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SPRING 2010

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### SAVE YOUR PRECIOUS TIME AND MONEY, DON'T SEE "PRECIOUS"

by Hariette Surovell

Louis Farrakhan is an evil sociopathic anti-Semite who was responsible for the murder of Malcolm X, but he was right-on about one thing—the Jews who ran Hollywood were racists. The celluloid presence of shiftless, stupid, lazy, greedy, sassy Blacks, featured exclusively as maids and butlers tainted major studio releases from the '30's to the 50's, rendering heartwarming family fare, cutting-edge comedy classics and edgy film noir expeditions into psychic cringe fests. What exactly was the purpose of including Black actors if only to cast them as bobby-eyed cooks and butlers unable to follow the simplest commands, who frequently fell down (since they were also incapable of learning how to walk properly), and bug-eyed, big-bottomed maids who either sassed their employees, broke or stole things, or relayed misinformation? Their presence was usually irrelevant to the plot, yet always successful in interfering with cinematic suspension of disbelief. As soon as I became swept up in emotion, I began obsessing about why Louis B. Mayer, Harry Cohn, Jack Warner, et al, found it necessary to demean and ridicule Black people. These studio-owners were always kvetching about being deemed unfit to join the no-Jews-allowed Los Angeles Country Club, forcing them to create the Hillcrest, just one of many humiliations these multi-millionaires endured. Shouldn't they have understood prejudice on a personal level?

What a difference the decades make! Now, not only are Black people directing and producing movies filled with vile racist stereotypes, but they also fill them with good, kindly, benevolent Jews, whom they cast as the saviors of the bad, bad Black people. Consider the cynically-crafted "Precious: Based on the Novel Push (sic) by Sapphire". Executive-produced by Oprah Winfrey, who never met a high-profile incest abuse project she didn't embrace, and produced by Tyler Perry, (best known for his drag queen/fat suit incarnation of a crazy Black grandmother, "Madea"), it was directed, so to speak, by Lee Daniels, a gay Black man who claims to have suffered abuse from his bio-family. The novel "Push" was written by a gay woman, Sapphire (a reference to Sappho?). The double entendre implicit in Jones' title is that Precious, the book's main character, must push against the barriers of her life and forward into a meaningful existence, and she must literally push out the two babies to whom she gives birth. As a work of cinema, "Precious" functions as a means to an entirely different end...awards, kudos and advertisements about future projects for Oprah and her producing partners. Why else would this movie focus on evil ghetto-dwellers who perpetrate unspeakable atrocities on each other, yet who are ultimately saved by empathic Jews who have the power to "heal" and the incentive and access to help?

"Precious" is nothing more than an obvious ploy on the part of media whiz Oprah Winfrey to nab the movie, and it's cast of non-actor actors, multiple nominations. It is an overt bid to get consideration from the predominantly Jewish members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS.) This is why "Precious" opens with a screen imprinted with words of wisdom not from the works of Toni Morrison, Harriet Tubman, Franz Fanon, W.E. B. Du Bois or the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. but The Talmud:

Every blade of grass has its Angel

that bends over it and whispers,

"Grow, grow."

The Talmud

For anyone lucky enough not to have already seen it: "Precious" is the nickname for the ebonically-spelled Claireece Jones, played by a former unknown, Gabourey Sidibe. My favorite review of her performance comes from the website allvoices.com: "I was also very impressed by newcomer Gabourey Sidibe whose flat affect conveys a child severely abused." In other words, her non-acting constitutes acting. This kind of nonsensical doublespeak characterizes every aspect of the movie.

