



"Color of the Cross" explores the story of Jesus Christ from a Black perspective.

## Crucifixion revisited: 'Color' recasts Jesus

By Kam Williams  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Was Jesus a Black man? He might have been, given the features of the folks from the region of the world where he was born. He was at least more likely to look more like a brother than the generally accepted representations of him as a fair-skinned, flax-haired Caucasian. Yet, Hollywood has never seen fit to make a major motion picture featuring a sepia Son of God. Till now.

"Color of the Cross" is the brainchild of actor/writer/director Jean-Claude LaMarre, a gifted tale-spinner who does much more here than merely revisit the life of Christ in blackface. For this controversial reinterpretation of the scriptures, which transpires during the 48 hours leading up to the Crucifixion, mixes many instantly recognizable Biblical passages with speculation about a motive for murdering Jesus which had to do with his skin color.

So, we find familiar scenes such as those taking place in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus (LaMarre) prayed to God the

Father the night before he died, and where he was later betrayed by Judas (Johann John Jean) with a kiss for 30 pieces of silver. Of course, there's The Last Supper, the last meal Christ shared with the Apostles.

Superficially, "Color of the Cross" reads like a passion play except for the fact that Jesus is Black, and that he has been rejected by disbelieving rabbis who have a hard time swallowing the idea that of a dark-skinned Messiah.

In fact, they routinely refer to him as the Black Nazarene, so in this version of the New Testament, not only do the Jews crucify Christ, but they're portrayed as racists to boot.

Although this ethnic discrimination angle might be factually inaccurate, since if Jesus was a Black Jew, his accusers must've mostly been Black Jews, too. The best thing about "Color of the Cross" is that it finally furnishes us with a reason for the Crucifixion. It reminded me of the Don Rickles routine in which the comedian wondered how his people could possibly have screwed

up Christmas. Now we at least have a theory.

The storyline aside, Jean-Claude LaMarre's charismatic performance as Jesus is what really holds the production together. He receives considerable help in this regard from his capable supporting cast which includes Debbi Morgan as the Virgin Mary, Ananda Lewis as Leah, Akiva David as John, Jacinto Taras Riddick as Peter, and John Pierre Parent as Doubting Thomas.

Is the film blasphemous? Blasphemy is in the eye of the beholder. But it's certainly a lot closer in tone to "The Ten Commandments" (1956) and "The Greatest Story Ever Told" (1965) than to "The Last Temptation of Christ" (1988) or Andy Warhol's "Imitation of Christ" (1967).

Regardless, if Kanye West can appear on the cover of Rolling Stone sporting a crown of thorns, then we're probably already primed for a religious epic featuring an ebony Prince of Peace. Let the debates begin!

Excellent (4 stars). Rated PG-13 for graphic crucifixion images.

## Rhymes cited for mouth

NEW YORK (AP) - Trouble has found Busta Rhymes again. The rapper, who's had other run-ins with the law, was caught talking on his cell phone while driving past a Manhattan police station, police said Friday.

Rhymes, whose legal name is Trevor Smith, was cruising past a police station about 7 p.m. last Thursday when police allegedly spotted him on the cell phone.

