

Los Angeles Times

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Academy Awards: It's about art, not political correctness [Blowback]

February 21, 2012 | 3:52pm



William Goldstein, a member of Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and a Grammy- and Emmy-nominated composer who has worked on numerous films and television, responds to The Times' Feb. 19 article, "Oscar voters overwhelmingly white, male." If you would like to write a full-length response to a recent Times article, editorial or op-ed, here are our [FAQs](#) and [submission policy](#).

The Times' story implies that diversity among voting members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences is more important than excellence. The Times implies that experience in craft and in life that comes with age is not as valuable as that which comes from a presumably younger and more diverse demographic. The implication that Academy members have an agenda to deprive minorities of membership is insulting and speaks of a press interested only in stirring up controversy.

The Times quotes Frank Pierson, a member of the Academy's board of governors, as saying: "I don't see any reason why the Academy should represent the entire American population. That's what the People's Choice Awards are for. We represent the professional filmmakers, and if that doesn't reflect the general population, so be it." Pierson is right, of course, but readers shouldn't take his quote as evidence of the article's even-handedness.

I have been a member of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences and received a Grammy nomination. I have been a member of the TV academy and received numerous Emmy nominations. I've been working on a Broadway musical and wrote an editorial that was published in the New York Times in 2005 outlining the problems surrounding the classic American musical and the Tony Awards. In other words, I have experienced the inner workings of most major award shows. The Oscars, in my opinion, is the most serious attempt by an awards show to go beyond the glitz and have peers reward their colleagues for excellence. Academy members take their responsibilities seriously; every one of them I know is genuinely concerned with both preserving and promoting the art of movie-making.

I entered the Academy in 1977 and since that time have served almost continuously on the music branch executive committee. Our committee has a history of being painstaking in its quest to find the most qualified members regardless of ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. For many years I have also served on the foreign language executive committee, where I have been very impressed with how dedicated my colleagues are to inspiring and giving opportunities to filmmakers from all over the world (speaking of diversity).

My own story, interestingly enough, started in Hollywood when I was discovered by Berry Gordy (founder of Motown records). Gordy wasn't concerned with demographics or diversity, just talent. My first two studio pictures were basically black content films. I understand the desire to cultivate artistic talent across all demographic lines; the California State Summer School for the Arts, where I have served on the board since its founding nearly 30 years ago, goes out of its way to make sure high school students of all backgrounds know about us and apply. I don't, however, support the recent push toward egalitarianism in the arts, which holds that we all have talent and that no art is "better" than another's. This view has serious implications for our culture and values. Such political correctness has no place in the arts, save for bringing the public's attention to social injustices. The demographics of the Academy are not a social injustice.

The Times should aim its darts elsewhere, perhaps at filmmakers. After all, the Academy can select its members only from those working on films currently being made. Since it is the filmmakers who hire the people who will become future Academy members, why pick on the Academy?

The cornerstone of the great country in which we live is based on the premise of equal opportunity for us all, that any of us should be able to go as far as our own abilities will take us. The members of the Academy that I have met over the years are all passionate about preserving the great legacy of storytelling in motion pictures, rewarding excellence, and inspiring future generations to pick up the torch. The media today could do well by trying to follow our example.

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-- William Goldstein

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