

**PERSPECTIVES**

# Oscars praise troop of morally- lacking movies



**DAVE  
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columnist

The Oscar gala has come and gone. Actresses paraded the most bizarre outfits in California and producers to keep the show running on schedule as always, the nominees are samples of Hollywood's finest efforts, but they are examples of vulgarity and gore. Religious weekly offered reviews of all films nominated for best picture this year and the reviews included summaries of all the questionable material in the picture. The list is startling. I summarize their list of offenses in the movies, there were close to a hundred profanities, several dozen obscenities, four sexual situations, several nude scenes (including several nude sketches), an obscene gesture, several instances of bigotry, a few beatings, a couple of killings, a suicide, one cynical diatribe about working for government and frozen bodies bobbing in an ice-cold

certainly a movie does not have to be shocking to be good. Two years ago the Oscars-nominated films were much more family-oriented. A summary of the offensive material in films then might read, "a few dozen vulgarities, a love scene featuring nudity, a few suggestive scenes, a view of hundreds of screaming Scotsmen and one urinating pig." A much more recent list than this year's tally.

Michael Medved, a syndicated columnist and movie critic, lately comments on the downward spiral of American entertainment. He particularly takes issue with Hollywood's fascination with bad language and bodily function. He admits that violent action films appeal to a certain segment of the population, but also points out no one leaves a theater saying, "that film didn't have enough f-words."

Of course, directors and producers insist they only give audiences what they want, but Americans do not really want their evening entertainment riddled with vulgarity and awkward contentions.

Unleashed researched movie profits over the last several years have found movies with lower ratings had higher average box-office success. Despite the assertions of members of the movie industry, more Americans will spend their money on a film with a rating than an R-rating.

Hollywood insiders continue to defend their creations, claiming they only reflect reality. Again, the argument seems disingenuous. The same celebrities who say their films reflect reality also insist to suspend belief and view their films as an "escape." Not only people want to escape to a world so filled with foul-mouthed, amoral citizens.

Producers and directors cannot expect a few seconds of nudity to make the difference between a box-office flop and the next big hit. American viewers will not stay home because an otherwise interesting film lacked sufficient skin scenes, but nudity drives away audiences.

While Quentin Tarantino movies depict unconventional and violent scenes, the films are not box-office giants. Tarantino is selling his version of art, but his films are not appealing to most people. If Tarantino were trying to please audiences he would use very different films.

The film industry is a unique industry where success can usually be measured by profits. Excepting a few odd instances like *Citizen Kane* and *It's a Wonderful Life*, if a film achieves its goal of providing enjoyable entertainment, it will bring in money.

Certainly not all producers and directors are trying to appeal to a wide audience. Spike Lee, for example, makes films to promote a cause, and he does a magnificent job. Lee's films cannot be judged by their audience appeal, but he realizes his message reaches more people if larger audiences are attracted.

The movie industry is not what it used to be. Theaters are filled with 90-minute plays lacking substance. *Titanic* made its debut by presenting a meaningful (and true) story in the tradition of the studios decades past.

Perhaps the public's encouragement will bring finer movies to the big screen soon.

Dave Johnston is a senior mathematics major.

**PERSPECTIVES**

# ACADEMY of discrimination

## Awards ignore minority contributions in film



**AARON  
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night news  
editor

Jesse Jackson where are you now?

Last year, his holiness decried the lack of minority representation in the nomination list of the Academy Awards. Even though Cuba Gooding Jr. took home the Best Supporting Actor trophy that night, headlines were made about the white-washing of Hollywood and Oscar's gold-dipped finish was tarnished with the accusation of racism.

If only the reverend had waited a year, he would really have been able to cry foul.

A glance at this year's nominations proves Hollywood isn't as color blind as it would like to think.

A Klan rally cannot claim to be as ethnically pure as this narrow spectrum of actors ranging in shades as pasty white as Kate Winslet to the bottled tan of Burt Reynolds.

Most notably absent from the list is *Eve's Bayou*, the story of a African-American family in the 1950s. Critics have heaped the praise on this drama. Roger Ebert took time out from his busy schedule of shoving donuts down his throat to make *Eve's Bayou* his pick for favorite movie of the year.

It was the most successful independent release last year. Although not raking in the bucks *Titanic* is seeing, it still is turned a mighty nice profit for a film that was rejected by every major studio, further evidence of Hollywood's narrow-mindedness, before being picked up by Trimark, a studio more known for its flicks about homicidal leprechauns than its dramatic fare.

Oscar handicappers were predicting at least a nomination for best original screenplay, while most were including cast members in the list. However, when rabid movie fans woke up early two months ago to watch the nomination ceremony, the words "Eve's Bayou" were never mentioned.

