Racial Bias in Film Awards Shows: Oscars & Golden Globes

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The Oscars has long been known as the pinnacle award for movies and anyone involved in the making of movies. However, recently it has come under fire with accusations of being racist. People argue that the Oscars are not being fair in who they deem to be winners. This controversy has led to other film award shows to pop up, including the BET awards. BET stands for "Black Entertainment Television" and aims to recognize minorities in the film industry that they feel are underrepresented in the Oscars and other mainstream award shows.

Much of the controversy has been in the 21st century. This project aims to uncover any racial bias in mainstream awards shows over a period of 75 years to determine if this racial bias has been a problem for many years or if the bias has become more prevalent in recent years. It will also determine if the genre of a movie plays a part in getting an actor nominated for an Oscar.

How we will be defining racial bias in the Oscars award show is if the distribution of race within the nominees are different than the distribution that exists in the film industry and Hollywood. For example if 25% of the nominees are Black but there are 50% of Hollywood that is Black then we would conclude that the Oscars do have a racial bias. If, however, the distribution is similar between the two, regardless of how skewed it is towards a certain race, we would not consider this racial bias within the Oscars since they are being consistent with the breakdown in the industry.

Context and Data Generation:

The Academy Awards, or the Oscars, are accolades annually distributed by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) to individuals for their notable achievement in the film industry. Being nominated for an Oscar indicates excellence in one's field and can lead to even greater opportunities for a winner in the future. There are several categories for which one can receive an award, including "Best Picture", "Best Director", and "Best Actor", and nominees and winners are chosen by voting members of AMPAS. The data generation process for our project is the Oscar nomination and voting process which produces the annual list of actors who are nominated for the "Best Actor" Academy Award, and which one of those actors goes on to win the award. Our project will try to uncover any racial bias that exists in this process.

Data Collection Process:

The data needed for this project consisted of two types: data on ethnicities of actors and data on the genres of movies made. The first part involved collecting information on the racial make-up of the actors who were nominated and won the "Best Actor" award and the racial make-up of all the people who acted in lead male roles in all the movies made that year. We decided to start with just the "Best Actor" award because it was a smaller subset of the Oscar awards to begin the study with and gather initial conclusions that we could then use in further explorations of other award categories.

This was done by first scraping the Wikipedia page that listed all the males

nominated and who won each year that the Oscars was held. This page also gave the movie title and the genre of the movie that the nominated actor acted in. This initial scrape gave us a master list that we could then build off of.

The next step was to gather the ethnicity of each actor that was nominated each year. This was done by using another website: www.ethnicelebs.com. Once you look up a celebrity on that page it returns information about him or her, including his or her ethnicity. These pages were then scraped for each actor on the master list.

Once the ethnicities were gathered for all the Oscar nominees, we moved on to gathering information about the general population of actors, or the pool of actors that the nominees were picked from. To do this, we again scraped Wikipedia pages for this information. Wikipedia has a page for each year that lists all the movies made that year. We scraped each page for the relevant information (actors and genre of movie) and created csv files for each year.

Once we had all the csv files we first had to determine the lead male actor in the list of actors and actresses for each movie. In order to do this we parsed through the list for each movie and used another website (www.namegenderpro.com) that determines the gender of a person given his or her name to find which people in the list were actors and which were actresses. We then picked the first person in the list that was male.

The next step was to determine the ethnicity of the lead actor in each movie. This was done in the same way it was done for the nominees.

At this point we had a master list of all Oscar nominated actors, their race, and the genre of the movie they were nominated from for each year from 1934 to 2008. We also had the same data about every movie made every year between 1934 and 2008.

The final piece of data we collected was information about the racial make-up of the actors nominated for the "Best Actors in a Drama" award from the Golden Globes each year between 1934 and 2008. The Golden Globes does not have a "Best Actor" award so we picked the "Best Actor in a Drama" because most of the nominees for the "Best Actor" award at the Oscars was from a drama so we felt this would be the closest comparison.

We did not gather any information about the racial distribution in the USA or Los Angeles/ Hollywood because the project focused on the racial bias in the Oscars and the racial distribution in the entire country is not directly correlated to those who get nominated. The Oscars only get to pick actors from movies so we collected data on the pool of actors they picked from, not everyone who lived in the United States. It is possible that the film industry and Holloywood had a different racial distribution than what existed in the country but that does not show the racial bias in the Oscars; that merely shows the racial bias in Hollywood, which was not the object of this project.

