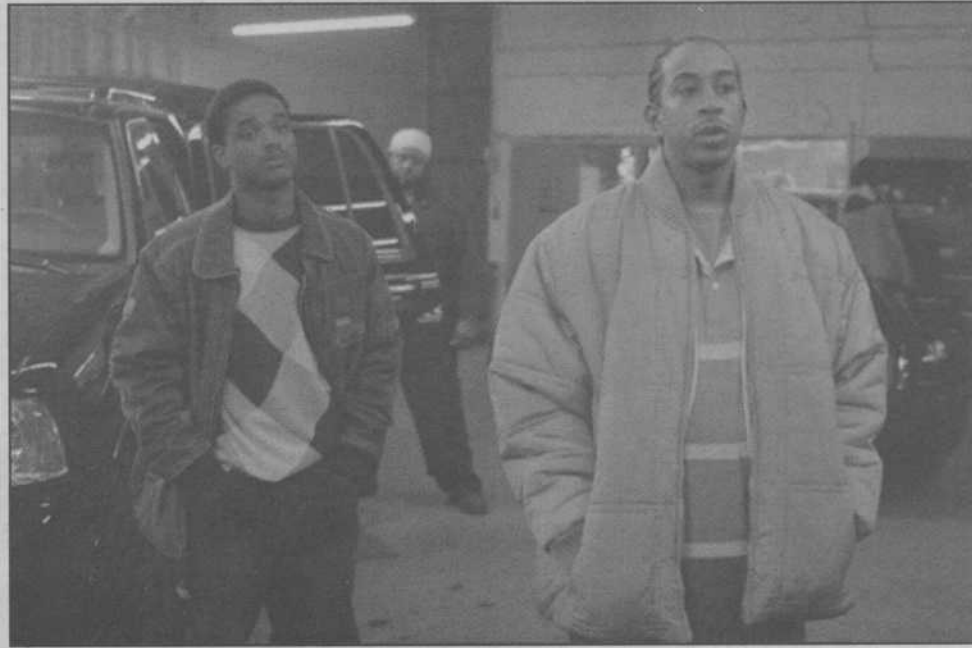
Leave it to a Canadian, recent Oscar-nominee Paul Haggis (for his screenplay adaptation of "Million Dollar Baby"), to shed some most-chilling light on how sub-cultures interrelate across class and color lines in present-day America. Haggis makes an impressive enough directorial debut with this thought-provoking morality play to warrant serious consideration come Oscar season.

The picture is set in a most unappealingly presented Los Angeles, where every subgroup, Whites, Blacks, Latinos, Asians and Middle Easterners, find themselves separated by a freeway lifestyle, which relies heavily on the insularity afforded by

a heavy reliance on the automobile. Still, points of contact are unavoidable, and it is those highly-charged moments of interaction which are ever so effectively explored in "Crash."

The film is one of those serendipitous pieces where a series of strangers become irreversibly entangled by chance, as seen in "Love Actually," "Magnolia," and countless other examples of this popular new genre. But this movie, rather than rely solely on a convenient plot contrivance which entertains via the implausibility suggested by the magic of cinematic coincidence, it simultaneously forces us to confront our every prejudice, and from a fresh perspective.

Assembling an already very talented ensemble cast of actors, Haggis coaxes career performances out of many actors and actresses who had never exhibited such emotional depth before, including Sandra Bullock,



Veteran actor Larenz Tate, left, and rapper Ludacris are two of multiple stars in "Crash."

Brendan Fraser, Terrence Howard, Thandie Newton, Matt Dillon, Larenz Tate and Ryan Phillippe. Also comprising the expanded dramatis personae are Don Cheadle, Tony Danza, Jennifer Esposito, Ludacris, William Fichtner, Keith David, Loretta Devine and Nona

Gaye.

Early in the adventure, we are introduced to Anthony (Ludacris) and Peter (Tate), a couple of young African-American men debating about whether they'd just been discriminated against while being served in a fancy restaurant. Strolling down the street, they decide to carjack an auto owned by L.A. District Attorney Rick Cameron (Fraser) and his

wife, Jean (Bullock).

Rick's reaction is to worry whether publicity about the robbery will affect his reelection, while Jean proceeds to have all the locks in their home changed. But when Daniel (Michael Pena), a Latino locksmith, arrives, her bigoted nature emerges when she unfairly suspects him of being a ghetto gang member.

