

OSCARS LEAVING BLACK AMERICANS BLUE...

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The Oscars are known for many odd customs and bits of superstition, but American Blacks best know the Color Purple Curse. Viola Davis was upset by the veteran Meryl Streep at the Oscars, even though Davis had won the Screen Actors Guild award days earlier.

The Los Angeles Times [“24 Frames” blog](#) this morning noticed the upset, but wrote it off to Streep doing a character based on a real-life person.

Bull.

Since 1929, there have been two black male actors to win Best Actor. Sidney Poitier for “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner” in 1967 and Denzell Washington for “Training Day” in 2002. The only Best Actress award handed out to a black woman was to Halle Berry for “Monsters Ball,” also in 2002.

Blacks have had to fight tooth-and-nail to get any recognition from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS). Denzell Washington effectively dared them not to give him the Oscar that he won in 2002, the year that the Academy went out of its way to prove that it was not racist, sending Halle Berry and Washington home with the coveted golden statuette, and giving a life achievement nod to actor Sidney Poitier.

No other person of color who is not a foreign national has won the top actor nod. Spanish actress Penelope Cruz is the only hispanic to take home a trophy for Vicky Cristina Barcelona in 2008.

A new University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) study entitled “Not Quite a Breakthrough: The Oscars and Actors of Color” predicted that Davis would have a tough road at the Oscars.

“Did 2002 truly herald a new era for actors of color?” the study asked. “Our study discovered some progress for actors of color, but we also found considerable continuing racial/ethnic disparity.”

The study found that:

- All best actress winners since 2002 have been white.
- No winner in any acting category during the last ten years has been Latino, Asian American, or Native American.
- Oscar winners and nominees of color make fewer movies per year after their nominations than their white peers do.
- Oscar winners and nominees of color are more likely to work in television, look down upon and “considered lower-status work” by the film community.
- Oscar winners and nominees of color are less likely to receive subsequent nominations.

The other problem is that black actors seldom are recognized for playing the same kinds of roles that white actors play. People in positions of power, particularly those who are good guys, are too infrequently ripe for Oscar contention.

It’s not that Meryl Streep is not a great actress, or deserving of awards. She is. We also know that the Academy often misses seminal achievements in all actor and actresses careers. The term “they’re due” often is tagged to a good, not great role or a lesser motion picture that pulls the big awards out of their AMPAS.

The role Ms. Davis played, though, socially relevant acts of bravery, is the kind that white actresses like Sally Field played in “Norma Rae” or Julia Roberts played in “Erin Brokovich.” They are, among white actresses, the kind of films and roles that normally garner big wins for the actors and actresses making the portrayal.

The L.A. Times is dead wrong. The 1985 stigma of the Color Purple, up for 11 Academy Awards, which received zero still lingers. The most blatant snub was in the Supporting Actress category, where the majority of nominees were from the movie, including Oprah Winfrey, who gave the towering performance of her brief acting career. She was bypassed for Prizzi’s Honor actress Angelica Huston, daughter of director John Huston. White and inside, that was a slider that the Black actresses did not have.

Supporting has been a category that has seen several black actors and actresses take home Oscars, but the Best Actor category still remains the domain of the white and powerful.

In the great civil rights march forward away from the days of slavery, one hallmark will be when two deserving black actors can win Oscars on one night, and actors of color are as much a rule in the winners circle as actors whose pale skin still gives them advantage.

My shiny two.

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