Issue #11

Op-Ed: 'Logan's 1st Annual Smackdown of the 93rd Annual Academy Award'

Featured Authors
2018 was one of the most disastrous years in the history of the Academy Awards. While your natural impulse might be to recall the mortifying Best Picture debacle of 2016, wherein “La La Land” was accidentally awarded the coveted prize when “Moonlight” had actually won, 2018 was a remarkable failure for cinema. This year witnessed the complete snubbing of the horror opus “Hereditary” and the subversive Korean drama “Burning,” instead lauding the awards on white saviorist favorite “Green Book” and the neoliberal Trojan Horse “Black Panther.” Many cinephiles, film critics and industry members lost trust in the Oscars that year, witnessing the most enduring and respected film industry awards show pander to popular trends in the name of viewership. 2019 was a redeeming year, but it was not without another set of tragic snubs, particularly of those films released by indie-giant A24.

The Academy is designed exceptionally poorly for contemporary cinema. Those studios and independent distributors who do not have the funds to campaign stand little chance against the titans of cinema who shove drivel down our throats (remember when Disney campaigned “The Lion King” 2019 remake for Best Picture?). The Academy is a homogenous entity, mainly composed of white men. Recently, they have made an effort to be more inclusive, but the selection process inherently functions to favor white men as a result of requiring industry involvement or awarding. There are many knowledgeable members, no doubt, but there are many ill-suited to make these career-making decisions. In a 2019 interview with “The Hollywood Reporter,” actress Chloe Grace-Moretz said she planned to watch screeners with her family and see what “they liked.” For an awards show purported to be the most esteemed in the entire world, passive film-viewing with your family cannot cut it.
Nonetheless, I think it is crucial to acknowledge where the 2021 Academy Award nominations get it right and where they get it wrong—really wrong. Below you'll find a series of hits and a series of misses. I have seen the majority of the films nominated except for in the documentaries category and the following major 2020 releases: “Judas and the Black Messiah,” “The Father,” “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom” and “Wolfwalkers.”

**Hit:** “Minari”
"Minari" has been nominated for six Oscars: Best Picture, Achievement in Directing (Lee Isaac Chung), Best Performance by a Lead Actor (Steve Yuen), Best Performance by a Supporting Actress (Youn Yuh-jung), Best Original Screenplay (Lee Isaac Chung), and Achievement in Score (Emile Mosseri). These nominations are spot on in my mind, although frankly, I think the film should have also been nominated for Cinematography. Mosseri is getting his due after being snubbed for his immaculate score in "The Last Black Man in San Francisco" and Yuen has ascended from his side character role in the "The Walking Dead" to a sensation in his own right. Additionally, I am glad to see that this film is not nominated for Best International Film, seeing that this is an American film that challenges the unscrupulous assumptions of whiteness in film. Oh, by the way, this should win Best Picture!

**Miss: Snubbing “i’m thinking of ending things”**

Charlie Kaufman’s latest film is a masterwork of storytelling that blends philosophy, existential horror and meta-commentary into a dreadful and surreal pastiche. In my view, "i’m thinking of ending things" cements Kaufman as one of the preeminent minds in contemporary cinema, one of the most snubbed minds. I’m not surprised that this film did not get nominated for Best Picture, seeing as the film is so esoteric and the Academy strays from subversive material often. However, it is criminal that this film has been snubbed for Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Editing.
Darius Marder’s directorial debut has been nominated for six Oscars: Best Picture, Best Performance by a Lead Actor (Riz Ahmed), Best Performance by a Supporting Actor (Paul Raci), Best Sound, Best Original Screenplay (Darius Marder, Abraham Marder) and Film Editing (Mikkel E.G. Nielsen). I’m unsurprised but equally happy to see this fantastic film getting the recognition it deserves in all the right places. I have a special connection to this film as a metal drummer who has had some minor hearing issues and has anxiety about this exact sort of thing happening. In my view, this film’s sound should easily win, Riz Ahmed should take the cake for Best Actor and Paul Raci should win for Best Supporting.

**Miss:** Snubbing “Feels Good Man”
Man,” which tells the story of the internet meme Pepe the Frog, is a remarkable case study in internet communication, sociology and memes as culture. The warmth and earnestly of this film radiates from the screen and nearly brought me to tears on my first watch. I will have much more to say about this film in my top 10 of 2020, but check out this conversation that I recently had with the directors of this film, Giorgio Angelini and Arthur Jones, and Puget Sound Professor of Internet Communication, Nick Brody: https://youtu.be/DK1XKBVvUF0.

