

Black Actors Make Oscar History

Foxx wins for 'Ray'; Freeman for 'Million Dollar Baby'

for "Training Day" and "Monster's Ball." With a supporting actor nomination for the hit-man thriller "Collateral," Foxx, 37, also became the first black actor to compete in two categories in the same year.

This time out, blacks overall had their best year ever at the Oscars, earning a record five of 20 acting nominations, including the two for Foxx. Don Cheadle was nominated as best actor and Sophie Okonedo as best supporting actress for "Hotel Rwanda."

"It's kinda like Def Oscar Jam tonight," irreverent host Chris Rock said during his opening monologue.

Nominated three times previously, Freeman, 67, won for his role as a worldly wise ex-boxer doing odd jobs at a gym run by his best pal (Clint Eastwood). The role was trademark Freeman, an understated mix of rascally humor, wispy melancholy, untarnished decency and towering inner strength.

For most of their history, the Oscars have largely been a whites-only affair. Blacks account for just 3.2 percent of the acting nominations, and while that figure is up from 2.8 percent three years ago, it remains a weak track record, considering blacks make up 13 percent of the U.S. population.

Until recent years, black actors had few opportunities to appear in serious films that might catch Oscar attention.

"Black movies don't have real names, they have names like 'Barbershop,'" Rock quipped. "That's not a name, that's just a location."

There were only a handful of black nominees in the first four decades of the Oscars and just two winners, supporting actress Hattie McDaniel for 1939's "Gone With the Wind" and best actor Poitier for 1963's "Lilies of the Field."

A surge of nominations for blacks in the early 1970s was followed by a long drought. In the 1980s, black actors re-



Jamie Foxx (left) and Morgan Freeman celebrate their winning Oscars. Foxx was voted best actor and Freeman best supporting actor. (AP photo)



Beyonce Knowles arrives for the Vanity Fair post-Oscars party at Morton's in West Hollywood, Calif. Sunday Knowles performed two nominated songs at the awards show. (AP photo)

Academy Awards Host Chris Rock backstage at the 77th Academy Awards. (AP Photo)

(AP) - Jamie Foxx and Morgan Freeman made it another record

night for black actors at the Academy Awards, their wins coming just three years after Denzel Washington and Halle Berry shattered the Oscars' racial ceiling.

"It means that Hollywood is continuing to make history," Freeman said backstage. "We're evolving with the rest of the world."

Foxx, who went into Sunday's competition as one of the most certain front-runners in Oscar history, won the best-actor prize for his extraordinary emulation of Ray Charles in the biopic "Ray." Freeman took the supporting-actor honor for his role in "Million Dollar Baby."

In an acceptance speech both funny and emotional, Foxx recalled being intro-

duced years ago to pioneering black actor Sidney Poitier.

"He said, 'I give you responsibility.' So I'm taking that responsibility tonight," Foxx said. "Thanks, Sidney."

Foxx also paid tribute to his late grandmother Estelle, the person he has credited often with shaping his life.

"She still talks to me now, only now she talks to me in my dreams," he said, breaking into tears. "And I can't wait to go to sleep tonight because we have a lot to talk about. I love you."

It was only the second time in the Oscars' 77-year history that blacks earned two of the four acting awards, following Washington and Berry's lead-acting wins



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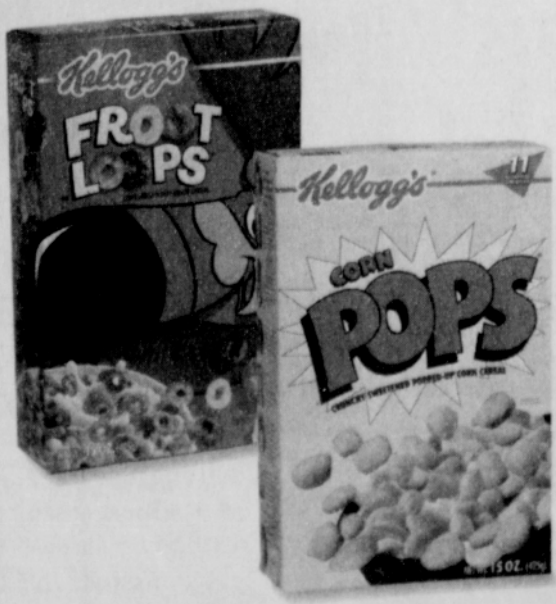
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