Precious is a morbidly obese (pushing 400 lbs.?) Black girl who lives in 1987 Harlem with her emotionally, physically and sexually abusive mother, Mary and, (in flashbacks), her sexually abusive father. She is pregnant with her second child, with the baby daddy being...her daddy! We see Precious' father zestfully raping her, in plain sight of Mary, and when Precious cries out, he covers her mouth with his hand. Mary is played by the comedian Mo'Nique, who is also obese, although not in Sidibe's league. She is almost always seen supine, disrobed and wigless on a couch. Mary demands



Terry McMillan & Tennessee Reed



"For All We Know", is dedicated to the young people who entered the armed forces in order to further their education.



many things of her only child: that she clean, shop and cook for her, that she depilate pig's-feet before deep-frying them, that she venture out 24/7 and buy her cigarettes, and that she perform oral sex on her (all these activities having the same, pun intended, emotional weight.) When Precious is slow to act on a command, her mother hurls ashtrays and skillets at her head or pours pots of water on her, calling her, " Little Piggy Cunt", "Lying Whore", "Fat Little Slut", "Stupid Mouth Bitch", and, most offensive of all..."Crafty Scorpio!"

Precious eventually relates the details of her first childbirth experience to a social worker. She lay down not in a hospital bed, or in any bed whatsoever, but on her own kitchen floor, with her mother kicking her "upside her head" throughout the ordeal. Yet she suffered no physical injuries from this combined home birth/physical assault, and is experiencing a second healthy pregnancy. Her first child, a girl with Down Syndrome (or, as Precious informs someone, " Sinder"-- an arbitrary and completely false note--why would she not know the word "syndrome?") is cared for by Precious' grandmother, a thin, passive but angry lady who brings the baby over on the days when a moronic Black caseworker comes to check in on the "family." This city official has been successfully scammed into believing that the baby lives there, so that Mary can collect its AFDC check. Despite a total absence of any children's toys, furniture, clothes or chachkas in the apartment, this ruse has worked effectively for two years (although one wonders how the grandmother is able to financially support the child, since Mary appropriates the check money.) When the social worker leaves, and Mary throws the baby off her lap and onto the floor in disgust, Grandma merely shakes her head in puzzlement, as she does when observing all of her daughter's sadistic rages and torrential temper tantrums. We never learn why Mary has become a monster. Or why her own disapproving mother remains so passive in her presence.

Baby # 1 is named Mongo, a fact I found disturbing, mostly because of its implications about the mental capacity of legendary jazz musician Mongo Santamaria. His cover of Herbie Hancock's "Watermelon Man" was played constantly on the radio during my childhood, so I'm sentimental about him. Precious' daughter Mongo is a light-skinned, almost white child, which is puzzling, since both Precious and her father are dark-skinned--one of the many genetic anomalies presented in "Precious."

The apartment Precious and Mary inhabit is a huge duplex with a long staircase separating each level. Where, one wonders, can such an apartment be found in Harlem? I sure would love to live there when Mary gets evicted! It's not in a housing project, it's located in a place called Movie Fantasyland. Could Lee Daniels be a Woody Allen devotee? Allen houses his characters in Park Avenue triplexes, Daniels invents Harlem duplexes.

The apartment is appropriately dingy, and yet, in it there resides the Jones' family's heart and soul, the center of its hopes and dreams, the repository of all intellectual life ...a large television set, usually tuned to a game show. Also sharing this apartment with Precious and Mary are two cats, Mary's pets. As I watched, I kept asking my friend, "Why would this woman have pets?" The answer is that she wouldn't, unless their presence is a visual reinforcement of the fact that there is pussy in this household, a fact hard to forget. Not only is Precious pregnant, but there is an explicit scene of Mary masturbating, then ordering her daughter to get her off ("Come take care of Mommy!" she demands.)

Despite being so illiterate that she is unable to read a sentence from a children's book, Precious is a "ninfe"-grader, who is "good with numbers" (except, apparently, the number "nine.") How do we know this? Because she herself informs us, in an epic Ebonic-al external monologue that opens the movie and only ends as the final credits roll. All the other students in Precious' math class are not only svelte, they are fashionable and attractive...and yet, in this part of Harlem, customers routinely purchase 10-piece fried chicken dinners with potato salad at greasy take-out joints.

