

More letters on the Academy Awards

7 March 2005

The following is a selection of letters received by the World Socialist Web Site on David Walsh's article, "77th Academy Awards ceremony—a miserable showing" and the subsequent correspondence, "Letters on the 77th Academy Awards ceremony"

Regarding the letters that accused you of having no "sense of pleasure," I understand one possible reason for these writers' accusation. A cheap shot of low comedy can make one laugh the first time one hears it, but the second time around one has to examine why one found it funny in the first place. The same is true about watching certain movies. One might be swept along at first viewing, but later on, after thinking about it for a while, one starts to notice all the flaws, unless it was truly a good film! Also, perhaps, people cling desperately to their "bread and circuses" because real life offers nothing but hardship and frustration. They need their little escapes and are not best pleased to have them dissected in a critical way. That takes all the escapism out of them. But, just like the drug problem, this desperation to be entertained shows just how unhappy people really are. There are people who don't want to see a film like *Fahrenheit 9/11* because its truths are the very thing they don't want to know. On the other hand, other people who are unhappy with the way the world is going may find the courage to struggle after seeing such a film. People deal with their despair in one of two ways: They either hide from it or they decide to do something practical to change it. And sometimes these two methods alternate in the same person.

That said, I agree completely that the artistic level of the majority of "major" films is abysmally low, that the subject matter and the kinds of people represented are banal when not horrific and violent and revealing a contempt for humanity, and that the inflated wealth and self-importance of many of the Hollywood elite makes it impossible for them to have any knowledge of, let alone any concrete experience of, the real lives and circumstances of the majority of what they like to think of as their audience. But what do they give us to hear? Blather and self-congratulation.

Worse than that, though, is the silence and acquiescence of those few so-called "activist" movie stars when they appear on the awards shows. The likes of Sean Penn, Tim Robbins, Al Pacino and others suddenly behave like good little sheep when the cameras go on at the Oscars. Truly disappointing.

CZ
San Francisco

3 March 2005

Read your review of the Oscars with interest. Your comments were generally on the money—no pun intended!

I have a few bones to pick with your overall tone. Granted Chris Rock wanted to be everything to everyone; not an uncommon malady in this business (I work as a sound editor at Universal). But he did have the guts to say what he did about our dyslexic thug of a president.

And no, Academy members didn't nominate *Fahrenheit 9/11* for best documentary, because of a needless technicality, and the wider membership didn't nominate *9/11* for best picture. Not likely when there is such pre-Oscar buzz for *Aviator* and *Million Dollar Baby*.

It's not always about money, though. Keep in mind, the 20 biggest grossing films in 2004 were barely represented in the list of nominees. The top 20 were:

1. *Shrek 2* (\$436,721,703), 2. *Spider-man 2* (\$373,377,893), 3. *The Passion of the Christ* (\$370,274,604), 4. *The Incredibles* (\$252,680,838), 5. *Harry Potter: Prisoner of Azkaban* (\$249,367,187), 6. *The Day After Tomorrow* (\$186,740,799), 7. *The Bourne Supremacy* (\$176,087,450), 8. *Meet the Fockers* (\$175,799,710), 9. *Shark Tale* (\$160,861,908), 10. *The Polar Express* (\$156,588,129), 11. *National Treasure* (\$156,270,878), 12. *I, Robot* (\$144,801,023), 13. *Troy* (\$133,259,341), 14. *50 First Dates* (\$120,776,832), 15. *Van Helsing* (\$120,073,130), 16. *Fahrenheit 9/11* (\$119,114,517), 17. *Dodgeball* (\$114,326,736), 18. *The Village* (\$114,197,520), 19. *The Grudge* (\$110,175,871) and 20. *Ocean's Twelve* (\$110,001,589)

The nominations are not a purely profit driven exercise. The Academy members nominate films, within their classifications, that they believe have merit. After the nominations are locked in, then the mad money race comes into play.