Literary/ Historical Context:

As stated in the introduction, the Oscars have been under fire for suspicion of having a racial bias in deciding who they nominated. According to the *New York Times*, 2016 was the second year in a row that the Oscars had nominated only White people. It also published a fact saying "as of 2012, 94 percent of Academy voters were White and 77 percent of those voters were men" (Gay). They claim this biased board of voters is reflected in the lack of diversity in their nominations.

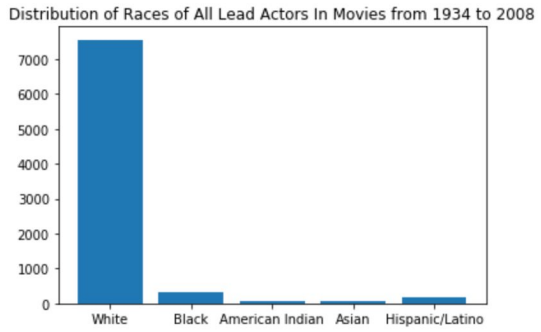
Another fact, written by *The Counter Punch* noticed that "Only 35 Oscars were awarded to Black artists out of more than

2,900 winners in the Academy's 87-year history. While 95% of nominations went to White film stars, less than 4% of the acting awards were given to African Americans" (Syed). These numbers are very skewed and this project aims to find historical trends that either support the present-day racial bias in the Oscars, or uncover that this bias is more prevalent in recent years.

Exploratory Data Analysis:

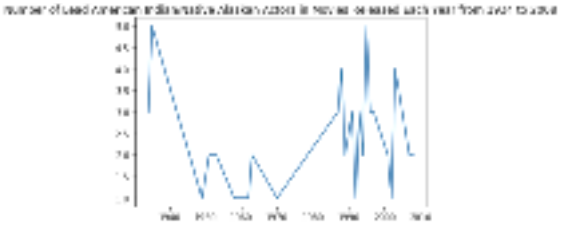
After collecting the data we performed some exploratory data analysis. The analysis was split into two parts: ethnicities and genres. In this section you will see how these two changed over time and what the overall takeaways were just from the raw data.

Part One: Ethnicities



Graph 1: Distribution of Races in All Lead Actors

Graph 2: Number of Lead Black Actors



Graph 3: Number of Lead Native American Actors

Graph 4: Number of Lead Asian Actors

Graph 5: Number of Lead Latino Actors

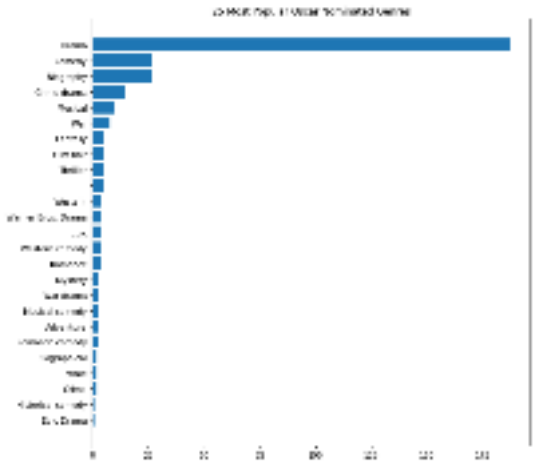
One thing to note before any analysis can be made is that the y-axis is different for each graph. Because these graphs are measuring total counts and not percentages of the total population the axes are different. Hence these graphs cannot be compared exactly.

From graph 1 we can see that the majority of lead actors between 1934 and 2008 are White. And very small percentages are filled in by the rest of the ethnicities. In graph 2 we can see that Black actors did not even act in any movie till the 1950s and since then had a steady increase in the percentage of the actors in Hollywood.

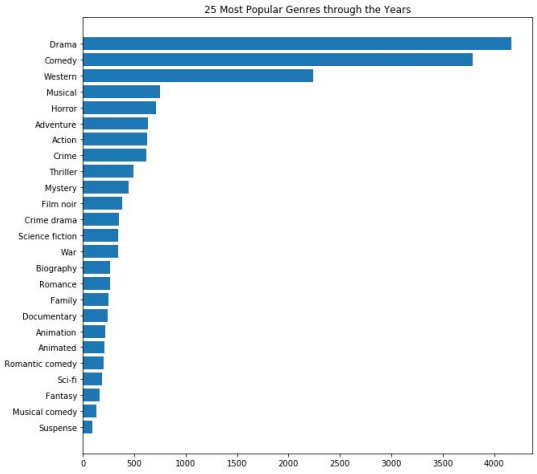
We notice something odd with the distribution of Asian actors and Native American actors. They start out the early part of the 20th century in movies but have several decades in the middle with a very low percentage and then pick back up in the later years of this study.

