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Sex and profanity stain movie based on educated black women

By James E. Alsbrook
SPECIAL TO THE POST

If the biggest and best daily newspapers are correct, hundreds of thousands of black women individually and collectively are seeing and enjoying the movie "Waiting to Exhale." These four women, in figurative terms, are holding their breath while waiting and looking for "Mr. Right" to appear, sweep them off their feet and leave them breathless. Then, and only then, will they really "exhale."

This movie is unusual because it was directed by a black actor, Forest Whitaker, and is the first movie ever to focus on middle-class black women. None is a cook, maid or servant as were portrayed by Butterfly McQueen and Louise Beavers, and none is a handkerchief-head as was Aunt Jemima. They are educated and are of the sorority-sister type. The movie was adapted from a very popular novel of the same name by the black fiction writer, Terry McMillan. The four sophisticated ladies in the leading roles are all talented -- Whitney Houston, Angela Bassett, Lela Rochon and Loretta Devine.

Reports from various cities provide the following black female reaction to this movie:

- In Houston, one black woman thought "Waiting to Exhale" was so important that she bought the entire house of 300 seats to entertain her friends and clubs.

- In at least two cities, black women said "Waiting To Exhale" was as important to them as the Million Man March on Washington was to black men.

- Some white women said the issues raised in this movie are so broad that they "transcend the experiences of race and class."

- In Columbus, Ohio, black women said the movie redefines the meaning of black womanhood, presents new public images of black women and gives new meaning to their missions in life and to their roles in society.

- One said on television that women of various races -- African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, European and others -- take "Waiting to Exhale" very seriously because all women of all races have variations of the same problems with men.

- Some women in California said the movie was the best ever shown about black women because it presented them as self-reliant, creative and prosperous authority figures with good taste and brains.

- Several women in different cities compared this movie with "The Cosby Show" that ran from 1984 to 1992 and "broke new ground" in truthfully showing middle-class black people. Millions of white people had an Amos 'n' Andy image of black people because they had been deceived by black stereotypes tailor-made to placate whites handicapped by a "sick" need to enjoy feeling superior to African Americans.

This writer saw the movie at the River Valley Mall in Lancaster, Ohio, an area wherein blacks constitute only 2 or 3 percent of the population. White women in the audience commented to one another sometimes across several seats when they saw familiar experiences in scenes depicting exploitation of women by an insensitive or unscrupulous man.

In several scenes this movie presented profane language and questionable sexual behavior that bordered on obscenity. Then I knew why the movie was categorized as "restricted" or "not suitable for family viewing."

Four-letter words are spewed from the mouths of the leading women frequently and loudly, and temper tantrums loom ominously nearby. The F-word and the S-word shocked some female and male viewers. This vile profanity really degrades the supposedly educated and cultured black woman. These "dirty" words detracted from the enjoyment of some, disrupting the mother-daughter and father-son rapport and companionship of some in the audience.

The best thing about this movie is that it projects a new image of the black woman, taking her from the kitchen help category and showing her as an educated, sophisticated living-room hostess. The worst thing is that its sex, profanity and man-bashing subtract and detract from its good assets.

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Loretta Devine as Gloria, Whitney Houston as Savannah, Angela Bassett as Bernadine and Lela Rochon as Robin portray four women who journey through husbands, lovers, and makeovers in "Waiting To Exhale."

Four unpopular columns in one

D.G. Martin



I have four columns in mind to write during the upcoming weeks.

You will probably disagree with me about all of them. And since I don't relish the idea of having you angry with me each week for the next month, I think I will give them to you all at once. Here they are -- four unpopular columns in one.

1. Quality of presidential candidates.

I am hearing about it more and more. "Why can't we have a better choice." Or, "I think I will just stay away from the polls this year. None of the candidates suit me." Sometimes it is worse. It is amazing what strong language a discussion of the presidential candidates can provoke.



Clinton

presidential candidates can provoke.

I say let's be thankful for what we have got. If Clinton and Dole are the major party nominees, we will have a choice between two strong, experienced, pragmatic, moderate people who are right out the mainstream American experience.

Maybe their political wheeling and dealing turns you off. But I want our presidents to have the skills and energy to make things work.

Hold your nose if you want to. I'll say a prayer of thanks.

2. Budget debate -- partial government shutdown.

Most people are still complaining about the partial government shutdown that resulted from the inability of the congressional majorities to reach a speedy agreement with the president about this year's budget.

