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The Brokebacklash

Hollywood to homos: "Whoa, cowboy!"

I know what you're thinking: Get over it.

But with the April 4 release of *Brokeback Mountain* on DVD, I still find myself trying to wrap my head around the film's shocking ending. And I'm not talking about Jack's untimely death.

Leading up to the Academy Awards ceremony March 5, every indication was that *Brokeback* would be named Best Picture: It received the most nominations, it won the top prize at the Golden Globes, and it swept the Producers/Directors/Writers Guild awards.

Of course, leading up to the 2004 election, every indication was that Americans would fire Dubya, so my crystal ball must be foggy. But this is Tinseltown! I figured those Hollywood liberals would proudly embrace this moment to tell 1 billion viewers worldwide that the year's best film was about two cowboys in love.

Instead, the academy honored *Crash*, a supremely mediocre melodrama about a topic that Spike Lee handled much better 16 years earlier with *Do the Right Thing*.

I explained this to my straight friends using terminology they could understand: Imagine the Pittsburgh Steelers going up against the Peoria Podunks, leading 72-0 until the fourth quarter and then losing the game on a bad call from the ref, who didn't even see the damn play.

Los Angeles Times film critic

Kenneth Turan was more-direct: "For people who were discomfited by *Brokeback Mountain* but wanted to be able to look themselves in the mirror and feel like they were good, productive liberals, *Crash* provided the perfect safe harbor. They could vote for it in good conscience...and not feel that there was any stain on their liberal credentials for shunning what *Brokeback* had to offer."

Annie Proulx, who penned the novella that inspired *Brokeback*, responded to the snub with a scathing *Guardian* column about clueless film industry voters, "many living cloistered lives behind wrought-iron gates or in deluxe rest homes, out of touch not only with the shifting larger culture and the yeasty ferment that is America these days, but also out of touch with their own segregated city.... Next year we can look to the awards for controversial themes on the punishment of adulterers with a branding iron in the shape of the letter A, runaway slaves and the debate over free silver."

So what went wrong? There are several possibilities:

- **The rural thing.** Academy members can relate to Los Angeles (*Crash*) more than Wyoming (*Brokeback*).

- **The hype thing.** *Brokeback* came with months of tremendous expectations, so voters might have been underwhelmed, while *Crash* came out of nowhere.

Tony Curtis, 80, who seemed to have no problem with cross-dressing in *Some Like It Hot*, sniffed: "This picture is not as important as we make it. It's nothing unique. The only thing unique about it is they put it on the screen. And they make 'em [male gay lovers] cowboys.... Howard Hughes and John Wayne wouldn't like it."



Jim's Closet

BY JIM RADOSTA

- **The gay thing.** My worst fear is that the suffering of gay people simply doesn't elicit sympathy from homophobes.

Conservative academy members like 89-year-old Ernest Borgnine didn't even bother watching their screeners: "I know they say it's a good picture, but I don't care to see it. If John Wayne were alive, he'd be rolling over in his grave."



Did homophobia kill *Brokeback Mountain*'s shot at Oscar gold?

Or perhaps these vapid celebs watched it and thought: "Eh, 20 years in a loveless marriage? Tough shit—I've been in a loveless marriage for 40!"

- **None of the above.** A Hollywood insider friend of mine—who happens to work for a recent Oscar winner—insists the upset had nothing to do with queers. She says Lionsgate orchestrated a shrewd campaign to basically buy itself an Oscar: The studio seduced academy members by mailing 130,000 DVDs—a \$4 million effort for a film that cost \$7.5 million to make.

Ultimately, this is what you get when you seek validation from an awards show. Good cinema is good cinema, and *Brokeback Mountain* certainly doesn't need a trophy to prove that. Besides, now it can join the ranks of other Best Picture losers like *Citizen Kane*, *The Shawshank Redemption* and *Pulp Fiction* instead of being listed alongside overrated crap like *Shakespeare in Love*, *Braveheart* and *Gladiator*.

And technically the awards season ended with a victory March 27, when *Brokeback* was honored by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. Director Ang Lee's classy acceptance speech exuded warm fuzzies instead of sour grapes.

"To end our *Brokeback* journey here tonight is like coming home," he said. "The fact is this: that *Brokeback Mountain* has helped to change the world.... When the world is made better for one gay or lesbian person, it's made better for everyone." 10

Watch the 17th annual GLAAD MEDIA AWARDS 9 p.m. April 15 on Logo and 11 p.m. April 16 on VH1.

Arts and Culture Editor JIM RADOSTA needs your feedback. Write to jim@justout.com.