

Killers of the Flower Moon (film)

Killers of the Flower Moon^[a] is a 2023 American epic Western crime drama film co-written, produced, and directed by Martin Scorsese. Eric Roth and Scorsese based their screenplay on the 2017 non-fiction book by David Grann.^{[7][8]} Set in 1920s Oklahoma, it focuses on a series of murders of Osage members and relations in the Osage Nation after oil was discovered on tribal land. The tribal members had retained mineral rights on their reservation, but a corrupt local political boss sought to steal the wealth.^[9]

Leonardo DiCaprio, Robert De Niro, and Lily Gladstone lead an ensemble cast, also including Jesse Plemons, Tantoo Cardinal, John Lithgow, and Brendan Fraser. It is the sixth feature film collaboration between Scorsese and DiCaprio, the tenth between Scorsese and De Niro,^[10] and the first between Scorsese and both actors overall (they previously all collaborated on the 2015 short film *The Audition*), and the eleventh and final between Scorsese and composer Robbie Robertson, who died two months prior to the film's release. The film is dedicated to Robertson.^[11]

Development began in March 2016 when Imperative Entertainment won the adaptation rights to the book. Scorsese and DiCaprio were attached to the film in 2017, with production expected to begin in early 2018. Following several pushbacks and delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic, production was scheduled to begin in February 2021, with Apple TV+ confirmed to finance and distribute the film alongside Paramount Pictures. Principal photography ultimately took place between April and October 2021, in Osage and Washington counties, Oklahoma. The film was produced by Scorsese's Sikelia Productions and DiCaprio's Appian Way Productions, with its \$200 million budget reportedly the largest amount ever spent on a film shoot in Oklahoma.^[12]

Killers of the Flower Moon premiered at the 76th Cannes Film Festival on May 20, 2023. It was theatrically released in the United States on October 20, 2023, by Paramount Pictures and Apple Original Films. The film grossed \$157 million worldwide, and received critical acclaim, with praise for Scorsese's direction, the screenplay, production values, editing, cinematography, musical score, and cast performances (especially DiCaprio, Gladstone, and De Niro). It won Best Film at the National Board

Killers of the Flower Moon



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	<u>Martin Scorsese</u>
Written by	<u>Eric Roth</u> <u>Martin Scorsese</u>
Based on	<i><u>Killers of the Flower Moon</u></i> by <u>David Grann</u>
Produced by	<u>Dan Friedkin</u> <u>Bradley Thomas</u> <u>Martin Scorsese</u> <u>Daniel Lupi</u>
Starring	<u>Leonardo DiCaprio</u> <u>Robert De Niro</u> <u>Lily Gladstone</u>
Cinematography	<u>Rodrigo Prieto</u>
Edited by	<u>Thelma Schoonmaker</u>
Music by	<u>Robbie Robertson</u>

of Review and was named one of the top 10 films of 2023 by the American Film Institute.^[13] It was also nominated for ten Academy Awards (including Best Picture), seven Golden Globe Awards (including Best Motion Picture – Drama, and with Gladstone winning Best Actress), nine British Academy Film Awards, and three SAG Awards (with Gladstone winning Best Actress).

Plot

Osage Nation elders bury a ceremonial pipe, mourning their descendants' assimilation into White American society. Wandering through their Oklahoma reservation, during the annual "flower moon" phenomenon of fields of blooms,^[14] several Osage find oil gushing from the ground. The tribe becomes wealthy, as it retains mineral rights and members share in oil-lease revenues, though law requires white court-appointed legal guardians to manage the money of full and half-blood members, assuming them "incompetent".^[b]

In 1919, Ernest Burkhart returns from World War I to live with his brother Byron and uncle William King Hale on Hale's large reservation ranch. Hale, a reserve deputy sheriff and cattle rancher, poses as a friendly benefactor of the Osage, speaking their language and bestowing gifts. Ernest and Byron commit armed robbery against the Osage. Ernest meets Mollie Kyle, an Osage whose family owns oil headrights, via his day job as a cab driver. A romance develops, and the two marry in an Osage ceremony with Catholic elements. Over time, they raise three children.

Hale secretly orders the contract killings of multiple wealthy Osage. He explains that Ernest will inherit more headrights if more of Mollie's family dies. Mollie is diabetic, and her mother Lizzie is ill. After Mollie's sister Minnie dies of a mysterious illness, Hale orders Byron to kill Mollie's other sister, the rebellious Anna. Lizzie and the Osage council blame the reservation's white residents and urge the tribe to fight back.