Isn't there anyone as unattractive as Precious out there? Not even one other overweight person in Harlem, other than Mary? In 2001, a study showed that 33% of all African-American children in the U.S. are morbidly obese. Are they all living outside of Lee Daniels' version of Harlem? If so, then where are they?

The plot kicks into high gear when Mrs. Lichtenstein, the school's Jewish principal, summons Precious to her office to point out that Precious is apparently pregnant with her second child. The audience is confused...however could she tell? The house-sized Precious could do damage to an NFL linebacker. Precious is unresponsive, and becomes enraged when the principal suggests a parent-teacher conference. When Mrs. Lichtenstein threatens to suspend her, Precious lunges from her chair and reaches over the desk. Mrs. Lichtenstein vaults backwards in terror and tumbles to the floor, calling, "Security! Security!" Her cries are still audible as Precious leaves the building.

We hear Precious' thought process, such as it is. Not, "Oh no, I'm in real trouble now, I tried to attack the principal and she called the guards on me" but:

"Nosy

ass white bitch mad `cause

she can't come over my house.

I don't be coming to this

bitch's house in Weschesser."

I didn't buy it. First of all, why would she think she would be entitled to visit the principal in her home under any circumstances? Secondly, how would she ascertain that Mrs. Lichtenstein lives in "Weschesser"? Precious doesn't know the word "syndrome", even though she is the mother to a Down Syndrome child. It's all illogical, arbitrary writing, i.e., bad writing. Precious' knowledge of

"Weschesser" was as bogus a detail as was a group of little boys, presumably as uneducated as Precious, calling her "Orca", and not "whale."

And yet, despite Precious' violent outburst towards Mrs. Lichtenstein, the two of them experience miraculous simultaneous changes of heart just a few hours later! The cause of Mrs. Lichtenstein's complete 180--a teacher has confirmed that Precious is, indeed, good at "maffs." This so impresses Mrs. Lichtenstein that she becomes filled with hope for Precious. She is determined to change her life, and so, without being accompanied by the aforementioned security guards, she braves the mean streets of Harlem at night, standing alone in the dark mean streets in front of Precious' building. One would think she'd get robbed, or at the least, hassled, but by bumming a cigarette off a passerby, she shows these Harlem residents that she is not just cool, she's practically a sista! Her intention? Like all public school principals who exist exclusively in the imagination of filmmakers, she's making a nocturnal Harlem house-call to tell Precious, albeit over their apartment intercom system, to check out an alternative school. Precious doesn't know what the word "alternative" means (why not?), and Mary wants her to stay home and collect Welfare, but Precious is nonetheless inspired to go. We're not quite sure why she is so determined to take advice from a principal whose lily-white ass she so recently wanted to kick. The confusion mounts when about ten minutes of screen time is devoted to Precious making numerous attempts to discover the meaning of the word "alternative" (an office worker finally fills her in.) Why did she want to go there so badly if she didn't even know what it was?

The alternative school, "Reach One, Teach One" seems to exist in an alternate reality. It's 1987, yet Precious passes a bodega advertizing Metrocards, which debuted in 1993. A certificate is displayed in a teacher's office signed by "President of the United States, Bill Clinton." The school employee who finally explained "alternative" has a computer displaying graphical capabilities not yet invented. Despite Precious allegedly being "good with numbers", she takes the subway to the 167th Street stop, located in the Bronx, to reach her destination of 125th Street, Manhattan, Harlem. As she runs for her train, kids sing Queen Latifah's "Come Into My House", a song released in 1989. Still, maybe it's a good thing that she has transferred to this school, since the teacher in her former school has written the word "Requirments" (sic) on the blackboard.

Precious finally reaches her classroom (albeit having gotten off the subway in another borough...) only to discover that the all-girl students are all beautiful, thin and stylin'. Why can't Precious find a peer? Even just someone moderately overweight? Precious' new teacher is a pretty, extremely light-skinned black woman with straightened hair in her 30's, who could impersonate a well-tanned white woman. Her name is Blu Rain, spelled just like that (but spelled "Blue" in the book) as in, as in, as in well, Blu-Ray discs! Is this barely-subliminal advertising? I wonder what percentage of Blu-Ray sales of this movie Oprah negotiated.

