

2013 Academy Award Nominations: “And the Winner is ... The CIA”

The Oscars: Extraordinary and glaring contradictions

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This year’s Academy Award nominations were announced Thursday morning during a media event at the Samuel Goldwyn Theater in Beverly Hills, California.

The award ceremony itself will take place February 24 at the Dolby Theater in Hollywood.

In 2012 the American film industry presented an extraordinary contradiction, between those showing an interest in social life and history, on the one hand, and those eagerly endorsing the “dark side” of imperialist policy, on the other. In their own inimitably muddle-headed fashion, the Oscar nominations reflect this divide.

With twelve, Steven Spielberg’s *Lincoln* received the largest number of nominations, including those for best picture, actor (Daniel Day-Lewis), supporting actor (Tommy Lee Jones), supporting actress (Sally Field), director (Spielberg), adapted screenplay (Tony Kushner), cinematography (Janusz Kaminski), costume design (Joanna Johnston), editing (Michael Kahn) and original score (John Williams).



This film about a social revolution, one of the most immense struggles for social progress of the 19th century, shared in the awards nomination bounty with *Zero Dark Thirty*, Kathryn Bigelow's quasi-fascistic glorification of the role played by the CIA in the so-called "war on terror," which was tapped for five awards; *Django Unchained*, Quentin Tarantino's foul and racist fantasy about the antebellum period, also nominated in five categories; and *Argo*, another tribute to the CIA, directed by Ben Affleck, this one concerning the Iran hostage crisis of 1979-80, which was named for seven possible awards.

Opposed groupings and factions within the film industry may back the different works, but it doesn't take any stretch of the imagination to suppose that a fairly representative figure in contemporary Hollywood might well favor both *Lincoln* and, say, Bigelow's deplorable film. The degree of bewilderment, willful or otherwise, about both artistic and political matters is that great.

The nominations overall demonstrated an effort to cover every possible base.

Life of Pi, a murky, semi-religious ode to the little things in life, which also preaches ethnic and religious tolerance, won eleven nominations, second most to *Lincoln*. One of David O. Russell's weaker films, *Silver Linings Playbook*, about a semi-dysfunctional working class couple in Philadelphia, one of this year's official "tributes to the human spirit," was nominated in eight categories. An obligatory big-budget action picture, *Skyfall*, the latest James Bond, was nominated for five awards. A sentimental (and musical) depiction of poverty and oppression in 19th century France, *Les Miserables*, carried off eight nominations.



Beasts of the Southern Wild

Also receiving recognition, somewhat surprisingly, were the independent *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, a poetical consideration of post-Katrina Louisiana (four nominations), and Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke's *Amour*, about an elderly couple confronting disease and the approach of death (five nominations). The interesting *Searching for Sugar Man* was nominated in the best documentary feature category.



Searching for Sugar Man

The Academy Awards process is always a peculiar one. The combination of confusion, liberal good intentions, semi-philistinism, self-congratulation and political blindness is a particular expression, refracted through the peculiarities of the entertainment business, of the thinking and feeling of sections of the better-paid professional middle classes in America. This is not the best crowd, and it is not the worst.

To the extent that such people, including of course Spielberg himself, remain in thrall to the Democratic Party and Barack Obama, they are both politically and artistically limited. The subordination to the Democrats speaks to and ensures their distance from the concerns and needs of the overwhelming majority of the working population. Insulated from the economic hardships facing tens of millions and all too ignorant of history and the social process, prominent figures in the film world tend to accept the view self-servingly advanced by the media that the mass of the American people is backward and conservative. To a shameful extent they cower before the right-wing media, terrified of being attacked as “un-American” and unpatriotic.

This is bound up with the ongoing consequences of the anti-communist purges of the 1950s, which still haunt Hollywood. The most “radical” and “controversial” work today remains firmly within the framework of an acceptance of the present social and economic order.

Events will help clarify the best elements in filmmaking. One can even imagine a day when considerable numbers in Hollywood may be able to distinguish between a work that celebrates the cause of human liberation and one that identifies with its bitterest and most murderous enemies.