**Hit:** Vanessa Kirby in “Pieces of a Woman”

“Pieces of a Woman” may be a disappointing film, but Vanessa Kirby’s performance is undeniably top-notch. Kirby employs subtle mannerisms that texture her character and achieves a numbness that any depressive can identify with. Her performance in the opening of this film, which is shot in a single, 30 minute take, is stunning. For that alone I would have nominated Kirby, but she maintains her commitment to her role throughout the two-hour runtime without any compromise.

**Miss:** “The Trial of the Chicago 7”
“The Trial of the Chicago 7” has received 6 more Oscar nominations than it deserves: Best Picture, Best Performance by a Supporting Actor (Sacha Baron Cohen), Best Original Screenplay (Aaron Sorkin), Film Editing (Alan Baumgarten), Cinematography (Phedon Papamichael) and Best Original Song (“Hear My Voice” by Celeste and Daniel Pemberton). An aggressively average film basking in naive, neoliberal conceptions of racism, “The Trial of the Chicago 7” archetypes the members of the Chicago riots in 1968 and uses humor to avoid confronting the most disturbing aspects of this event. This film is suffocatingly edited, filled with unnecessary cuts and coverage angles to placate even the most bored viewers. The Academy seems to adhere to the philosophy that the most editing is the best editing (see “Bohemian Rhapsody” for more evidence), but it is often the inverse case. Cohen is fine in the film, but he’s proven himself to be a formidable screen presence in other films. This is 2020’s “Green Book.”

**Miss:** Snubbing Delroy Lindo in “Da 5 Bloods”
Delroy Lindo gave a career-best performance in Spike Lee’s latest and went places none of us expected him to ever go. A menacing and capricious Trump supporter plagued by insecurities and PTSD, Lindo’s character Paul epitomizes the dark side of American exceptionalism. When the film premiered in May 2020, I was prepared to hand him the Oscar then and there without considering any other performances for the category. Having seen “Sound of Metal,” I can’t say that I would jump to that conclusion so easily now, but to have been so completely snubbed is shocking.

**Miss:** Snubbing “And Then We Danced”

“And Then We Danced” is a gorgeous LGBTQ drama from the country of Georgia. Featuring lush, vibrant cinematography, a phenomenal score and a tender story about two exceptional Georgian dancers who fall in love, this love looks radically different in
I never expect the Academy to agree with my personal preference on films, especially given my proclivity for art-house and other genres which are alienating to the mainstream. Perhaps then that’s why I am more content with this year’s selection than previous years; of course, contentment is relevant. Someone will probably see this year’s list and be ecstatic with the selections by the Academy. More power to those people. Just remember that the film medium now doles out some 20,000 new films a year, so there is bound to be something that we overlook. The question is then: do we still need the Academy?

The 2021 Academy Awards will take place on Sunday, April 25th at the Dolby Theatre, and will be broadcast to the public on ABC.

Logan Canada-Johnson, Staff Writer, Film Analyst

Logan Canada-Johnson is a Communication Studies and Philosophy double-major from the East Bay, California. He primarily writes about film releases and film culture, but is also interested in philosophy. He performs a number of other roles on campus, including Campus Films Programmer, President of UPS Film Club, officer in Sigma Alpha Epsilon, and debater in Ethics Bowl. He plans on obtaining a Doctorate in Cinema Studies after his Bachelors.

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I am a Gen Z born in 1997, which is the cusp of the millennial generation (1981-1996). Honestly, I thought I was a millennial for years and I was proud of it. Even though they’ve been the target of criticism for a while with things as mundane as avocado toast, I wasn’t ashamed of being a part of it. I was shocked and saddened the day I discovered that I had been living a lie and was in fact Gen Z. This is not a hate letter or exposé piece on Gen Z, but I was ashamed to now have to use that label. If millennials think they got it rough, the Gen Z’s are basically laughing stocks. The millenials are the opening act and we are the closers.

This probably over dramatic reaction partly comes from feeling disconnected from people my age way before I knew what different generations were. It’s like I’m in a constant state of imposter syndrome and my whole generation is the cool people party I can’t get into. I watched movies those just a few years younger than me think are dumb and I listen to “grandpa” music from the 50s to the 70s. I hated skinny jeans when they first got big and wore straight leg and boot cut to imitate bell bottoms. I gave into only wearing one of your backpack straps, despite it killing my shoulder and finding it so effing stupid and pointless. I felt (and still do at times) more comfortable talking to a group of my mom’s friends then with my peers. I am also a die hard person pleaser, so when a certain thing about me that I can’t control gets insulted, especially by my superiors, I do all I can to distance myself from it. Even when I know the reasonings are faulty, I don’t want to be lumped into the whole, when I never fit in there in the first place. It’s like I’m a knight trying to defend my honor.