A newsreel of the 1921 Tulsa race massacre, in which white people destroyed a black community and killed numerous residents, causes further concern amongst the Osage that they could suffer similarly. Lizzie sees her ancestors welcome her to the afterlife as she dies. Hale orders Ernest to arrange the murder of Henry Roan, Mollie's first husband, who suffers from depression and alcoholism. However, Ernest botches the assignment and Hale paddles him inside a Masonic Temple as punishment. Hale orders Ernest to arrange the murder of Mollie's last surviving sister Reta and her husband Bill.

Since Hale is the local political boss, and both the local sheriff and judges are in his pocket, no investigations are conducted. An Osage Nation representative seeking to lobby Congress is murdered in Washington, D.C., while private detective William J. Burns, who was discreetly hired by Mollie, is attacked by Ernest and Byron, who run him off of the reservation.

Production companies	<u>Apple Studios</u> <u>Imperative Entertainment</u> <u>Sikelia Productions</u> <u>Appian Way Productions</u>
Distributed by	<u>Paramount Pictures</u> <u>Apple Original Films</u> (through <u>Apple TV+</u>)
Release dates	May 20, 2023 (<u>Cannes</u>) October 20, 2023 (<u>United States</u>)
Running time	206 minutes ^[1]
Country	<u>United States</u>
Languages	<u>English</u> <u>Osage</u>
Budget	\$200 million ^[2]
Box office	\$157 million ^{[3][4]}

Hale again orders Ernest to murder Reta and Bill, this time by having criminal Acie Kirby blow up their house. As the last surviving member of her family, Mollie inherits their headrights. Despite her illness, she travels to Washington with an Osage delegation and asks President Calvin Coolidge for help. Because of this, Hale orders Ernest to poison Mollie's insulin to "slow her down". Mollie's condition worsens, and Ernest exhibits similar symptoms after ingesting the poison himself.

Due to Mollie's lobbying, the Bureau of Investigation (BOI) sends Agent Thomas Bruce White Sr. and assistants to investigate; they quickly discover the truth. Hale tries to cover his tracks by murdering his own hitmen, including Acie, but White arrests Hale and Ernest. While Ernest is being interrogated, two agents are sent to question Mollie and find her near death. They rush her to the hospital where the doctors discover that she has been repeatedly poisoned and quickly notify White and the other agents. Mollie recovers.

White persuades Ernest to confess and turn state's evidence against his uncle. W. S. Hamilton, Hale's attorney, tries to convince Ernest to claim he was tortured and recant. However, after one of his daughters dies of whooping cough, Ernest testifies against his uncle, wanting to be around for his remaining family. Hale unsuccessfully tries to have his nephew murdered. Mollie meets with Ernest after he testifies, and leaves him after he refuses to admit to poisoning her.

A radio drama years later reveals the aftermath: The Shoun brothers, who gave Ernest the poison for Mollie and were implicated in other "wasting deaths", were never prosecuted due to lack of evidence. Byron was tried as an accomplice to Anna's murder, but served no prison time due to a hung jury.^[c] Hale and Ernest were sentenced to life imprisonments. Both were paroled after years of incarceration, despite Osage protests to the parole board. Mollie divorced Ernest, married her third husband, a man named John Cobb, and died of diabetes-related complications in 1937 at the age of 50. Her obituary stated that she was buried with her parents, sisters and daughter, while making no mention of the Osage murders.

The film closes with an overhead view of a 21st-century Osage powwow dancing circle.

Cast

- Leonardo DiCaprio as Ernest Burkhart, a World War I veteran
- Robert De Niro as William King Hale, Ernest's uncle
- Lily Gladstone as Mollie Burkhart, Ernest's wife
- Jesse Plemons as Thomas Bruce White Sr., a BOI agent leading the murder investigation
- Tantoo Cardinal as Lizzie Q, Mollie's mother
- John Lithgow as Peter Leaward, the lead prosecutor in the trials of Hale and Burkhart
- Brendan Fraser as W. S. Hamilton, Hale's attorney
- Cara Jade Myers as Anna, Mollie's first sister
- JaNae Collins as Reta, Mollie's second sister
- Jillian Dion as Minnie, Mollie's third sister
- Jason Isbell as Bill Smith, Minnie's and later Reta's husband
- William Belleau as Henry Roan, Mollie's first husband and close friend and later victim of Hale
- Louis Cancelmi as Kelsie Morrison, an acquaintance and accomplice of Burkhart and Hale
- Scott Shepherd as Byron Burkhart, Ernest's younger brother
- Brent Langdon as Barney McBride, a white oilman who travels to Washington, D.C. to seek federal help in solving the murders
- Everett Waller as Paul Red Eagle