In graph 5 we can see that the distribution of Hispanic lead actors remained constant up until the 1990s where it then increased. It is interesting to note that Black actors had a spike in numbers also around the 1990s. Both Black and Hispanic actors took a steep dip in the early 2000s.

Part Two: Genres



Graph 6: 25 Most Popular Genres in Nominations

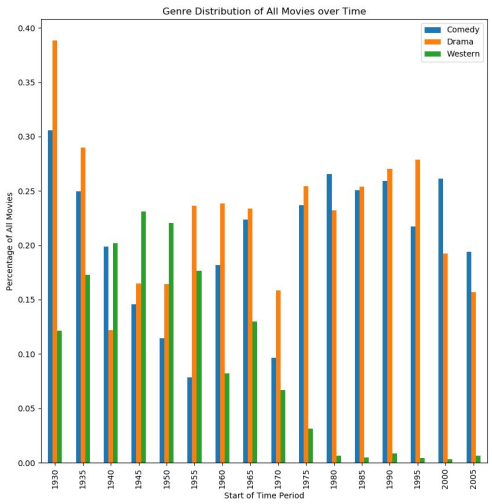


Graph 7: 25 Most Popular Genres in All Movies

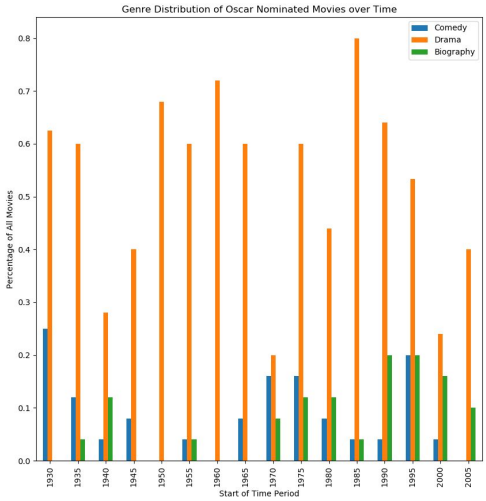
As seen by both graphs, the majority of the movies made each year as well as the majority of the movies that actors get nominated from are dramas. However, comedies are a close second in the genre of movies made each year but they are significantly less in the movies that actors get nominated from. From this we can see that the population distribution of genres is not the same as the distribution of the movies that actors get nominated from. From this difference we can see that an actor has a higher chance of being nominated for the "Best Actor" award if they acted in a drama film as opposed to some other genre, irrespective of their race. This does not mean that we can rule out racial bias in the nomination, but we can say that other factors, such as the genre of the film an actor acted in, plays an important part in getting him nominated.

Visualizations/ Analysis and Conclusion:

The following 5 visuals are on this webpage: *https://mkwan13.github.io/180_final_site/* Please refer to this to see full size images. All explanations for the images are in this section.



Graph 8: Genre of All Movies

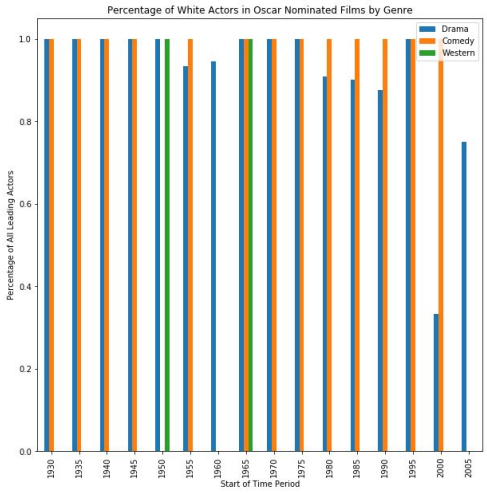


Graph 9: Genre of Movies of the Best Actor Nominees

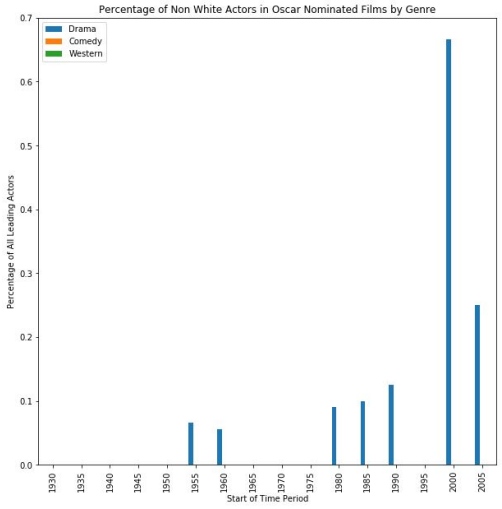
Looking at graph 8 we can see that the one genre that has been consistently the highest percentage of movie genres that the best actor nominees acted in were dramas. This is consistent with the distribution of movies being produced during that 75 year period. In graph 9 we can see that dramas are the most made movies since 1934 and remain at the top into the 21st century.