He was pulled over and issued a summons for the moving violation. His man-

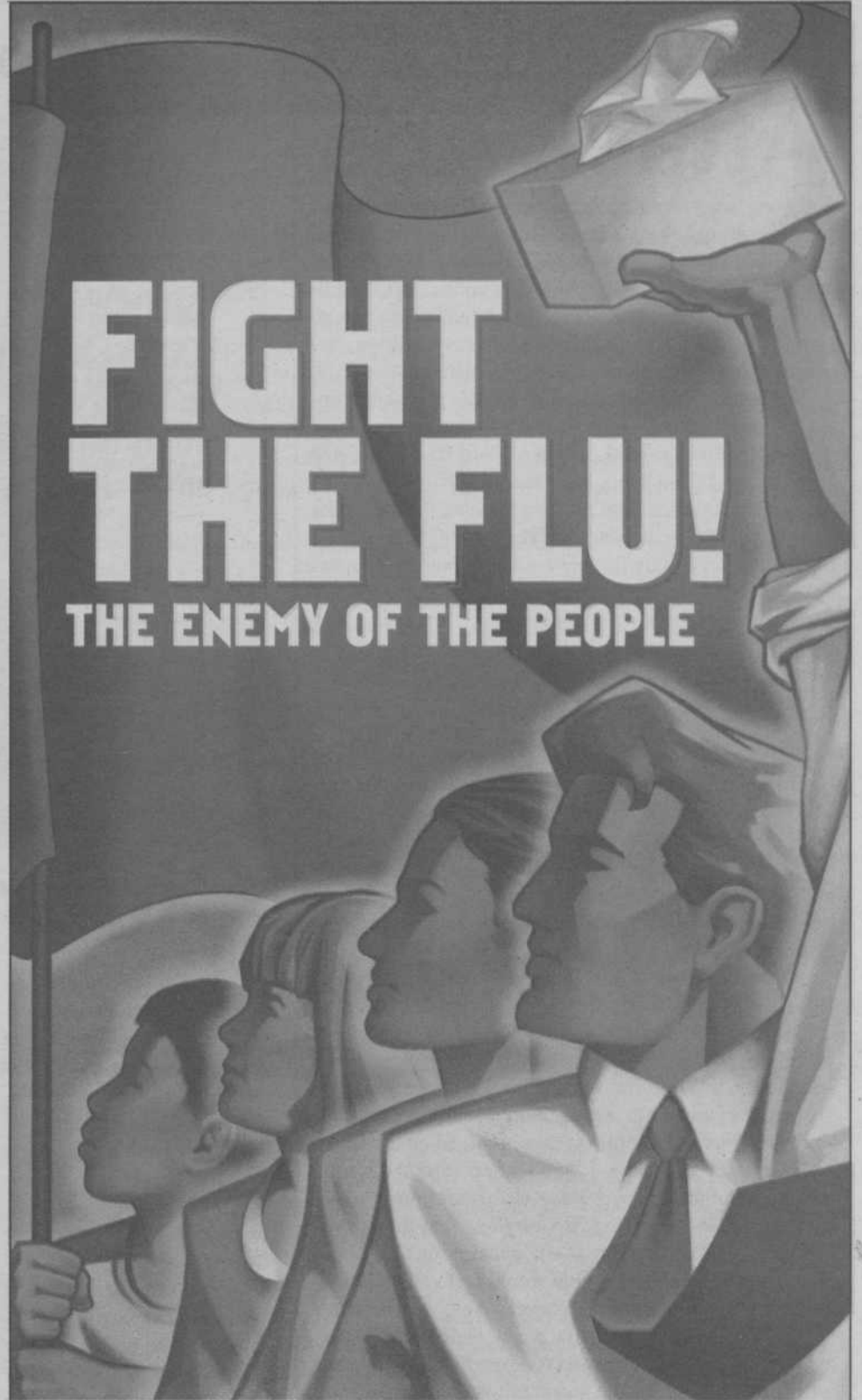
agement office declined to comment last week. Last month, the best-selling rap star appeared in court on an assault charge for allegedly attacking a man who spit on his car in August. He is due back in court in that case on Dec. 11.

In another case involving the unsolved shooting death of his bodyguard Israel Ramirez in February, Rhymes has refused to be questioned by police as a potential witness. Police say Rhymes, 34, has made no

effort to help identify the killer. The shooting occurred outside a music video taping in Brooklyn.

The rapper's most recent album was the "The Big Bang," released earlier this year, featuring the hit "Touch It."

Rhymes has had a stream of hits throughout his career, which spans more than a decade, including "Put Your Hands Where My Eyes Could See" and "Dangerous." He's also been in films, including 2000's "Shaft."



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