- Talee Redcorn as Non-Hon-Zhin-Ga^[d] / Traditional Leader
- Yancey Red Corn as Chief Bonnicastle
- Tatanka Means as John Wren, a Native American undercover BOI agent
- Tommy Schultz as Blackie Thompson
- Sturgill Simpson as Henry Grammer
- Ty Mitchell as John Ramsey
- Gary Basaraba as Burns, a detective
- Charlie Musselwhite as Alvin Reynolds, an agent
- Pat Healy as John Burger
- Steve Witting as Dr. James Shoun
- Steve Routman as Dr. David Shoun
- Gene Jones as Pitts Beatty
- Michael Abbott Jr. as Frank Smith, an agent
- Jack White as radio show actor
- Larry Sellers as Non-Hon-Zhin-Ga^[d]
- Barry Corbin as Undertaker Turton
- Randy Houser as Scott Mathis
- Pete Yorn as Acie Kirby, explosives expert
- Katherine Willis as Myrtle Hale
- Norma Jean as Vera
- Elden Henson as Duke Burkhart
- Steve Eastin as Judge John Calvin Pollock
- Larry Fessenden as radio voice (for Hale)
- Martin Scorsese as radio show producer
- Vince Giordano as radio show bandleader

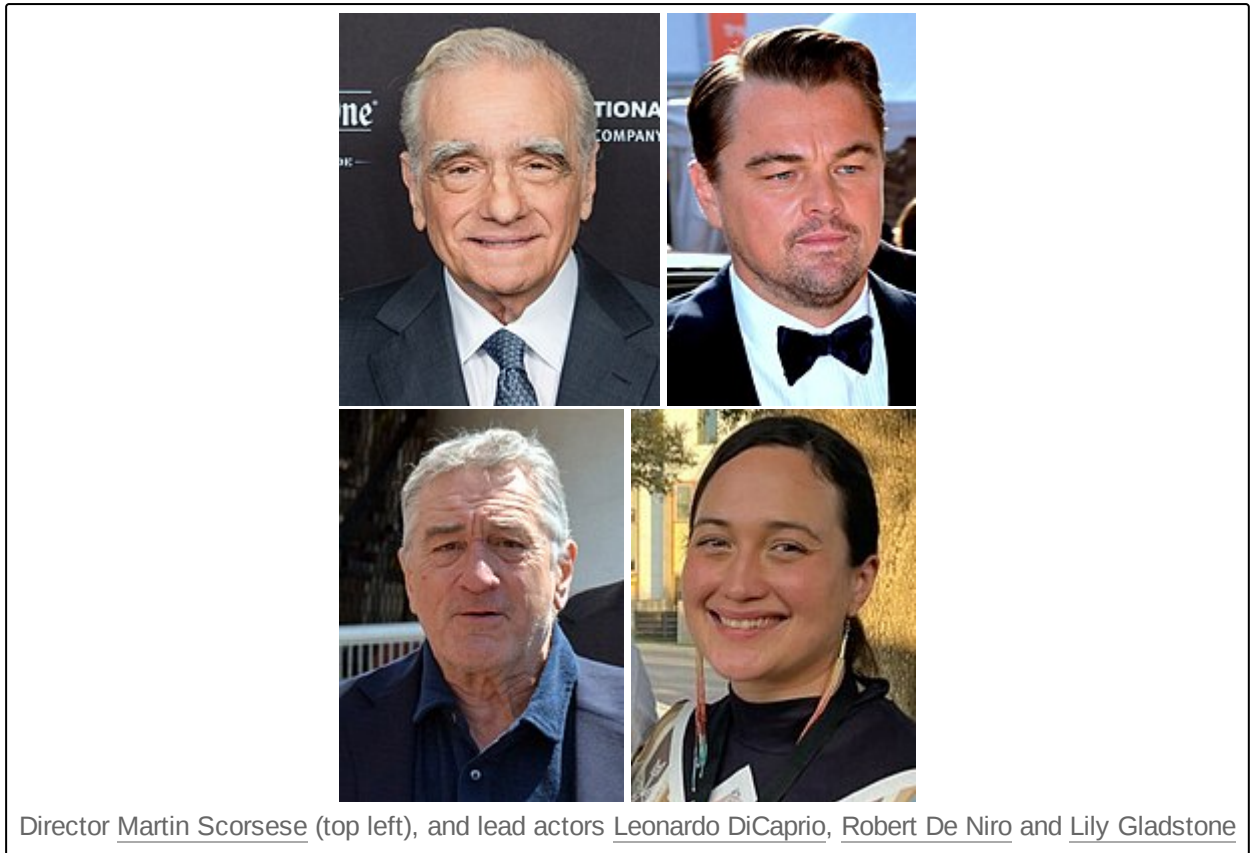
Themes

The analysis of the themes in the book and film has centered on the difference between *Killers of the Flower Moon* and traditional Westerns in the old Hollywood tradition. Jorge Cotte of *The Nation* stated: "Unlike the visions of unbounded freedom found in traditional westerns, Martin Scorsese's new film is a study of a West bounded by the vertical geometry of oil rigs and the violent conspiracies of powerful men." Cotte then indicated the thematic differences between the book version and the film version of Scorsese's film stating: "At the center of Grann's book is a set of unsolved crimes: a slew of unsolved murders, then called the 'Reign of Terror', that tormented the Osage from 1921 to 1926, and the corresponding emergence of a Bureau of Investigation (the eventual FBI) that finally arrives to determine who is doing the murdering. The book is meticulously researched and as diligent in setting the context for these shocking acts as it is in examining J. Edgar Hoover's role in shaping the bureau and using the murders as a showcase for it... Scorsese's retelling ends up being narrower in focus. It does away with much of the original's sense of suspense and Hoover's role in the investigation, and instead focuses on how an individual descends, through greed, complicity, and cowardice, into unforgivable acts of despoliation and violence."^[19]

Niles Schwartz's review focuses on the film's theological dimensions, as well as the overarching theme of human greed undermining our society's ideals.^[20]

Production

Development



Director [Martin Scorsese](#) (top left), and lead actors [Leonardo DiCaprio](#), [Robert De Niro](#) and [Lily Gladstone](#)

On March 10, 2016, Imperative Entertainment won the bidding war to make a film adaptation of [David Grann's](#) nonfiction book *Killers of the Flower Moon* and paid \$5 million; the studio's [Dan Friedkin](#) and [Bradley Thomas](#) would produce the film.^[21] In April 2017, it was revealed that [Martin Scorsese](#), [Leonardo DiCaprio](#), and [Robert De Niro](#) were considering involvement in the film, adapted by [Eric Roth](#).^{[22][8]} Both [De Niro](#) and [DiCaprio](#) had long histories of working with Scorsese, but the three had collaborated only once before in the short film *The Audition* (2015).^[23]