Daniel's life, in turn, dovetails with that of Farhad

(Shaun Toub), a Persian shopkeeper whose store has been broken into and needs a new door.

Meanwhile, on another side of town, bourgeois Blacks, Cameron (Howard) and Christine (Newton), are at odds after she's molested by a racist cop (Dillion) during a deliberate profile stop. She's left clearly as enraged by her emasculated husband's failure to protect her honor, as by the venereal violation.

Over a score of complex characters are eventually linked as the story continues to unfold seamlessly. Expect to squirm uncomfortably in your seat throughout the duration, for this articulate and particularly poignant mood piece demands nothing of its audience if not for some brutally honest introspection about each of our unquestioned presumptions about the human condition. Easily, the best film of 2005 thus far.

Excellent (4 stars). Rating: R for profanity, ethnic slurs, mature themes, frontal nudity, graphic sexuality, and gruesome violence.

Comic reportedly checks into mental health facility

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Comedy Central star Dave Chappelle has checked himself into a mental health facility in South Africa, the magazine Entertainment Weekly reported on Wednesday.

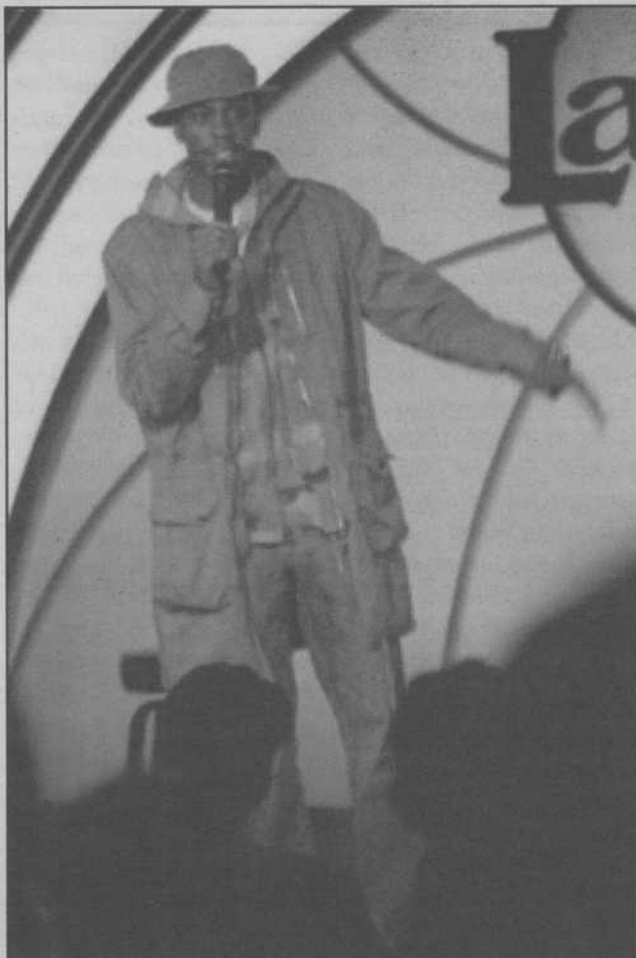
The comedian's whereabouts and condition have been unknown since Comedy Central abruptly announced last week that the planned May 31 launch of the third season of "Chappelle's Show" had been postponed and production halted.

Chappelle flew from Newark, N.J., to South Africa on April 28 for treatment, said the magazine, quoting a source close to the show it would not identify. Entertainment Weekly said it had corroborating sources for its story.

"We don't know where he is," Comedy Central spokesman Tony Fox said. "We've heard about South Africa. We don't know. We haven't talked to Dave."

Chappelle's spokesman, Matt Labov, would not comment on the magazine's story.

"It seems like the issues he's contending with are really quite serious," said Dade Hayes, a senior editor at Entertainment Weekly. "It isn't a case of him spending a weekend someplace recuperating from exhaustion."



Comedian and show host Dave Chappelle works the stage at the Laugh Factory in New York City on April 3, 2004.

The magazine's sources say Chappelle is still in the facility, which was not named, Hayes said. Chappelle's representatives have denied that the comedian was abusing drugs.

Chappelle reportedly signed a \$50 million deal with Comedy Central for two more

seasons of his show, a payday made possible because of the explosive sales of the show's first season DVD.

The magazine said Chappelle had shot four to five episodes' worth of sketches for the new season, but none of its onstage introductions.



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