

# 2026 Academy Award nominations: *Sinners* and *One Battle After Another* receive the most nominations

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The nominations for the 98th Academy Awards were announced Thursday at the Samuel Goldwyn Theater in Beverly Hills, California. The awards ceremony will be held at the Dolby Theater in Los Angeles on March 15. The event will be televised in the US on ABC and hosted by comedian-talk show host Conan O'Brien. Honors will be handed out in 24 categories for films released in 2025.

The award nominations were the usual combination of the thoughtful and the confounding, or even disturbing. The record 16 nominations for Ryan Coogler's *Sinners*, which our review termed a "racialist horror show," provides an indication of the continuing hold of such retrograde politics on an unhealthy portion of the approximately 11,000 Academy voters.

Paul Thomas Anderson's uneven *One Battle After Another*, inspired by the Thomas Pynchon novel, complete with devastating scenes of attacks on immigrants by paramilitary fascist forces, identical in look and manner to ICE and the other thugs mobilized by the Trump administration, received 13 nominations.

Guillermo del Toro's new adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, *Marty Supreme* (Josh Safdie) and *Sentimental Value* (Joachim Trier) each had nine nominations. *Bugonia* from Yorgos Lanthimos, about the capture and torment of a powerful corporate executive, was nominated in four categories, including Emma Stone as best actress. Stone becomes the youngest actress to have been nominated seven times, and deservedly so for the most part.

Aside from *Sinners*, *One Battle After Another*, *Frankenstein*, *Marty Supreme*, *Sentimental Value* and *Bugonia*, the other films nominated for best picture are the very weak *F1*, *Hamnet* (Chloé Zhao), *The Secret*

*Agent* from Brazil (Kleber Mendonça Filho) and *Train Dreams*, an effort reminiscent of the more abstract, disoriented works of Terrence Malick.

In the best international feature film category, *The Voice of Hind Rajab*, written and directed by Tunisian filmmaker Kaouthar Ben Hania, received a nomination. The film focuses on the Palestinian Red Crescent response to the desperate cellphone calls of Hind, a 6-year-old Palestinian girl, trapped by Israeli fire in Gaza in January 2024. The girl, along with six members of her family and two Red Crescent paramedics, eventually died in a hail of lethal IDF fire. The film only received distribution in the US in late October, after pressures from pro-Zionist forces prevented its showing for months.

*Sinners*, a horror story set in the 1930s in the Mississippi Delta, we suggested in our comment, may be benefiting from the perception that it represents some sort of opposition to the Trump White House, with the latter's obvious and rampant racism and sympathy for the Confederacy and slavery. In the film, twin black brothers return to the Jim Crow South and confront supernatural evil.

In one scene, set in the brothers' "juke joint,"

We see the presence of musical "spirits" from across time. African dancers from the distant past perform alongside DJs, hip hop artists, and others. The scene is something of a visual thesis for the film: the blues, hip hop, and other forms of art are lumped together into a single racial-cultural mythology, a "black culture" which is under threat by white vampires.

## The film

combines cartoonish monster-movie antics with a racist interpretation of history. It swims in the same, or very similar, ideological waters as the *New York Times*' reactionary 1619 Project. Taken at face value, the film is an argument for the virtues of maintaining "cultural purity" through racial separatism, a perspective not far from what is being promoted by the fascist right.

Hollywood voters continue to be mesmerized all too often by this type of narrative. The recent efforts at "diversity" have not led, of course, to a greater *social* mix or variety, but simply to a further infusion of generally affluent individuals.

According to the latest figures, roughly 35 percent of active Academy voters identify as women, an increase from 24 percent in 2014. Approximately 22 to 25 percent identify as coming from "underrepresented racial or ethnic communities," up from only 6 percent a decade ago. About one-quarter of the Academy membership now resides outside the US.

The increased ethnic and gender variety has not necessarily done anything to improve the opinions and tastes of the Academy membership. As the WSWS has argued for some time, the "diversity" problem in Hollywood is neither a racial nor a gender one. The US is an immensely complex society of more than 340 million people, the vast majority of whom work for a wage—or would like to. How well represented is the struggling working class represented and depicted in American filmmaking, including the overwhelmingly proletarian African American and Latino population? In general, how thoroughly are the complexities of US society and its people depicted by Hollywood?

In its best scenes, *One Battle After Another*, with Leonardo DiCaprio and Benicio del Toro doing their best to evade the fascist interlopers in their town, is a *far more accurate* picture of contemporary life than Coogler's racist cartoon. *Bugonia*, perhaps most of all in the performance of Jesse Plemons, *not nominated* for best actor, also reveals something about the wretchedness of social and psychological

conditions endured by many in the US.

Academy voters do not always get things wrong. Sometimes they get things surprisingly right, and certainly not all of the nominations this time around are mistaken. But the Academy members continue to be strongly distracted by the Democratic Party and the various self-involved, self-pitying race and gender obsessions, directing them back to personal identity problems. In part this is a deliberate diversion, in some cases a deliberate "self-diversion," to avoid looking at painful realities.

In the face of the Trump drive toward fascist dictatorship, what does an appeal to racial separatism and cultural nationalism have to offer?

Renée Nicole Good, a 37-year-old mother and poet, was fatally shot by an ICE agent in Minneapolis on January 7, 2026, less than a mile from where George Floyd was killed in 2020. We were told at the time that police violence was all about race. Now what? Or look at the faces of the 15,000 nurses on strike in New York City, from every possible ethnic and national background. The support for a work like *Sinners* is regressive, it flies in the face of the objective logic of social and cultural development and the requirements of political and economic progress.

Hollywood is in turmoil, facing catastrophic job losses, in part due to the introduction of AI as well as mergers and concentration among the handful of conglomerates. Whether Warner Bros. is taken over by the viciously right-wing Ellisons at Paramount or Sarandos and Netflix, it will spell further disaster for workers. Media reports estimate as many as 6,000 more job losses from the Warner Bros. sale alone.

War, the threat of dictatorship, abduction of foreign leaders, piracy on the open seas, murder on the streets of an occupied American city, the threat to seize entire countries, the complicity and cowardice of the official "opposition" and the trade union officialdom—these are the facts of life in 2026, and Hollywood continues to both look at them and look away.



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