

The Academy Award nominations, a protest at Sundance and political repression in Hollywood over Gaza genocide

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24 January 2024

The 2024 Academy Award nominations were announced Tuesday morning at a presentation held at the Samuel Goldwyn Theater in Beverly Hills, California. The award ceremony will take place March 10 at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles, hosted by comic and talk show host Jimmy Kimmel.

The distribution of nominations follows the general pattern already established by the Golden Globes, Critics Choice and other bodies handing out film honors this awards season.

Christopher Nolan's disturbing *Oppenheimer*, about the developer of the atomic bomb and the latter's catastrophic use by the US military in 1945 on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, received 13 nominations. Unexpectedly, the three-hour film has developed a large popular following, having taken in nearly \$1 billion so far at the global box office.

Nolan's film was nominated in almost every major category: best picture, director (Nolan), actor (Cillian Murphy), supporting actor (Robert Downey Jr.), supporting actress (Emily Blunt), adapted screenplay, cinematography, film editing, costume design, production design, original score, sound and makeup.

The large number of possible prizes corresponds to the general importance of *Oppenheimer*'s subject matter and its approach. The film did stand out among those released last year. The WSWS review argued that its success "suggests that viewers are being drawn by something more than spectacle. ... *Oppenheimer* is a serious and appropriately disturbing film about nuclear weapons and nuclear war. It is intended to leave viewers shaken, and it succeeds in that."

Yorgos Lanthimos' absurdist *Poor Things*, based on the 1992 novel by Scottish novelist Alasdair Gray, which we will be reviewing shortly, received 11 nominations, including for best picture, director, actress, supporting actor and adapted screenplay. The performances of Emma Stone and Mark Ruffalo have been widely praised.

Killers of the Flower Moon, *Barbie* and *Maestro*, all of them very weak films or worse, were nominated in 10, eight and seven categories, respectively. *The Holdovers* and *American Fiction* were named for five possible honors. *Anatomy of a Fall*, *Napoleon* and *Past Lives* were among the other films

getting more than a single nomination.

The nominations reflect in a complex fashion the different impulses at work in Hollywood. On the one side, genuine concerns about the state of the world; on the other, limited artistic conceptions, commercial pressures and the demands of identity politics.

The media does its best to lower the discussion about the nominations to the lowest possible level. Depending on the outlet and article, the fate of individual studios (this year it's Universal, Apple Original Films, Searchlight and Warner Bros. leading the pack) or the racial/gender breakdown may predominate.

In regard to the latter, *Deadline* informs us that "Seven out of the 20 acting Oscar nominees across Best Actress, Best Supporting Actress, Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor were represented this year by people of color. For all of them ... it's their first career Oscar nomination." Colman Domingo (*Ruskin*) is the first "Afro Latino" to be nominated for best actor, where he will "compete against Black nominee Jeffrey Wright" in *American Fiction*.

Discussion of the merits of a given film, of its actual artistic *quality*, is nowhere to be found in the press coverage. To the media and the industry, a work almost exclusively represents a *quantity*: so much congealed box office revenue or so much ethnic and gender "diversity." Along these lines, for example, we are told that three female directors (Celine Song for *Past Lives*, Greta Gerwig for *Barbie* and Justine Triet for *Anatomy of a Fall*) "saw their movies nab Best Picture nominations Tuesday morning, the first time that's occurred in Oscar's 96-year history." No one will be impolite enough to point out the works in question are three of the weakest in the category.

The Academy Awards announcement took place in the midst of the ongoing campaign of mass murder carried out by the Israeli military in Gaza, made possible by the full backing of the Biden administration. If all goes as planned, there will be no reference to troubling world events at the awards ceremony in March. Award recipients will tediously thank studio executives, producers and agents. The life has been gradually squeezed out

of such events, like every other public event in the US, in recent decades. They have become increasingly scripted, sanitized and embalmed precisely as the social situation for tens of millions in America has deteriorated and the ruling elite has continuously launched wars. All of that is far too explosive to address, even in the most limited or timid fashion. “Controversy” at the Academy Awards (aside from displays of backwardness like Will Smith’s in 2022) has been stamped out, coinciding with a growing lack of popular interest in the ceremony.