In June 2019, it was announced that [Paramount Pictures](#) would distribute the film.^[24] Scorsese would later reach out to [Netflix](#) and [Apple TV+](#) to finance and distribute the film, as Paramount had concerns about the film's budget reaching \$200 million. Paramount was still open to a deal to be involved with the film alongside an additional partner.^[25] In May 2020, Apple TV+ was announced to co-finance and co-distribute the film, with Paramount remaining as distributor.^[26]

Writing

The initial script focused on the perspective of [Thomas White](#) and the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) coming into Oklahoma to investigate the murders of the [Osage Nation](#), with DiCaprio originally cast to star as White. This version of the script would have been a more faithful adaptation of Grann's book, and at one

point was nearly two hundred pages in length. Scorsese compared the initial draft to a police procedural, and said that he and Roth initially struggled to complete the script due to their unfamiliarity and discomfort in writing for that genre.^[27]

Scorsese and Roth worked on the script for nearly two years before DiCaprio questioned Scorsese where the heart of the story lay. After several meetings and dinners with members of the Osage, Scorsese realized that the real story came from their perspective. During these meetings, tribe members would constantly mention the marriage between the American war veteran Ernest Burkhart and the Osage tribe member Mollie Kyle, and that the couple were indeed in love. This intrigued Scorsese, who concluded the heart of the film lay in the love story between Ernest and Mollie, as well as Mollie's self-deception in staying with her husband despite his onerous dealings.^[27]

DiCaprio then suggested changing his role from Tom White to Ernest Burkhart, to which Scorsese agreed. Scorsese and Roth would then overhaul the script to switch the film's main perspective to the Osage community's, and to place the story's emphasis on Burkhart and his torn loyalties between his wife and his uncle William King Hale.^[27] Paramount felt this character change resulted in the film turning into "a moody and less commercial character study," but Lily Gladstone would later say that the Osage Nation's input had positively affected the film, stating "the work is better when you let the world inform your work".^{[28][29]} Scorsese would cite Ari Aster and his films Midsommar (2019) and Beau is Afraid (2023) as inspirations for the "slower...quieter" pacing of *Killers of the Flower Moon*.^[30]

When writing the ending, Scorsese and Roth noted how previous adaptations had reduced the events to being "entertainment", and instead wanted their film to "take responsibility". They had conceived various versions of the ending, including the filming of a Hollywood movie similar to that of The FBI Story (1959), but changed to the filming of a radio drama adaptation as the script focused on Mollie and Ernest's relationship. Wanting to avoid chyrons, Roth wrote the final tribute to Mollie, which Scorsese himself would end up delivering in the film as he felt he could not direct another actor in doing so.^[31]