ANNEX

The Complete List of Nominations

Here is the complete nominations lists:

Best Motion Picture

Argo
Amour
Beasts of the Southern Wild
Django Unchained
Les Misérables
Life of Pi
Lincoln
Silver Linings Playbook
Zero Dark Thirty

Achievement in Directing

Ang Lee, *Life of Pi*
Benh Zeitlin, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*
David O. Russell, *Silver Linings Playbook*
Michael Haneke, *Amour*
Steven Spielberg, *Lincoln*

Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role

Bradley Cooper, *Silver Linings Playbook*
Daniel Day-Lewis, *Lincoln*
Denzel Washington, *Flight*
Hugh Jackman, *Les Misérables*
Joaquin Phoenix, *The Master*

Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role

Emmanuelle Riva, *Amour*
Jennifer Lawrence, *Silver Linings Playbook*
Jessica Chastain, *Zero Dark Thirty*
Naomi Watts, *The Impossible*
Quvenzhané Wallis, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*

Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role

Alan Arkin, *Argo*
Christoph Waltz, *Django Unchained*
Phillip Seymour Hoffman, *The Master*
Robert De Niro, *Silver Linings Playbook*
Tommy Lee Jones, *Lincoln*

Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role

Amy Adams, *The Master*
Anne Hathaway, *Les Misérables*
Helen Hunt, *The Sessions*
Jacki Weaver, *Silver Linings Playbook*
Sally Field, *Lincoln*

Best Animated Feature Film

Brave
Frankenweenie
ParaNorman
The Pirates! Band of Misfits
Wreck-It Ralph

Original Screenplay

Amour, Michael Haneke
Django Unchained, Quentin Tarantino
Flight, John Gatins
Moonrise Kingdom, Wes Anderson and Roman Coppola
Zero Dark Thirty, Mark Boal

Adapted Screenplay

Argo, Chris Terrio
Beasts of the Southern Wild, Lucy Alibar and Benh Zeitlin
Life of Pi, David Magee
Lincoln, Tony Kushner
Silver Linings Playbook, David O. Russell

Best Foreign-Language Film

A Royal Affair (Denmark)
Amour (Austria)
No (Chile)
War Witch (Canada)
Kontiki (Norway)

Original Score

Anna Karenina, Dario Marianelli
Argo, Alexandre Desplat
Life of Pi, Mychael Danna
Lincoln, John Williams

Skyfall, Thomas Newman

Original Song

"Before My Time," J. Ralph; *Chasing Ice*

"Everybody Needs a Best Friend," Walter Murphy and Seth McFarlane; *Ted*

"Pi's Lullaby," Mychael Danna and Bombay Jayashri; *Life of Pi*

"Skyfall," Adele Adkins and Paul Epworth; *Skyfall*

"Suddenly," Claude-Michel Schönberg, Herbert Kretzmer and Alain Bouilil; *Les Misérables*

Achievement in Production Direction

Anna Karenina

The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey

Les Misérables

Life of Pi

Lincoln

Achievement in Cinematography

Anna Karenina, Seamus McGarvey

Django Unchained, Robert Richardson

Life of Pi, Claudio Miranda

Lincoln, Janusz Kaminski

Skyfall, Roger Deakins

Achievement in Costume Design

Anna Karenina, Jacqueline Durran

Les Misérables, Paco Delgado

Lincoln, Joanna Johnston

Mirror Mirror, Eiko Ishioka

Snow White and the Huntsman, Colleen Atwood

Best Documentary Feature

5 Broken Cameras

The Gatekeepers

How to Survive a Plague

The Invisible War

Searching for a Sugar Man

Best Documentary Short Subject

Inocente

Kings Point

Mondays at Racine

Open Heart

Redemption

Achievement in Film Editing

Argo
Life of Pi
Lincoln
Silver Linings Playbook
Zero Dark Thirty

Achievement in Makeup & Hairstyling

Hitchcock
The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey
Les Misérables

Best Animated Short Film

Adam and Dog
Fresh Guacamole
Head Over Heels
Maggie Simpson in "The Longest Daycare"
Paperman

Best Live-Action Short Film

Asad
Buzkashi Boys
Curfew
Death of a Shadow
Henry

Achievement in Sound Editing

Argo
Django Unchained
Life of Pi
Skyfall
Zero Dark Thirty

Achievement in Sound Mixing

Argo
Les Misérables
Life of Pi
Lincoln
Skyfall

Achievement in Visual Effects

The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey
Life of Pi
Marvel's The Avengers
Prometheus
Snow White and the Huntsman

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