Hollywood is sharply divided by the Israeli war against the Gazans. The upper echelons ferociously support the genocide, apologizing or covering up for every one of the monstrous crimes in the name of Israel’s “right to self-defense” or the battle against “antisemitism.” These are the people whose voices are heard in the media for the most part. This social layer was represented in the open letter issued by the misnamed “Creative Community for Peace,” signed in October by hundreds of lawyers, accountants, casting directors, talent agents, executives, producers and personal managers in particular, all of whom were lumped together as “leaders from the entertainment industry.”

Hostility to the war is widespread among actors, writers, directors and others, especially from the younger generation. An intense campaign aimed at intimidating or punishing expressions of opposition has been under way since the moment the Israeli murder campaign began. Anyone who steps out of line faces denunciations and blacklisting.

The Hollywood media coverage of a protest organized at the Sundance Film Festival on Sunday typifies the level of venom and nervousness. More objective news accounts explained that several hundred protesters gathered on Main Street in Park City, Utah in opposition to the Gaza slaughter. According to *Indiewire*, demonstrators carried “Palestinian flags, signs, and banners with expressions like ‘Ceasefire Now,’ ‘Deplatform Zionism,’ and ‘Let Gaza Live,’ among many others.” They chanted “Genocide Joe, what do you say? How many kids did you kill today” and “Netanyahu, what do you say? How many kids did you bomb today?” Indya Moore (*Pose*) and Melissa Barrera (*Scream*) were among the better-known performers who attended.

The smearing, vicious coverage of the Sundance protest in *Deadline*, *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter* needs to be read to be fully appreciated.

The *Deadline* piece, for instance, notes that the protesters slammed “the Biden administration’s stance on Israel and strong allegiance with the Jewish State over the horrors of Hamas’ murderous attack on Israel on Oct. 7.” Fingering Barrera as one of the demonstrators, *Deadline* claims that the actress “advocated for a ceasefire in the Gaza War that erupted soon after Hamas’ bloody and sexual assault filled attack on communities and military bases near the border with the Jewish state.” Not content with these two references, the article later

lyingly refers to “detailed evidence” of the October 7 attack showing “wide-spread rapes.”

The same piece cites the comments of “activist and producer Noa Tishby,” a speaker at a panel entitled “Sects, Lies & Videotape: Debunking Deadly Tropes About Jews and Israel in TV, Film and Media,” also taking place during the film festival. Tishby is quoted as terming the protesters “misinformed” and “useful idiots.” *Deadline* neglects to mention that Tishby is a former Israeli government official, having been appointed in April 2022 as “Special Envoy for Combating Antisemitism and the Delegitimization of Israel.” She is currently a leading apologist for Israel’s crimes in the US.

Tishby is also prominently cited by *Variety* in its piece purportedly devoted to the protest, a piece largely given over to comments by pro-Zionist supporters. The *Hollywood Reporter*, which knows something about witch-hunts, having championed the anti-communist purges of the late 1940s and early 1950s, cites the comments of a participant at a brunch on Sunday hosted by billion-dollar talent agency UTA. “There,” writes the *Reporter*, “an anonymous industry insider said it was ‘incredibly inappropriate’ for such a protest to be happening amid the festival. ‘There are a lot of Jewish people at this festival and a lot of them are not happy about these protests going on around the world.’” The slanderous implication being that opposition to genocide is a form of antisemitism.

These film industry types live in an ignorant and reactionary bubble. Deluded by their immense wealth, their entirely undeserved prominence in filmmaking and the media’s slavishness, they convince themselves they represent something important. They are presently lining up enthusiastically behind some of the most horrific crimes of modern times, defending mass oppression and misery. The generally wretched character of Hollywood’s products becomes less of a mystery. How could such a social layer contribute anything artistically, an effort that requires, as a minimum, compassion and sensitivity to human suffering?



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