Casting

In July 2019, it was reported that De Niro had joined the cast, with filming tentatively set to commence in the summer of 2020.^[32] At the 26th Screen Actors Guild Awards on January 19, 2020, DiCaprio confirmed that he and De Niro would star in the film.^[33] DiCaprio was paid \$30 million for his involvement.^[34] In February 2021, Gladstone and Jesse Plemons were added to the cast.^{[35][36]} Production wanted a Native American actress to portray Mollie Kyle; casting director Ellen Lewis first tipped Scorsese off to Gladstone by showing him Certain Women (2016), where Gladstone's performance impressed Scorsese.^[27] Gladstone was selected for the role after a Zoom call with Scorsese, in which they discussed Catholicism.^[37] DiCaprio also endorsed Gladstone after the two actors had their own conversation on Zoom, and soon the Osage Nation gave their own approval for Gladstone.^[27] The role of Thomas White, the lead BOI agent, was initially written for DiCaprio, but after DiCaprio pushed to instead portray Ernest Burkhart, Plemons was cast as White.^[38]

In March 2021, Tantoo Cardinal, Cara Jade Myers, JaNaë Collins and Jillian Dion were added to the cast.^[39] William Belleau, Louis Cancelmi, Jason Isbell, Sturgill Simpson, Tatanka Means, Michael Abbott Jr., Pat Healy, and Scott Shepherd joined the next month.^{[40][41]} In June, Steve Eastin, Gary Basaraba and Barry Corbin were added to the cast, while Brendan Fraser and John Lithgow would join in August.^{[42][43][44][45][46]}

Filming

Filming would experience several delays. In July 2017, production designer Dante Ferretti said that filming would begin in early 2018, with Scorsese directing and DiCaprio starring.^[47] Production would stall until October 2018, when it was announced that the film would be Scorsese's next effort after completing *The Irishman* (2019). At that point, filming was due to begin in summer 2019.^[48] In December 2019, Rodrigo Prieto, Scorsese's frequent cinematographer since *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), said that the film was expected to start principal photography in March 2020, adding that the "look and feel of the film" was still being figured out.^[49] However, in April 2020, it was announced that the filming of *Killers of the Flower Moon* had been postponed indefinitely in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.^[50] Production was expected to resume in February 2021 in Oklahoma; Jack Fisk would sign on as production designer for the film, marking the first collaboration between him and Martin Scorsese.^{[2][51]}

Killers of the Flower Moon would ultimately begin principal photography on April 19, 2021, with filming taking place in Osage County, Oklahoma and Washington County, namely Pawhuska, Fairfax and Bartlesville.^{[52][53][54]} There were over 50 production locations being used, including a combination of existing structures and built sets.^[37] In a news release before the beginning of filming, Scorsese said: "We are thrilled to finally start production on *Killers of the Flower Moon* in Oklahoma. To be able to tell this story on the land where these events took place is incredibly important and critical to allowing us to portray an accurate depiction of the time and people. We're grateful to Apple, the Oklahoma Film and Music Office and The Osage Nation, especially all our Osage consultants and cultural advisors, as we prepare."^[55]

Prieto had shot most of the footage using film, except for some night scenes. When the film approaches the climax, Prieto used a Technicolor process called ENR, which enhances color contrast and reduced saturation, saying that "Everybody suddenly has this harsh feel".^[37] On May 13, De Niro suffered a quadriceps muscle injury off-set and returned to New York City for medical attention; production was not delayed, as De Niro's subsequent scenes would be filmed in June 2021.^[56] When filming the radio play scene, Scorsese's family members were there, and he felt he could confidently deliver his dialogue.^[37] Principal photography wrapped on October 1, 2021.^[57] In March 2022, Osage Nation Principal Chief Geoffrey Standing Bear stated that additional footage would be shot to film a traditional community dance in mid-May in Osage County.^[58]

Osage Nation involvement

From the beginning, Scorsese sought to closely involve the Osage Nation in the film's production.^[37] During pre-production, Scorsese would travel to Pawhuska, Oklahoma, to meet with Principal Chief Geoffrey Standing Bear and learn about the tribe during the "Reign of Terror", while also discussing how they could incorporate the tribe members on the film's set.^{[37][59]} A consultation was held with around 200 Osage people to gauge Osage points of view regarding the production.^[60] Scorsese would cast Osage actors in at least 40 roles, in addition to hundreds of tribe members being hired as background extras. He also employed several Osage members in both small and prominent production crew roles to ensure

accuracy of the tribe during the film's time period.^[37] Osage language teacher and translator Christopher Cote taught the actors the Osage language and gave coaching about how to use it. As Osage people in the 1920s extensively used the language, the film incorporated its use.^[61]