However, we do not see the same trend for other genres. We can see that "Western" movies were a popular category for nominations to come from in the first half of the century but greatly fell in the later part of the century, almost to 0, and this trend has remained today. This is very different from the genres of movies being produced. A very small percentage of movies being made were of the "Western" genre.

From these two graphs we can conclude that the genre of a movie has some weight in determining whether or not an actor gets nominated for the "Best Actor" award. This does not mean that the Oscars does not have a racial bias; it just means that other factors, such as genre of movie, go into the nomination process (other than an actor's acting performance).



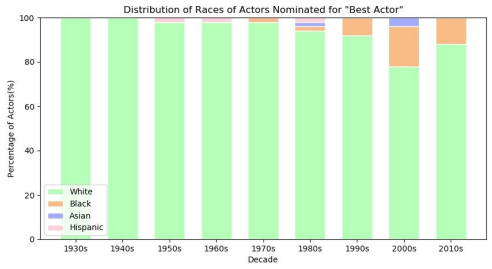
Graph 10: Percentage of White Actors Per Genre



Graph 11: Percentage of Non-White Actors Per Genre

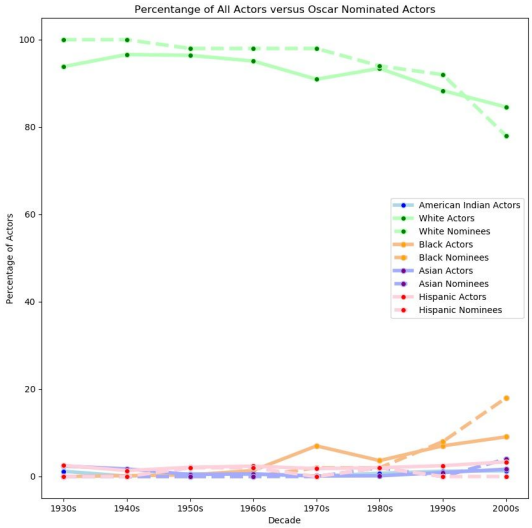
Graphs 10 and 11 do not show the genre distribution of movies that the best actor gets nominated for, like graphs 8 and 9 do, but rather in each genre what the percentage distribution of actor's race is. For example, in the first bars from the 1930s on graph 10 we can see that of the 5 nominees they either were from a drama or comedy and that 100% of actors from each of those genres were white. We can also see from the graph 11 that in the 2000s, of the actors that were nominated and came from a drama, 70% were non-white.

From these two graphs we can see that there are no non-white actors that get nominated from a movie other than a drama. This could be for several reasons, one being that there are not many non-white actors acting in lead roles for other genres. It could potentially show that the Oscars overlook non-white actors in other genres but that cannot be definitively drawn from this graph. It does, however, show a lack of representation in the oscar awards of non white actors in all genres.



Graph 12: Graph of Ethnicity of Nominated Actors

Graph 12 shows the distribution of race among the nominated actors for the "Best Actor" award. We can see that in every decade, between the 1930s and 2000s, the majority of the nominations are White. Racial bias cannot be determined from this graph alone because it does not show the racial distribution of the population of all actors. However, we can see when Black actors were first nominated. This began in the 1950's and grew into the 21st century. However, the percentage of Black actors nominated remains much smaller than the percentage of White actors.



Graph 13: Graph of Nominated versus Total

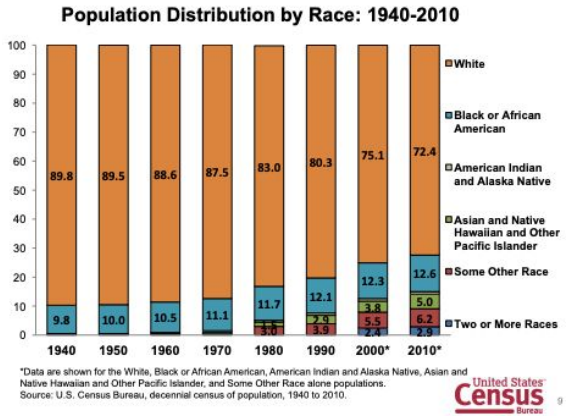


Image 1: Population Distribution 1940-2010 (US Census)

Graph 13 shows the great difference in the diversities of both actors who were nominated and those who acted. We can see that throughout the 75 year period that this study was conducted in, White actors dominated both the nominations as well as those who acted in any movie at all.