Ms. Rain asks everyone to tell their favorite color. A girl named Joanne says that hers is "fluorescent beige", a color which could only exist in an alternative reality school. Then Ms. Rain asks the class to write the letters of the alphabet on the board. The action ends when someone is stumped by "E". We discover that Precious is equally unfamiliar with the letters of the alphabet.

Despite the fact that most of the students are equally as illiterate, with Precious thinking that the word "at" is actually "ate" (she's not 400 lbs. because she starves herself), Ms. Rain informs them that they will be writing in their journals on a daily basis. Just as The Bard explored the concept of a play within a play, so "Precious" pretends that its subtext is the omniscient power of writing.

When Precious goes home, her mother insists that she stop attending this alternative school so that she can get Welfare, her main concern being affording her cigarettes. For Mary, Welfare is the one true way of life and should be every Black person's destiny. The next morning, Precious meets with her very own Welfare caseworker. This is no dumb Black lady! Since Precious' life is on an upswing, she has earned herself a Jew, Mrs. Weiss! An ostensible Jew, played by an oddly miscast oddly Hispanic-looking Mariah Carey, who phones in a performance with all the vitality, energy and natural acting ability she displayed in "Glitter." Mrs. Weiss asks Precious the identity of her children's father.

"My daddy," Precious replies. "He give me this baby comin and my other one before. Thas all I know. Don't see him."

Mrs. Weiss looks startled (as startled as Mariah Carey playing a social worker, or, well, playing anybody, can look), but does nothing. She doesn't make an effort to locate Precious' father, nor does she talk to the police or the district attorney's office about getting a warrant out for his arrest, because in Movieland Harlem, fathers can impregnate their daughters repeatedly without legal consequences.

Next we see Precious in the hospital, where she has given birth to a healthy baby boy. No birth defects, no "down sinder" for little Abdul, even though the baby was deprived of nutrition, pre-natal care, and was fathered by its grandfather.

We learn from the voice-over that a social worker (it's unclear whether by this she means Mrs. Weiss or a hospital social worker) is encouraging Precious to give up both Abdul and Mongo. Her grandmother informs Precious that "only a dog will drop its baby and walk off." Wow, what a guilt-trip! That one was worthy of the stereotyped Jewish mothers invented by Hollywood scriptwriters. Not only does this grandmother enable Mary to defraud and deceive the government, and enforces a strict non-intervention policy about Precious' being physically, emotionally and sexually-abused, but she suffers from a bizarre species confusion. Dogs are, in fact, extremely devoted and protective mothers. It's the human bitches who neglect and abuse their offspring. Then again, who can blame Granny? Not one character in this celluloid fantasy-fest resembles an actual human being.

Only a few months have elapsed since Precious entered Ms. Rain's classroom, unable to read a sentence from a first-grade primer, but now, she is magically writing regular journal entries, filling

entire pages with sentences and paragraphs! Ms. Rain is surely the most brilliant teacher in the entire history of education! Whatever her secret is, she needs to patent it! Precious has become so super-literate that she is asked to explain what Ms. Rain means when she discusses "a protagonist's unrelenting circumstances."

Ms. Rain addresses granny's guilt-trip in her notes to Precious:

"Dear Precious, You are not a dog. " (Whew! Whatta relief. I was worried for a while...) "You are a wonderful young woman who is trying to make something of her life.

I have some questions for

you. 1. Where was your grandmother

when your father was abusing you?

2. Where is Little Mongo now?"

I had some thoughts about this, too. I wondered, 'One, where has Ms. Rain been throughout all this?' and 'Two, why is Ms. Rain deliberately disobeying the New York City law mandating that teachers report suspected child abuse cases to the authorities?'