Brandy Lemon, an Osage Nation Congress member, served as liaison between the film production and the Osage community.^[62] Lemon was present during the film's production and consulted on several details of the film. For example, Lemon helped instruct Gladstone on how to hold her cup.^[63] Lemon credited the production for their consultative approach, saying, "They listened, that was the biggest thing. They actually listened to us."^[63]

Post-production

Industrial Light & Magic and visual effects supervisor Pablo Helman provided the visual effects for the film after previously collaborating with Scorsese on *The Irishman* and *Silence*.^[64]

Music

Frequent Scorsese collaborator Robbie Robertson, himself having Cayuga and Mohawk ancestry, composed the incidental score.^[65] Critics have described it as "old-timey",^[66] "bluesy",^[65] and "percussive".^[67] The film also features a soundtrack of popular music from the 1920s and Native American songs.^[65] It was Robertson's final completed film score before he died in August 2023. The film is dedicated to his memory.^[68]

Release

Killers of the Flower Moon had its world premiere at the 76th Cannes Film Festival on May 20, 2023,^{[69][70][71]} where the film received a nine-minute standing ovation at the end of its screening.^[72] The film's United States premiere took place on September 27, 2023, at Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center in New York City, with none of the cast members in attendance due to the 2023 SAG-AFTRA strike.^[73] The film was originally set to open in select theaters on October 6, 2023, before going wide in the United States on October 20, 2023, by Apple TV+ (under their Apple Original Films label) and Paramount Pictures.^[74] However, the limited release was later scrapped, with the film receiving a global theatrical rollout on October 20.^[75]



Press conference for the film at the 2023 Cannes Film Festival

As reported by Variety, Italy's Rai Cinema, alongside Leone Film Group, had acquired the rights for local theatrical release over Paramount as they managed to secure the rights in the middle of the film's production progress.^[76] Right before the film's second trailer premiered in July 2023, it was announced that the film would also be released in IMAX theatres.^{[77][78]}

A small number of cinemas in Denmark, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Brazil, the Netherlands and the United States inserted their own intermission into the film. The theaters were considered to be in violation of their contract by Paramount and Apple Original Films, who took action to have it stopped. The film has been criticized for its long running time,^[79] which Scorsese and editor Thelma Schoonmaker have publicly

defended.^{[80][81]} The film debuted at the #2 position at the global box office followed by *Vijay's* film *Leo*.^[82] The film was released on video on demand (VOD) platforms on December 5, 2023, and became available for streaming on Apple TV+ on January 12, 2024.^{[83][84]}

Reception

Box office

As of March 7, 2024, *Killers of the Flower Moon* has grossed \$68 million in the United States and Canada, and \$89 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$157 million.^{[3][4]} *Variety* noted that under a traditional theatrical release, the film would need to gross \$500–600 million worldwide in order to break even.^[85] In February 2024, *Deadline Hollywood* reported that the film lost Apple around \$20 million during its theatrical run, but made up for it from home rentals.^[86]

In the United States and Canada, the film was projected to gross \$20–25 million from 3,621 theaters in its opening weekend.^[82] The film made \$9.4 million on its first day, including \$2.6 million from Thursday night previews. It went on to debut to \$23 million. The total was above the average Scorsese–DiCaprio collaboration (\$19 million), the highest opening of Scorsese–De Niro collaborations (topping *Cape Fear*'s \$10.2 million in 1991), and the third-best of Scorsese's career; 61% of the audience was male, with "an amazing" 38% being over 45 years old.^{[87][88]} The film made \$9 million in its second weekend (a drop of 61%),^[89] then \$7 million in its third, finishing in third place both times.^[90] Following its 10 Oscar nominations, the film expanded from 16 theaters to 941 in its 15th week of release and made \$220,000, an increase of 3,811% from the previous weekend.^[91]

Critical response

On the review aggregator website *Rotten Tomatoes*, 93% of 454 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 8.6/10. The website's consensus reads: "Enormous in runtime, theme, and achievement, *Killers of the Flower Moon* is a sobering appraisal of America's relationship with Indigenous peoples and yet another artistic zenith for Martin Scorsese and his collaborators."^[92] *Metacritic*, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 89 out of 100, based on 63 critics, indicating "universal acclaim". Audiences polled by *CinemaScore* gave the film an average grade of "A−" on an A+ to F scale, while those polled by *PostTrak* gave it an 88% overall positive score, with 72% saying they would definitely recommend the film.^[87]