The green lines show the percentage of nominees that are White as well as the

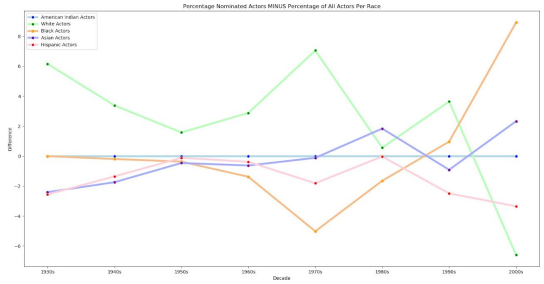
overall population of actors that are White. They are both very high but they both follow a similar distribution. This can also be said about the orange lines, which represent Black actors. This means that the Oscars stay consistent to the racial distribution of the industry.

Since the racial distribution of the industry is not similar to the distribution that can be seen from the US Census graph in image 1 we can say that the film industry as a whole has a racial bias, favoring White actors. Non-white actors, both in the industry and in the nominations are close to 0 percent and only rise in the late 1990s reaching a peak of 20% for Black actors. This is not consistent with the racial distribution in the United States over this time period. It is true that segregation did not get abolished till 1954 and it is fair to assume that Hollywood did not have lead Black actors for that reason but even after the 1950's Hollywood favors White actors. It is fair to conclude that Hollywood has a racial bias and that gets reflected in the Oscars awards.

Another point, that is contradictory to the Oscars having a racial bias against African Americans, is that in the early 21st century was the percentage of White actors in the industry is higher than the percentage of White actors that got nominated and that the percentage of Black actors in the industry is lower than the percentage of Black actors that got nominated. From this it appears as though the Oscars were favoring Black actors.

This shift could be due to the social and media pressures to recognize minorities in the industry or because Black actors truly delivered better acting performances in the more recent years. Regardless, it appears that the Oscars, in recent years, have been rejecting the racial diversity, or lack thereof, that the film industry has, and nominating actors in a different distribution than exists in the overall population of actors.

This trend is noticeable in the early 21st century, up to 2008. However, according to the research presented earlier in his paper, in 2015 and 2016 there were no Black actors nominated. Why this sudden drop in racial diversity exists will have to be further studied.

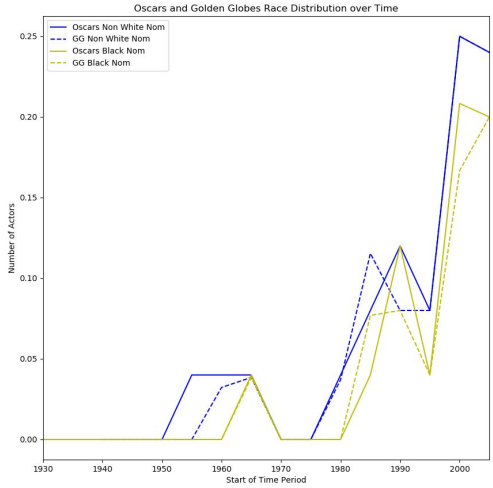


Graph 14: Graph of Nominated versus Total

In graph 14 we plotted the differences in the percentages of each race that exists in the population minus the percentages of the nominees that were each race. When the line is below zero that means there was a larger percentage of the overall industry population that were of that race than were nominated. We can see that White actors held a larger portion of the nominees than they had in the industry up until the late 1900s when they fell below the line. This means that they had a lower percentage of the nominees than they had in the entire population. Just a decade before that, Black actors rose above the zero line meaning they were being nominated at a higher rate than they existed in the industry. This means that in the last 20 years of the 20th century, the Oscars began changing who they nominated and no longer reflected the racial bias in the industry. They appear to be closing the racial gap in the nominees.

This may be because the first Black person to be president of the Academy, elected in 2013, joined the Academy board

in the 1980's. She was probably an influential person and hence was elected to be president in 2013. If that is the case she may have had an influence on who the Academy nominated in the late 1900s (Wikipedia, Cheryl).



Graph 15: Comparison of Oscars to Golden Globes

In order to further compare the racial distribution of the Oscars to the movie industry as a whole, we similarly scraped the ethnicities of actors nominated for the Golden Globe Award for Best Motion Picture – Drama. As can be seen in Graph 15, the distributions of Black nominees as well as Non-White nominees in general of the Oscars follow the same general trend of their Golden Globe nominated counterparts. Despite the Golden Globes nominees being chosen by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association with members composed of journalists and photographers as compared to the actors and directors that nominate for the Oscars, these groups seem to share similar racial biases when nominating for their respective awards, perhaps as a result of popular opinion at the time.

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