

## Thinkers' Corner – The Oscars

By [Monica Saiz-Miranda](#)

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Image: York Student Think Tank

The excitement in the run-up to the 88th Academy Awards has been somewhat muted following the acknowledgement of an elephant in the room. A large, all-white elephant. On and after the 14th January, the day of the annual 'big reveal' of award shortlists, many prominent figures in the film industry voiced their angered disillusionment at the distinct absence of any ethnic minority nominees.

With it being the second consecutive year this has occurred, the question of who gets nominated and why has brought the topic of racial diversity to the forefront of discussions surrounding the Oscars. Critically-acclaimed blockbusters such as "Straight Outta Compton", "Beasts of No Nation", "Creed" and "Concussion" have been snubbed for prestigious categories such as Best Actor, possibly indicating an institutionalised discrimination against non-white narratives, film-makers and actors.

The controversy was attended to in a statement on the 18th January made by the president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Cheryl Boone Isaacs, stating: "I am both heartbroken and frustrated about the lack of inclusion [...] The Academy is taking dramatic steps to alter the makeup of our membership."

This does not necessarily mean that films such as "The Revenant" and "Mad Max: Fury Road" are undeserving of accolades, but are these releases participating on a level playing field? Should we be surprised by the current outrage? Hasn't the Academy always been a predominantly male-governed, white, elitist institute at the centre of interminable criticism and controversy? The answers to these questions are by no means black and white, however they should not be avoided due to the harsh truths they may reveal.

Among those who have chosen to publicly boycott the Academy Awards ceremony are Spike Lee, Jada Pinkett-Smith and Will Smith, with actors such as Mark Ruffalo, David Oyelowo and Lupita Nyong'o (to name a few) speaking out against the problem, but still choosing to attend. However some actors, such as Charlotte Rampling and Sir Michael Caine, have countered this approach by asserting that it is the calibre

of acting that excludes potential candidates rather than racial or cultural agenda.

Perhaps we should take heed of Ice Cube's approach: "I'm not pissed. You know, I'm not surprised... It's the Oscars, they do what they do" continuing to say that given "Straight Outta Compton"'s box office performance, he "can't be mad". Though a relatively neutral and unprovocative comment compared to those of his film-making contemporaries, the Oscars "doing what they do" is unfortunately euphemistic of the Weinstein-monopolised\*, exclusive academy, occasionally awarding obscure films which are not even released in mainstream cinema screens.

"But so many other films have been snubbed regardless of race?" I hear you cry, along with: "Black actors aren't the only ones who are hard done by in the film industry!" This cannot be denied, with George Clooney stating that as well as black actors lacking opportunities for recognition, "for Hispanics it's even worse." These facts do not negate the necessity for discussion to emerge in order to grapple with issues of exclusion and representation of minorities in film. The current climate of boycotting and protesting against one of the largest and oldest film establishments is a sign that diversity needs to be addressed, without solely focusing on race. With the provocative black comedian Chris Rock presenting this year's awards, showbiz colleagues and viewers alike will watch with baited breath hoping for these preoccupations to be confronted through comedy which may have the Academy's committee squirming in their seats.

*\*Harvey Weinstein's releases "Carol" and "The Hateful Eight" have also been snubbed this year for Best Film category in an interesting turn of events*

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