

Letters on the Academy Awards

11 March 2010

The following is a selection of recent letters sent to the World Socialist Web Site in response to "The 82nd Annual Academy Awards: Hollywood celebrates itself, undeservedly".

Thank you for a clear-eyed and sensible evaluation of the Academy Awards this year. The very few worthy films and performances were ignored, while the most banal and even vile films (Tarantino comes to mind) were celebrated and honored. This is why I very seldom enter a movie theatre, and why I no longer watch the Academy Awards.

There was a time when we all looked forward with interest to watching the Oscar program. We made a party of it. We had all seen most, if not all, of the films. This is no longer the case with me. I rarely bother to see most films on offer and the ones that might interest me either pass through town in two seconds or never arrive at all.

I think it is criminal, by the way, that Colin Firth didn't win an Oscar for his performance in *A Single Man*. And Sandra Bullock just makes my skin crawl.

Over all of this looms the fact that the majority of the films nominated were films that bore no relation to the world around us, as you mention. This nasty, solipsistic little circle of wealthy "liberals" and their smug admirers really is sickening. Nothing remotely thoughtful allowed to break through. And this while we are living in what the Chinese curse as "interesting times"!!!!

Carolyn
California, USA
9 March 2010

Essential plain speaking, all the more effective for being couched in elegantly caustic terms.

You might be interested to learn that the "confrontation" between *Avatar* and *The Hurt Locker* was presented in France as one between Mr. Cameron and the ex-Mrs. Cameron (Bigelow was once married to Cameron), which shows that the Hollywood mentality is widespread.

The intellectual and political value of hailing Bigelow's Oscar as a triumph for feminism is equal to the talent and intelligence of director Bigelow: zero.

However, I read recently that Cameron, who is a Canadian, withdrew his application for American citizenship when Bush was re-elected in 2004. If that is true, it sets him aside from Hollywood's liberals and, more especially, from Bigelow, whose comments on American's imperialist wars are indeed reprehensible.

It is perhaps also worth pointing out that Cameron has frequently shown throughout his career a thorough-going hatred for corporate capitalism. *Avatar*, by having an American change sides and join forces with those imperialism wishes to annihilate (clearly symbolizing both the American Indian and the peoples of Vietnam and Iraq), is a genuinely radical movie.

Attacks on the film by the right and Hollywood's pathetic need to be politically correct (= feminist + pro-Obama) clearly dictated the final result of the "contest".

Keep up the good work!

Reynold H
Paris, France
9 March 2010

Bigelow's main theme of American anti-bomb heroes protecting people certainly lends weight to the American/NATO aggression in attempting to cover-up, or at least "regret," the loss of innocent people in their murderous drone attacks. Certainly, Bigelow is a boon to Obama and Co. in displaying it in wide screen style. The Oscar fiasco is yet again fulfilling this remarkably well. John Wayne, if he were still around, would certainly approve.

Philip T
Germany
9 March 2010

The Hurt Locker truly is all things to all people. I read another article with a comments section in which one person applauded it for showing the way war is addictive to thrill junkies who have little concern for anything other than the rush, and a second person applauded it for showing the necessity of the war in Iraq. It sounds like you folks are in the second category, minus the applause.

As the title card explains, the first compliment is correct. The film is not "about" the war, it's about the insanity of war being addictive to some people (not to mention its overall insanity in all other aspects.) "War is a drug."

Whatever one may take from the film, the fact that at the end our “hero” tells his young son that there is only one thing in the world he loves now, and it’s not him, then cuts to him back in Iraq walking towards another bomb which needs defusing.

As someone who has followed Bigelow’s career for a long time, this is a subject that interests her greatly: people who are seeking catharsis through life-risking endeavors. Such as it is, the politics of the film are implicit and not explicit, suggesting that the absurdity of war is that it is attractive to many people, people who rush headlong into death for the thrill of it. We’re meant to view the lead character as heroic mostly to himself and gradually losing his marbles (endangering others for his own rush, becoming deeply paranoid and delusional, being unable to acclimate to normal society). This is less a war film and more of a psychological study of a single soldier, dressed up in action movie tropes.

And as someone who is as anti-war as they come, there’s nothing “reprehensible” to me about acknowledging the soldiers who are risking their lives. They are there for us and we should be there for them. Bigelow’s antiwar message and this sentiment are not at all mutually exclusive, unless one believes that the soldiers fighting over there are evil and not merely misled into believing what we’re doing is righteous, and therefore playing Russian roulette with their lives for a pointless and murky goal (as Bigelow’s film suggests.)

Recall one key line spoken by Jeremy Renner as the US soldiers scare the hell out of the driver of a car who has accidentally crossed into a defusement zone: “If he wasn’t an insurgent before, he is now.” Iraq and Afghanistan in microcosm.

Willis J
9 March 2010

Well, Hiram and David, you’ve said it all again.

Even in the 1930s Depression one had Warner Brothers musicals acknowledging the crisis and supporting the New Deal as in the climax of *Gold Diggers of 1933* with Joan Blondell singing that “My Forgotten Man” number and the Busby Berkely formation of the NRA symbol at the end of *Footlights Parade*. What we have now is total irrelevance and mockery.

It is not surprising that former talents such as Scorsese (responsible with DeNiro for supporting informer Kazan getting another Hollywood Award when that wretch had already several) shamelessly plundered the far superior *Infernal Affairs* to get his “30 pieces of silver” recognition by the establishment. Now he goes on to make another bloated work with the untalented Leonardo while interesting talents such as Johnnie To remain ignored, to say nothing for the effective acting ensemble in *Infernal Affairs*, such as Andy Lau, Tony Leung Chiu-wai, Anthon Wong Chau-sang, and Eric Tsang, who are far better than their mediocre American clones in *The Departed*.

I look forward to reading the full text of David’s talk about the decline of Hollywood that he delivered recently for further insightful and new contributions.

Tony W
9 March 2010

I don’t even watch the Academy Awards anymore. Nor, for that matter, do I see most films made by US studios anymore, in that examination of contemporary film once it is released to video unfailingly offers the same formulae: insipid romantic comedies which feature two self obsessed upper middle class nebbishes, comedies laden with adolescent penis jokes and pre-adolescent scatological humor, horror films that haven’t gotten past the notion that creating gothic imagery or atmosphere is far more complex than jumping out from behind a bush with a pair of sharpened hedge trimmers and a hockey mask on and cutting the life out of someone; historic dramas patched together by postmodern thinkers who clearly never read or study anything which doesn’t confirm their point of view, which is almost unvaryingly always unreconstructed Cold War liberal suspicion of the working poor of the world; and documentaries made up by people who select facts to fit their theories.

Of course, there is also the choice of the occasional re-make of a film which was done as well as it was ever going to be done the first time it was created, the recent re-makes of *Sleuth* and *Fun with Dick and Jane* being prime examples. Throw in an occasional live action version of an insipid kiddie cartoon and you have what passes for a “family film.” And if that doesn’t rock one’s clock, there is the option of seeing a movie based upon an obscure 1960s television series. Foreign films recognized in this country are largely seen because the film makers are pattering after the Hollywood system, i.e., what Gil Scott Heron would call *cinematica baggio*.

As for the failure of the Academy to broadcast the recipients of the lifetime achievement awards, no surprises there, either. What has craft to do with the spoiled brat cultural offal that holds sway over all?

Watch the Academy Awards? I’d rather eat dirt. The work upheld usually amounts to the same thing.

Michael H
Washington, USA
10 March 2010



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