It is not as if Hollywood forgot to make ethnic film's this year.

How could anyone forget the media blitz behind *Amistad*, directed by the Oscar wunderkind Steven Spielberg.

Even if voters forgot the movie, I'm sure the Oscar's resident African-American choreographer Debbie Allen, who produced *Amistad*, would have been able to drop hints during rehearsals for last night's ceremony.

Ironically enough, the only major nomination the film got was for Anthony Hopkins, an admitted white person.

The nomination should have gone to fellow cast member Djimon Hounsou. His heart-wrenching delivery of the line "Give us free!" left audiences in tears, but the cries fell on the deaf

ears of voters.

Hopkins wasn't the only white nominee from a cast honored by other awards for its black actors.

Relative unknown Robert Forester got a nod for his sleepy portrayal in *Jackie Brown* in a film that had Travolta-like comeback role for Pam Grier. Also of note was Samuel L. Jackson's role in the same movie. Jackson submitted two performances both worthy of Oscars this year only to be snubbed by a voting pool which still includes Nancy Regan.

Wesley Snipe's role in *One Night Stand* won him the acting prize at last year's Venice Film Festival but went absolutely ignored even in the pre-Oscar fanfare.

One film this year can boast a "victory" for African-Americans. *A Little Girls*, a documentary directed by Spike Lee tells a story about the civil rights movement.

However, this film is buried in the Best Feature Documentary category, not an award that generates screams from audiences when the envelope is opened.

African-American's are not the only group being ignored by Oscar. Some critics point to Jennifer Lopez's performance in *Selena* which garnered her a Golden Globe nomination.

Racism is not the only accusation being leveled at Oscar.

Homophobia kept *Chasing Amy* from receiving any nominations as well as preventing Rupert Everett's scene-stealing antics in *My Best Friend's Wedding* from being recognized as a best supporting actor material.

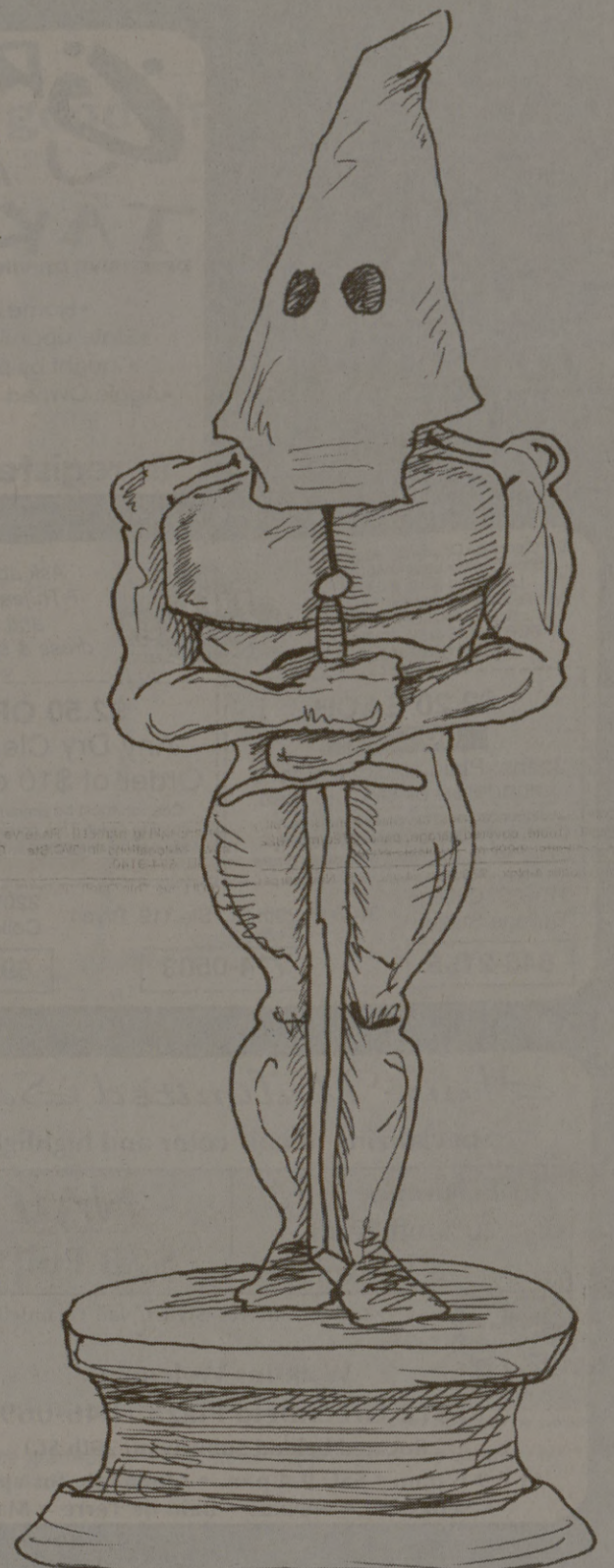
The Oscars of old are gone. Hollywood can no longer pay lip service to their supposed open-minded philosophy. The not-to-distant memory of Whoopi Goldberg's victory and Tom Hank's tearful acceptance speech after winning his first Oscar for his role as a homosexual AIDS victim in *Philadelphia* are the Academy's token offerings to minorities.