I say that this crisis has been good for us. All of us want a balanced budget. But we also want to keep many core government programs

and we want our taxes lowered. We have tried to have it all ways. And then blame the politicians for the mess we are in.

The budget crisis has put the ultimate responsibility where it belongs -- with us.

3. Bosnia

"We shouldn't be there." "We shouldn't sacrifice a single American for that region's peace."

I hear opposition to our use of troops in Bosnia at every corner. It is good to be skeptical about sending American troops to somebody else's country. A healthy "show me" attitude is the right starting place for such proposals.

But I believe that bringing a time of peace -- even an imperfect peace -- to that region of Europe is so important to our long term security that it is worth the risk Americans are taking. And I have high hopes for their success.

4. Recalling elected officials.

Some of my neighbors in a nearby town have been busy collecting signatures as a part of an effort to put a newly elected councilman out of office. He was charged with

"impaired driving" a few days after the election.

Chasing public officials -- from the president to town councilmen -- out of office early is becoming our most popular pastime.

I say let's ease up on our elected officials and let them serve out their terms -- absent misconduct in office -- or crimes that send them to jail. Here are a few of my reasons:

We will treat elections even less seriously if we think we can easily remove elected officials whenever they don't suit us.

The more we require our elected officials to fight efforts to remove them from office, the more we take away the time they should be working in the offices to which they were elected.

And, the more we go after those in office, the harder it is to recruit sane, well-meaning people to run in the next election to replace them.

Now, aren't you glad I got those four columns out of my system at once. Next time, I will write something that you agree with. I promise.

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THIS GROUP REPRESENTS:

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Can't afford to lose drum majors for justice

Bernice P. Jackson



Our values are misplaced. You hear about the deaths of old sports and entertainment figures who have abused their bodies, but those people who have devoted their lives to justice so that the lives of others might be better get no lines in the newspapers or time on the television.

The world was a better place because Dr. Jean Sindab was in it and some 800 people came to Riverside Church in New York in the middle of a snowstorm to testify to her life of commitment to poor people, to oppressed people, to young people. Young people came, native Americans came, environmental justice advocates came, Southern Africans came and many of her friends and colleagues came to pay tribute to this gentle woman with an uncompromising spirit.

Dr. Jean Sindab was an Africanist, whose love for Mother Africa was central to her own identity. Through her

work at the World Council of Churches, she was able to work for the liberation of black people throughout Southern Africa and for the eradication of racism the world over.

Through her more recent work at the National Council of Churches, Dr. Sindab became a leading voice in the environmental justice movement. She helped black churches to understand the impact of environmental racism on the lives of their communities and she clearly understood the link between living in degraded physical environments, mass alienation and destructive violence.

Jean Sindab was also a vocal supporter of our youth and one deeply concerned about the violence which threatens to engulf them. She put together a program called "Things that Make for Peace" and was an active participant in the Kansas City gang summit.

Jean Sindab died at 51 of breast cancer. Another warrior for justice felled during what should have been the prime of her life. Another frontline casualty in the war against racial, social and eco-

nomic injustice.

We seldom talk about the price one pays for being on the frontlines in the battles. We seldom talk about the early deaths, the nervous breakdowns, the health problems of facing into the winds of injustice and power. But they are clearly there and we as a community need to acknowledge them. And then we need to do something about them.

We need to take better care of our leaders. We need to embrace them, to support them, to demand that they take care of themselves physically, mentally and spiritually. We need to encourage our leaders to stop smoking and to find time for exercise in the madness of the world. We need to make sure that our men on the frontlines watch their blood pressure and their diets and have prostate cancer tests. We need to make sure that our women on the frontlines have mammograms.

It seems that I've lost a lot of folks I respect and love to cancer.

Indeed, African Americans have the highest overall age-adjusted cancer incidence and mortality rate of any group in the U.S. Black

women are more likely than white women to die from breast cancer and black men are more likely to die from prostate cancer, for instance.

Cancer, I am told, is a relationship between a host and an invader. There are a number of factors which impact how your body reacts to that invader and clearly heredity, environment, social and nutritional factors all take a part to play in cancer. So do racism and stress.

Being a drum major for justice is full of stress. It means being sensitive to the plight of those who are oppressed. It means speaking difficult words to power. It means putting your life on the line, sometimes in not-so-obvious ways.

Tell someone you respect, someone who is on the frontlines for justice that you care. Make sure they take care of themselves. We can't afford to lose many more Jean Sindabs. We can't afford to lose many more drum majors for justice.

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