Eventually, Precious must leave the hospital, so she returns to her home, carrying Abdul. Mary greets her by screaming "Bitch!" Then she hurls a vase at daughter and grandson, followed by a plant (why would she have a plant? A plant, a pet...why, oh, why?). Next, she stands above Precious and hits her directly with the plant so that Precious is covered with dirt. This is the second time Daniels has attempted to employ symbolism. Quel auteur, he's a true maverick! When we first saw Precious being raped by her father, Daniels then cut to a visual of meat sizzling in a frying pan (she's a piece of meat, she's treated like dirt, get it?) Then, her fury only increasing, Mary attempts to "ram Precious and Abdul like a bull." This is taken verbatim from the shooting script. Rams, bulls, pigs, cats, dogs... either Daniels is obsessed with astrology (Eastern and Western), or he associates Black people with animals.

In her effort to escape, Precious overturns the television set and runs down the stairs to the lobby. Mary then throws the set down the steps, where it threatens the lives of Precious and Abdul! Is this (hopefully) meant to be a commentary about the evils of television, how it has killed Mary's desire to live and to be a part of the world, and almost ensnared Precious in its evil grip? Actually, no! Because soon afterwards, Precious ends up in Ms. Rain's apartment, where they all sit together and...watch television! Ms. Rain lives with her "wife", Katherine, who is also a light-skinned black woman. They insist to Precious that they are indeed married, despite the fact that gay marriage has yet to become legal in NYC in 2010.

And then comes an insidious barrage of advertising by the movie's producers, Winfrey and Perry. Plastered on the wall of Ms. Rain's home is a colorful, eye-catching poster for the 1975 play, "For Colored Girls Who have Committed Suicide, When the Rainbow is Enough," by Ntozake Shange. Producer Tyler Perry is currently in pre-production to make a movie of that play—it will be shown in theatres in 2011. Why not just paste an ad for the upcoming movie on the wall? Then executive producer Oprah gets plugged. Watching Ms. Rain dance with Katherine, Precious sorts through her confusion. "Are homos really (as she has always been taught) bad people?" she wonders. There is no reason for the teacher to be gay. It's irrelevant to the plot and adds nothing. It is, however, essential to leading Precious to contemplate the single most important question of the film: If 'Ms. Rain be a homo, and she nice' then, what's the truth about Oprah, whom Mary also dissed? Employing the single most creative product-placement technique in the cinema history, Precious muses, "I wonder what Oprah have to say about that?" And then she asks, "Y'all watch Oprah?"

Ms. Rain gives her a loving smile and extols Oprah's virtues. So convincing is she that when Precious moves into a halfway house, she decorates it with...a postcard of Oprah!

Readers, Oprah executive-produced this movie! This is the ultimate in cinematic chutzpah!

Precious, can you spell "conflict-of-interest" yet?

Well, I could go on and on, as the movie did, citing, for instance, Precious telling us, "I find out Mayor's office give me Literacy Award and check for progress!" which should make all viewers very nervous about what the criteria for winning was.

Or I could talk about how Precious moves to a halfway house, where Mary visits to inform her that her father has died from AIDS, but that she herself is HIV-negative because the sex she had with him was "not like faggots, in the ass and all." This news motivates Precious to get tested (naturally, she's positive), because although she gave birth to a child of incest in a city hospital, they never tested either her or her child (who is, unlike Precious, miraculously AIDS-free, yet another genetic anomaly.)

Or, I could tell you about how Precious attends an "Insect Survivor's Meeting." She may have won a mayoral literacy award, and she knows what a "protagonist" is, and her life itself may be the very essence of "unrelenting circumstances" but somehow she never learned the term for the act which has defined her existence.

Or, I could go into detail about Precious' final visit with Mrs. Weiss, a session also attended by Mary, and the, no pun intended, climax of the movie.

But then, I might be accused of leaking spoilers!

I did, however, wonder whether Precious had plans to re-christen "Mango." I asked my friend, "What should she name her?"

My friend thought briefly, and replied, "Mango?"

When Oscar time comes, and the screeners are sent out to the members of AMPAS, I expect them to come in an envelope inscribed, "Shalom uv'racha leYisrael!"

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