And for what it's worth, the sixth ranking film for 2004, *The Day After Tomorrow*, was angled as a politically tinged popular entertainment. And the sixteenth was *Fahrenheit 9/11*; an achievement worth noting.

Another issue you chose to short-shrift is the nomination (and selection) of *Motorcycle Diaries* for an Oscar. You might dismiss this as a token acknowledgment, but it does point to a significantly greater presence of other-than-American films being recognized by the so-called Hollywood establishment. This is progress, considering the effect the Oscars still have on popular culture.

Of course money has a less than savory role to play, but please keep in mind many Academy members vote their consciences and take their votes seriously.

JB

Woodland Hills, California

2 March 2005

I love reading the letters you receive; however, I am dismayed that among all the thought provoking articles you publish, a review about Hollywood's masturbatory awards ceremony got more responses than your exposes on Guantanamo Bay or Bush's other cover-ups.

David Walsh's article is excellent. As he rightly observes, the Academy Awards are vapid promotional tools designed for studios, filmmakers, and actors to make even more money off of their mostly inconsequential films.

What I'd like to read, in addition to deserved criticism of this so-called "art form," would be an analysis of the American publicity machine, and how it affects our voting and government. Hollywood would make a great microcosm for such a study!

Thanks for this very important site; I always gain a new perspective when I read your articles.

Regards,

RJ

3 March 2005

Fire it up, David. Many people I know look forward to the Academy Awards every year. I look forward to reading what you say about the hoopla. Always the well deserved caustic observations of the exercises in special effects pettiness that passes for film making in the United States nowadays.

And the hits just keep on coming. As a horror film afficianado, I have long known that most of what the genre is crap, and most of it is guilty pleasure. But there's good crap and there's bad crap, and having seen the trailers for the upcoming remake of *House of Wax*—which was of the good variety—it seems unusually punishing for Hollywood to inflict upon us not only a bad remake, but to star a half dressed Paris Hilton in it.

I am convinced that, whereas other national security states have used white noise and shock batons to torture dissidents, the time will come when they lock us in rooms and make us watch 12 hours of Bo Derek movies and listen to Madonna music in order to exact confession. Hell, I know I would confess.

MH

Seattle, Washington

3 March 2005

David if you put this up and I hope you do, I would like to say you did a great job. I never liked Chris Rock. He's just another bloated millionaire just like Eddie Murphy, Bill Gates and all the rest. They're hypocrites all of them. At least you are not living like them, and darn it somebody had to say something about the awards. They want us to believe it really

means something. When in reality we all know it's a bunch of lies and deceit. I've been reading articles from WSWs for over five years now and there's a reason for that. You guys are telling the other side. No, you are not always right, and you don't always speak as everybody would like. But tell me who is foolish enough to try or even think they can please everybody. I never have watched the awards because I know it's a farce. I defend you and your web site, although I don't agree with all your conclusions, against all those mockers, backward, stubborn and ignorant people. If they enjoy the show let them have it, but there are people here who enjoy your work and the work of the WSWs. We got plenty of fools down here too—the same ones who think George, his daddy and his brother Jebby are all good guys!

MG

3 March 2005

With regard to David Walsh's article and SC from Santa Cruz's reply: As the Sufi judge said to the two opposing petitioners: You're both right!

I think there's generally "one particle of amusement to be snuffed up" from most things. On the other hand, anyone should realize that Hollywood movies and much modern entertainment are far too negative and pointlessly nihilistic, indeed meaningless. Movies, TV, etc., had a lot more "heart" pre-mid-1980s, before Reagan/Bush really became entrenched.

I like SC's question: "Why not entertain the question of what we like about films even when they don't demonstrate sufficient historical consciousness?" Yes, what is the answer to that indeed? Socialists should ask themselves if they want to be as sectarian as certain evangelist Christians, who want everything to have a "Christian message."

And, now, *if* David Walsh and this whole site were overnight to develop a discernible sense of humor, *and* a touch of satirical outlook, that would be a fine thing indeed.

EK

Cornwall, UK

3 March 2005



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