I think it’s important to critically analyze oneself from time to time to gain a better understanding of how you interact with and affect the world. It’s a good way to humble oneself, adapt to a better version of oneself and better cooperate with those outside of one’s bubble. Remember, not all critiques are unfounded, unhelpful or intentionally cruel. First, fellow Gen Z’s are told over and over that we are “too sensitive,” especially when it comes to the 2010s rise of PC culture. In many ways I agree with this. We need and expect trigger warnings on everything (this critique does not apply flash/epilepsy warnings obviously) and if it doesn’t happen, a cesspool of anger floods the comments of every social media platform. It’s as
I knew it was ridiculous and bad, but it really hit me when I read my syllabus for my Intro to Anthropology class, taught by Professor Gardner. I’m not sure if other professors have done this, but he dedicated an entire section to a trigger warning for millennial and post-millennial students. I was sort of insulted but also really glad that he brought this issue up.

He said “our discipline’s empirical foundation, and our esteem for firsthand, immersive, detailed experiential data, means that students in this course will pursue and perhaps collect material that distills and analyzes a wide variety of difficult, disturbing, wrenching, frustrating, and compelling experiences. Expect to cross paths with others painful experiences and sufferings so readily found in our world.”

This may seem unfair to place on those who aren’t yet in the professional world, but we are about to be. You can’t be prepared for everything (as a control freak that’s hard to say). There are certain times were a trigger warning can be necessary when it’s something no one could expect, but if it’s a youtube video about suicide, a trigger warning for self harm and depression should be obvious or a movie about periods, blood and vomiting would be heavily implied. There’s also movie and video game trailers with ratings that can disclose certain things that happen in the movie like gun violence or assault, without specific trigger warnings of everything that happens with specific time stamps. I am all for being courteous for people’s needs and I do it to an extreme at times, but we will not be able to enter into and survive the adult world if we can’t better handle the unexpected and the ugly. The world is filled with it and it won’t change overnight for anyone any time soon.

In the same camp as trigger warnings, there’s linguistic policing that especially surges in current college spaces. I am not okaying racial, sexist, or LGBTQ+ slurs be back and proud in our regular vernacular. Something that has caused that much harm and anguish should be buried (unless those within the community feel comfortable reclaiming it). It’s okay, natural and unavoidable in most cases to get pissed off or offended by something. We all grow up in different environments with different values, contexts, and dissect every little thing a person
anything because of the rigidity our generation is implementing in language. Not saying everyone’s voice doesn’t matter or certain people should be silenced for justly calling someone out, but again, if we attempted to cater language—which is one of the most complex concepts we have ever invented—our dictionary would probably be a fourth of the size and so much depth and color would be lost. Language is just not built to change that quickly.

Then, there’s our dependence on our screens and social media. At this point no generation is immune to this—I’ve seen many in their 70s and 80s glued to their phones—but Gen Zs role at TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram, which has led to a huge spike in depression and anxiety, has negatively impacted how we interact with the outside world and has warped our relationship to our bodies, as well as how we judge other people’s bodies. We love to put all of our value in how many likes, shares and followers we have and base who we deem worthy based on those numbers. It’s not an isolated issue, but no generation before has put all that they have into pictures that move on a screen that fits in your pocket. Millennials created it, but we gorge it down.

Similar to the phones, we are never satisfied with sitting still. We have this constant urge/need in our hearts to make things change. Back when I was growing up in the 2000s and centuries before then, things such as technology, clothing, hairstyles, slang, etc. lasted for at least a decade. Now, you are lucky if it doesn’t go out of style in a year. Phones get updated once or twice a year. Slang is moving so fast, people only two to three years younger than me make me feel stupid and ancient (as a 23 year old) to the point where they are basically meaningless and hodgepodges of something resembling a word. We don’t even have time to say full words. You can now make an entire sentence with just abbreviations. Apparently Gen Z’s are going after millennials for their side parts and skinny jeans, when we are basically recycling what those in their 40s and 50s (who grew up in the 70s and 80s) did with middle parts or curtain bangs, the miniest of crop tops, scrunchies and mom jeans. It bothers me because we don’t appreciate the beauty of the now, but mostly because we insult those who can’t keep up with 17 year olds who are changing at faster rates then any other generation. We get upset about other generations bringing us down rag on
Change isn’t necessarily a bad thing, especially since it’s what all living beings do, but it leads to my last critique that we completely erase or make light of the successes and good ideas of older generations. This is probably a thing every generation does to one another (especially in decades like the 70s when kids heavily critiqued their parents who grew up in the 50s), but I find that we have created the biggest rift between us and the baby boomers (insert the “okay boomer” joke for the thousandth time). We utterly REFUSE to listen to those who, yes screwed up a lot of things, but also brought many things to us that would not be around without them. Things like civil rights, Vietnam War, LGBTQ+, women’s protests, the scanning/tunneling microscope, DNA fingerprinting, the portable dialysis machine, text to speech technology, musical synthesizer, ethernet, seatbelts, record player, black and white tv, the huge cellular phone/macintosh computer that made reading this article on our phones or laptops possible, etc. The majority in past generations gave up everything and lived/worked like hell to make things as safe as flawed humans can make the world. There are many things about older generations that make me mad, especially when it comes to bigotry and having to undo the mess that doesn’t seem to end, but the biggest thing to remember is our hands aren’t dirt free either. We make mistakes everyday that worsen our current, most pressing issues. We both make/made mistakes and we both have so much success stories to share. We don’t have to agree on everything. We won’t agree on everything. Stay critical and outspoken, but don’t completely shut your ears off. That stubbornness to not work together and give each other a platform is exactly what led to the problems of the past still haunting our future (and possible 5X great grandkids who will one day roll their eyes at us for how dumb we were).