After parading John Singleton around the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion as the first African-American director to be nominated, they quietly relegated him to the back of the auditorium along with other visionaries such as Spike Lee and the Hughes brothers.

Recently an explosion of quality films have been about African Americans marketed to African-Americans.

*Eve's Bayou* just marks another in a long string of ignored films and it is time to acknowledge that African-Americans have evolved from the days of Al Jolson in blackface in *The Jazz Singer* and Mammy in *Gone with the Wind*.

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**PERSPECTIVES**

# Elementary school offers chance to honor A&M founder



**DONNY  
FERGUSON**  
columnist

For a state so steeped in tradition and reverence for its Confederate heroes, the fact a significant part of its history was written by freed slaves may seem a bit odd.

All Aggies know of

Lawrence Sullivan Ross' contributions to the University and Texas history books chronicle the work of Governors Mirabeau B. Lamar and Miriam "Ma" Ferguson in founding modern education in Texas.

However, in the flood of Jim Crow laws and anti-carpenter propagandists which followed Reconstruction, a part of our history was lost, and now the Bryan-College Station community has an opportunity to recapture it.

This June, the Bryan Independent School District will begin construction on its sixteenth elementary school, to

be located in the Austin Colony subdivision. The school has yet to be named and BISD is accepting name suggestions of prominent Texans until April 15. While "R.C. Slocum Elementary" and "George Jones Elementary" are terrific ideas which will undoubtedly be submitted, one Texan has gone for over 120 years without due recognition.

BISD has been given a unique opportunity to name their newest school after a local figure, whose dedication to education and perseverance in the face of adversity make him a significant contributor to education, a central figure in the establishment of this community and a badly-needed role model in an age of disillusioned children.

To recognize the achievements of black Texans after the Civil War, and to pay homage for his role in the establishment of public universities in Texas, BISD should name the new Austin Colony School the "Matthew Gaines Elementary School."

Gaines, a minister and former slave, became the first African-American to represent Washington County

in the State Senate. In 1869, thousands of freed slaves elected Republican Edmund J. Davis as governor and sent a Republican-controlled legislature to Austin.

The new chief executive and legislature worked together to establish a public university system in Texas under the federal Land Grant College Act (Morrill Act), sponsored by Congressman John Smith Morrill, a Republican from Vermont.

Gaines and his black colleagues in Austin introduced a bill in 1871 to establish the "A. and M. College of Texas" which provided for a black college as well, if state officials chose to segregate blacks and whites.

Democrats in the legislature viewed educating blacks as both a waste of taxpayer money and a loss of good field hands. It was through hard work, over the opposition of white supremacists and Democrats, that Gaines and the 12th Legislature created what are today known as Texas A&M University and Prairie View A&M.

We students and the Bryan-College

Station community as a whole are the heirs of Gaines' dedication to education. Had it not been for the passionate support of Matthew Gaines, the A&M system would never have been created. College Station would not exist and Bryan would be nothing more than a few houses and bluebonnets alongside a railroad track.

Clearly, Gaines and his black colleagues deserve recognition and grateful thanks from our community, and nothing would serve as a more fitting monument to his belief in the power of education than an elementary school bearing his name.

Campus organizations such as the College Republicans have worked to erect a statue honoring Gaines on campus, but the \$200,000 price tag proves troublesome.

An elementary school in his name requires no additional costs, however. The Matthew Gaines Elementary School would not only honor the achievements and work of Gaines, but it would also honor the memory of other prominent black Texans in the 12th Legislature who

fought for the passage of the A&M creation bill, despite the resistance of white racists and Reconstruction Democrats opposed to public education.

We at A&M and in the Bryan-College Station area owe the existence of this school and community to a former slave who fought for the Texas A&M University system on the floor of the Texas State Senate, in an era in which black lawmakers and public education were often met with harsh resistance. The least we should do to show our gratitude to a man who overcame incredible odds to give the gift of education is to grace his name upon our newest school.

Hopefully, in a time where racial tensions are high and role models are hard to come by, especially among minorities, children filing into the Matthew Gaines Elementary School will be inspired by his story and someday impact the history of our great state, just as Matthew Gaines did.

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