Critic Brian Tallerico on *Roger Ebert.com* gave the film 4/4 stars, writing, "In the end, “Killers of the Flower Moon” is like a puzzle—each creative piece does its part to form the complete picture. When it’s put together, it’s depressingly easy to see the wolves. The question now is, what do we do when we find them?"^[93]

In his review of the "meaty and demanding" film following its premiere at Cannes, Peter Debruge of *Variety* commended the story, characters and themes, but criticized the runtime: "In its present form, [*Killers of the Flower Moon*] is still a compelling true story ... It's engrossing from the get-go, the palpable tension methodically echoed by Robbie Robertson's steady-heartbeat score. But it keeps going and going until everyone we care about is dead, dying or behind bars, with nearly an hour still in store".^[79] Conversely,

David Rooney of *The Hollywood Reporter* opined, "The three-and-a-half-hour running time is fully justified in an escalating tragedy that never loosens its grip" and praised the screenplay, direction, cinematography, score, and cast performances (particularly that of Gladstone).^[94]

In *The Guardian*, Peter Bradshaw called the film an "epic of creeping, existential horror about the birth of the American century, a macabre tale of quasi-genocidal serial killings" and also lauded the "performance of tragic force" by Gladstone.^[95] The *Los Angeles Times*' Justin Chang observed that the film "is both like and unlike anything its director has ever done",^[71] writing "Scorsese doesn't just achieve a sense of place; he also pulls off, not for the first time, a passionate and meticulous feat of cultural anthropology. He brings an entire bygone era to rich, teeming life, just before he chokes it off with an all-consuming stench of death."^{[96][71]}

The film's coda in particular drew acclaim for its acknowledgement of the historical silencing of crimes committed against Indigenous peoples, with Joel Robinson of *Slate* writing the scene "turns the camera both inward and onto the audience simultaneously",^[97] and *The New Yorker*'s Richard Brody noting, "Scorsese's control of form and tone, and the bold yet subtle way that he marshals incident, signal that he is intent not merely on narrating history but on troubling the conscience of his (doubtless largely white) audience".^{[98][99]}

Much praise was given to Lily Gladstone's performance, with Anthony Lane of *The New Yorker* describing her as "unmistakably the movie's most compelling presence",^[100] and Justin Chang calling her "an actor who can set off more emotional reverberations with a barely cracked smile than some performers manage in an entire monologue".^{[96][98][101][99]} Richard Brody observed, "[Mollie] is not only the character on whose actions the drama pivots but also the one whose subjectivity, presented sparingly but suggested powerfully, gives the story a sense of inner life."^[98]

Filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón praised the film, saying "Scorsese has chosen a distant and reflective stance, favoring atmosphere over narrative, denying us the easy satisfaction of moral superiority to the men on screen who managed to justify their hideous betrayals of their loved ones and still pretend to have a soul, and confronting audiences with the sin by omission that must rightfully haunt the American soul."^[102]

Some critics lamented the film's decision to focus its narrative on the characters of Ernest and Hale, opining that the character of Mollie felt underdeveloped.^{[100][98][101]} Chang noted "the movie seems curiously reluctant to penetrate the psychology of its Osage characters — a reluctance that feels like timidity, respect or maybe a mix of both."^[96] Angelica Jade Bastién of *Vulture* wrote, "Trapped by the gleam of reverence, [Scorsese] ends up returning to the same racial stereotypes he sought to avoid: The Osage people are noble and connected to the land, but their personalities, their desires, their joys, and, most crucially, their anger remain in the shadowed hallways of a history Scorsese is too timid to approach."^[101]

Accolades

Killers of the Flower Moon received 10 nominations at the 96th Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actor, Best Costume Design, Best Original Song, Best Original Score, Best Production Design, Best Editing, and Best Cinematography.^{[103][104]} The film received zero awards at the 96th Academy Awards.^[105] It was also longlisted, along with *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer*, in 15 categories at the 77th British Academy Film Awards, equaling the BAFTA longlist record for most nominations set by Edward Berger's German anti-war film *All Quiet on the Western Front* (2022).^[106] For her portrayal of Mollie Burkhart, Gladstone became the first Indigenous American actress

to be nominated for an Academy Award.^[107] At age 81, Scorsese earned his tenth nomination for Best Director,^[e] garnering more Oscar nominations for that category (including one prior win) than anyone alive.^[108] Scorsese also became the oldest Best Director nominee, eclipsing John Huston,^[f] who was 79. Schoonmaker earned her ninth nomination for Best Editing, surpassing the record for most nominations in this category.^[109] Robbie Robertson earned his first Academy Award nomination (for Best Original Score), becoming the 64th individual to earn a posthumous nomination for a competitive category.^[110]

