

# THE OSCARS'

## Battle for Relevance



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On Feb. 22, The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced that this year's Oscars would not be airing eight of its 23 categories. These categories are documentary short, film editing, makeup and hairstyling, original score, production design, animated short, live-action short and sound. This news was met with backlash from film lovers and filmmakers alike. Isaac Fieldberg, a pop culture critic who has contributed to Vulture, Fortune, Entertainment Weekly and the Boston Globe responded to this news on Twitter, writing, "any award ceremony that can't find time to present categories this integral to filmmaking cannot seriously claim to honor the craft of cinema." Steven Spielberg even weighed in for Vanity Fair, saying "I feel very strongly that this is perhaps the most collaborative medium in the world. All of us make movies together, we become a family where one craft is as indispensable as the next...And that means for me, we should all have a seat at the supper table together live at five."

This Oscars controversy is only one of many in recent years. Every year there seems to be a lot of criticism regarding how many marginalized communities are represented among the winners and the nominees. Following the 2015 Oscars, #OscarsSoWhite began trending on Twitter due to the nominees and winners that year being almost exclusively

white. The backlash in 2015 was so bad that the Academy implemented new diversity initiatives to combat the idea the Oscars were for the white Hollywood elite. They were embroiled in controversy once again in 2019 when the film "Green Book" won Best Picture. This was particularly controversial because "Green Book" was a white savior film that won Best Picture that year over films like "Black Panther" and "BlacKkKlansman."

It should come as no surprise that the Oscars' ratings continue to wane every year, and it seems like most attempts to keep the Oscars interesting or relevant continue to fail. This has caused many people in recent years, particularly those who are most interested in film, to begin questioning who the Oscars are actually for and what purpose they're actually serving.

So, who are the Academy voters? In 2012, 94% of Oscar voters were white and 77% were male. According to The Conversation, in 2018, 900 invitations were sent out as part of a diversity initiative to diversify the Oscar voters. Of the people invited, 49% were women and 38% were people of color. These were, of course, just invitations. This does not mean that everyone who was invited actually accepted and statistics on the current Academy are not transparent.

What purpose do the Oscars serve? According to the Washington Post, the Oscars are meant for peer recognition, to boost the profiles of people working in the industry, and to sell tickets so that moviemakers and movie studios can make more money. According to

the Academy's website, the Oscars are geared toward the entertainment community and film lovers internationally, so that people can come together and appreciate the accomplishments of filmmakers every year.

However, for an award show that claims to be by and for filmmakers and film lovers, they seem to alienate a lot of people in these groups. Variety reported in February 2022 that there have been discussions among Hollywood music guilds to ask the best score nominees, which includes people like Hans Zimmer ("Dune") and Jonny Greenwood ("Spencer," "Licorice Pizza"), to boycott. Many Twitter users have proclaimed that they will not be watching the Oscars broadcast because they see the Academy's decision as an insult to the art of filmmaking.

The next decade is going to be very important for the Oscars. With issues over nominees and voters, to issues with hosts, to issues with waning viewership, the Oscars are going to have to prove they are still relevant in today's society or risk falling into complete irrelevance. This is not to say that the Oscars need to become a contest for what is most popular with the public, because that is what the People's Choice Awards are for; it should not turn into an award show that gives incredibly famous people awards for being incredibly famous. However, the Academy could benefit from listening to younger generations and more of a variety of film lovers and filmmakers. There is a reason that certain films, usually biopics ("Bohemian Rhapsody," "Ghandi," "12 Years A Slave") or serious 20th century period pieces ("Atonement," "If Beale Street Could Talk," "First Man") get labeled "Oscar bait." The Academy has a formula that it prefers which means that lots of creative and innovative films get overlooked.

Even when films do get nominated for Oscars, they are still undermined. Just this

year at the 2022 Oscars, the writers wrote a joke for the presenters of the Oscar for Best Animated Picture that did not go over well with many viewers. After a spiel about the importance of animated films in childhood, the presenters went on to say that "animation is for kids to enjoy and adults to endure." This felt particularly disrespectful because one of the films nominated, "Flee," was an animated film about a gay man's experience as a child refugee from Afghanistan, which was geared towards adults. Even when films are nominated, they are still disrespected by the people who nominated them.

Despite many recent controversies, there have been a few silver linings. Jordan Peele's Best Screenplay win for "Get Out," Bong Joon-Ho's Best Picture win for "Parasite," Chloe Zhao's Best Picture win for "Nomadland" and Sian Heder's win for "CODA" are bright spots within overall disappointing Oscar Awards. If the Academy wants the Oscars to stay relevant, they will have to ask themselves whether they want the previously mentioned wins to be a moment or a movement.