After bombarding with so many negatives, here are positives that have made me not ashamed to be a Gen Z. I want to break this “snowflake” stupidity once and for all. It’s not even accurate or clever. Apparently there are studies that have busted the myth that every snowflake is different. So if you are one who uses it to roll your eyes at Gen Z’s, you are no better than when they insult you and it doesn’t even prove your point. I really don’t understand why being told you’re “special” is such a bad thing. We aren’t the first generation to be told some of us are special. That’s just not possible.

Yes, telling every child they’re special can lead to egotism/entitlement and
they don't have to conform to everyone's expectations. You learn the hard truth that not everything works out and you can't technically be whatever you want to be, but that isn't an exclusive problem to Gen Z. It's been a struggle every human in all of history will experience. Everyone has those soul crushing breaks and the "aren't I good enough?" or "but I'm so much better than them" self talk. No one's good at rejection, no matter if you were told you were special or not. Also, we are all technically special biologically when our fingerprint matches no one else's on the planet. Because of all the generations of parents, we all have completely unique ancestry and DNA (unless you are identical twins). Isn't that a beautiful thought that no one can replicate your exact looks, talents and personality? Isn't that what we should always strive for? If you have ever read something like "A Wrinkle In Time" where a long line of kids who all look and dress the same and are bouncing red rubber balls in unison in front of mirror image tan houses until one kid screws up and gets taken away, then you can understand how scary a world with no one special can look like.

Using our heightened sensitivity as a positive, instead of the usual negative is how we are the most inclusive generation when it comes to mental health, disabilities, race, women, LGBTQ+, etc. People think the perceived tsunamis worth of sensitivity is something we caused. We are told we've made things harder than they need to be and if you were taught to harden up, you wouldn't be so soft. So many people from past generations have come forward as suffering from a severe mental illness or coming out as queer and third gender. We had mental hospitals and mental issues long before Gen Z's, and gender/sexual fluidity has been around for centuries. The big difference is we actually give people a chance to work through it. It was always there, but was shoved under the carpet and it was successful for quite a bit until they inevitably committed suicide or they couldn't take it anymore and yelled it out. Telling and showing people—whomever they are or the hardships they go through—that they can share themselves completely, they turn out to be much healthier people, mentally and physically.

In addition, we are the most concerned with the environment and we are the ones who are coming up with the changes. I have no statistics to back me up, but based on cultural assumptions living in the U.S. my whole life, mate change deniers out of all
rolling on climate change science and policies by a long shoot, but we are making sure they get heard to a capacity never before seen (thanks to things like social media and our unabashed passion). Because our brains thrive off speed, we are coming up with technology that will greatly improve many industries, such as medical, forensic, automotive and environmental that will hopefully make the world the most inclusive/accessible it can. Whether people like it or not, they are relying on us to change the future for the better. I think our generation has a lot we need to unpack and reflect on internally so we don’t get carried away, but I know we can prove people wrong. I’m sure you picked up on plenty of contradictions in the positives and negatives, but that’s true of every generation. NO generation is perfect, so it’s inevitable. I still feel like a bit of an outsider in my generation and there are things people my age do that make me crazy, but I am proud to be a Gen Z.

Regan Strauss, Staff Writer

I am an English Major with a Creative Writing Emphasis. I'm in LA, California this spring 2021 where I was born and grew up. I am interested In writing about a majority of social issues (Frankly too many to list), music, and movies through this publication. Might get a graduate degree in creative writing (undecided). I want to be a professional freelance writer who focuses on poetry, short stories, and opinion/research essays after I graduate.

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