Lily Gladstone's loss to Emma Stone for Best Actress at the 96th Academy Awards stirred debate over what some deemed a snub.^[111] Some argued that awarding Stone was a missed opportunity for greater inclusivity to Native Americans, with others arguing that since Stone had already won Best Actress for her performance in *La La Land*, Gladstone was more deserving of the award.^[112] Emma Stone herself was surprised at her win, with her stating, "I think I blacked out. I was very shocked."^[113]

Indigenous response

Christopher Kuo of *The New York Times* wrote that there was a mixed reaction to the film among indigenous people.^[60]

At the film's LA premiere, Christopher Cote, an Osage who was a language consultant for the film, said that he "really wanted this to be from the perspective of Mollie and what her family experienced".^[114] *Slate*'s Joel Robinson, an Osage, expressed similar views, but still praised the film, concurring with former chief of the Osage Nation Jim Gray that he had "never seen a film immerse itself in a culture like this one did with ours". He added that he hoped that the success of the film would mean more opportunities for Indigenous filmmakers to tell stories from their own point of view.^{[97][115]} Maureen Lee Lenker notes in *Entertainment Weekly* that First Nations actress Devery Jacobs, Elora Danan Postoak on *Reservation Dogs*, shared her reaction to the film: "Being Native, watching this movie was f---ing [sic] hellfire. ... Our pride[,] languages, cultures, joy & love are way more interesting & humanizing than showing the horrors white men inflicted on us."; Jacobs also believes Gladstone "carried Mollie [with] tremendous grace", and that though no performances were weak, "each of the Osage characters felt painfully underwritten, while the white men were given way more courtesy and depth."^[116] Indigenous commentator Kate Nelson wrote, "When it comes to Native representation, is *Killers of the Flower Moon* perfect? No. Is it progress? Yes. The film meaningfully moves the entertainment industry forward, making a strong statement that it's no longer acceptable to extract valuable assets from Indigenous communities – whether that be our stories or our natural resources – without our consent and input."^[117]

Gianna Sieke, an Osage princess from 2021 to 2023^[118] who was present for the film's production,^[63] told *TODAY.com* "It does tell our dark history but it's also including things that no one really knows, and it hasn't been expressed to Osage people and anyone because it's a dark history. People don't really talk about it that much. And because of that, (the movie) has made a really big impact. Families are learning to cope and understand."^[63]

Kuo wrote "There seems to be broad agreement in Indigenous circles that the drama succeeded in accurately portraying the culture and language of the Osage people."^[60]

On November 9, 2023, the day that the SAG-AFTRA strike ended, Gladstone posted on social media encouraging Native people to "See it when and only if you feel ready, and see it with people you feel safe with. You'll likely have a lot of generational grief to process."^{[119][120]}

Legislative responses

Lieutenant Governor of Oklahoma Matt Pinnell named the film as a reason to increase subsidies for the film industry in Oklahoma. The Filmed in Oklahoma Act of 2021 allocated \$30 million to film subsidies. Bills to increase the total available subsidies to \$80 million in 2023 failed in the Oklahoma Senate after passing the Oklahoma House of Representatives.^[121]

See also

- *The FBI Story*
- *Tragedies of the Osage Hills*

Notes

- a. Osage: ၫၮၦၵ ၵၵၵၵ ၵၵၵ ၵ'ၵၵ, *Mihopa hlaska žika c'eḏe*.^{[5][6]} The Osage title appears on screen at the end of the film, before the English title.
- b. The federal Burke Act (1906) led to the creation of conservatorships for "incompetent Indians" that required white legal guardians to manage the affairs of Native American wards. All Native Americans with a blood quantum of one-half or more were required to have a court-appointed guardian. Ostensibly set up to protect tribal members, the guardianships became the basis of widespread exploitation of them by white people instead. Appointments historically continued into the 1930s.^{[15][16]}
- c. In addition, Byron, also known as Bryan, had his charges dropped after he turned state's evidence against Kelsie (aka Kelsey) Morrison.^[17]
- d. "Nonhonzhinga" is translated as medicine man.^[18]
- e. This tenth nomination only includes Scorsese's accolades within this Director category. He has additional nominations in writing and producing. He now has the second most, surpassing Steven Spielberg, who has 9 for directing (and 2 wins). Meanwhile, William Wyler maintains the record with 12 nominations (and 3 wins).
- f. John Huston was 79 when he received his final Best Director nomination, for *Prizzi's Honor* (1985).

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External links

- *Killers of the Flower Moon* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5537002/>) at IMDb
 - *Killers of the Flower Moon* (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/killers_of_the_flower_moon) at Rotten Tomatoes
 - Official website (<https://www.killersoftheflowermoonmovie.com/>)
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