

Academy fails to nominate Fahrenheit 9/11: Hollywood's olive branch to Bush

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The 77th Academy Award nominations, announced Tuesday in Beverly Hills, revealed once again the unseriousness and spinelessness of the majority of Academy voters. Two deeply false films, Martin Scorsese's *The Aviator* and Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby*, received 18 nominations between them, while Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* failed to be nominated in the best picture category. The award ceremony will be held February 27.

None of the 10 nominees in the male acting categories are particularly deserving, at least for these performances, although Johnny Depp (*Neverland*), Leonardo DiCaprio (*The Aviator*), Don Cheadle (*Hotel Rwanda*) and Jamie Foxx (*Ray*) are all talented performers. It is scandalous, frankly, that Liam Neeson, in the commercial film world's best male performance, in *Kinsey*, failed to win recognition.

Among the women, the performances of Catalina Sandino Moreno (in *Maria Full of Grace*), Imelda Staunton (*Vera Drake*), Kate Winslet (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*) and Laura Linney (*Kinsey*) are worthy ones, but the competition for best actress is expected to come down to a contest between Annette Bening in the trivial *Being Julia* and Hilary Swank, a generally fine performer, in the retrograde *Million Dollar Baby*. *I Heart Huckabees* (David O. Russell), including Mark Wahlberg's fine performance, went entirely unrecognized.

Scorsese and Eastwood, along with Taylor Hackford for *Ray*, Alexander Payne for *Sideways* and Mike Leigh for *Vera Drake*, were nominated as best directors. Leigh, with a long history of serious work, is extremely unlikely to win. *Vera Drake*, the story of a goodhearted woman who performs illegal abortions for free in 1950s Britain, was also nominated for best original screenplay.

In a typical unseemly Hollywood compromise, Academy members failed to nominate Mel Gibson's loathsome *The Passion of the Christ* as best picture, but tapped it in three secondary categories—cinematography, makeup and musical score. A piece on *eonline.com* noted six weeks ago that *Passion* “suffers from the ‘Jewish problem’—i.e., the Academy's Jewish members may not take to a film long perceived by some Jewish leaders as anti-Semitic.”

And rightly so! However, the same concern did not apparently prevent many of these same individuals from voting for *The Aviator*, the whitewash of a lifelong anti-Semite, Howard Hughes, who had business dealings with a Nazi collaborator.

The failure to nominate *Fahrenheit 9/11* is particularly noteworthy and revealing. It says so much about the privileged, upper middle-class layers that constitute Hollywood “liberalism.” With about 5,800 members, the film had to win the support of approximately 20 percent of the voters, or 1,160, to land in the top five and win nomination.

Various arguments were presumably mustered by those who decided that Moore's film was not worthy. First, a documentary picture had never been nominated in the best picture category. Nonetheless, this was far by the most serious film eligible for nomination. With all its limitations, *Fahrenheit 9/11* was the only major film produced last year that gave some indication of the mass hostility seething under the surface of bipartisan unity on the “global war on terror” and the criminal invasion of Iraq. It spoke to the terrible American reality as no other film did.

That is an aesthetic as well as a political question. One can only imagine the thinking of many of the Academy voters. They told themselves that they

generally sympathized with the anti-Bush line of the film, but that it lacked “drama,” it was not a “well-crafted” artistic work, etc. This is all simply lying to oneself. The situation of Flint, Michigan’s Lila Lipscomb (treated in *Fahrenheit 9/11*), whose son is killed in Iraq, is more genuinely gripping than all the contrived and frenzied posturing of *The Aviator* and *Million Dollar Baby* combined.

Lack of backbone has a great deal to do with the failure of Moore’s film to be nominated. Right-wing commentators threatened the Hollywood establishment with retribution if they dared to nominate *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Fox News Channel’s resident demagogue, Bill O’Reilly, claimed, “If Hollywood nominates this propaganda tract as Best Picture, you will see a backlash against the movie industry that you have never seen.” That Moore’s documentary won the People’s Choice award, voted on by 21 million people, as most popular film in 2004, did nothing to give Academy voters courage. Hollywood liberals live in terror of the right-wing media.

Reading between the lines of various commentaries, one gets sense of the mentality of the voters. *Fahrenheit 9/11* is described as “polarizing...in these days of supposed ‘healing.’ ” Another article suggested that it would not appear on the Academy ballot because it was “too divisive.” In other words, the defeat of Moore’s film by the Hollywood establishment was essentially an olive branch extended to the Bush administration.



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