

News

Motion Picture Academy Reforms Spark New Round of Protests

By Jake Coyle
AP Film Writer

NEW YORK — Since the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences said it was altering membership rules in response to an outcry over the diversity of its voters and nominees, another uproar has erupted around Hollywood. Many academy members are protesting that the new measures unjustly scapegoat older academy members and imply they're racist.

Fiery letters have poured into the academy. Trade magazines are littered with critical op-eds from members.

Meanwhile, civil rights leaders and others say the academy's actions didn't go far enough.

More steps are needed, they say, to make the Oscars and the industry more inclusive.

Reforms meant to calm a crisis seem to have only further enflamed it.

This year's Feb. 28

Academy Awards are looking less like a glitzy gala and more like a battlefield.

"We all have to calm down a bit. The conversation has become unduly vitriolic," says Rod Lurie, the writer-director of "Straw Dogs" and "The Contender" and a member of the academy's directors' branch. "Nobody

boycott of the Oscars broadcast — the 51-member board unanimously voted to revamp membership rules in an effort to change the makeup of the largely White, male and older association of some 7,000 exclusive members.

Though Oscar voting was previously for life, it will now be restricted to

aren't to blame for the dearth of minority nominees in the past two years; the industry is.

Studies have shown that minorities remain underrepresented in all levels of the movie business, from protagonists on screen to executives who can green-light a film. But the last two years are something of an aberration in recent Oscar history. In the 10 years prior, 24 of the 200 acting nominees were Black. (Far less is

the rate of nods for Hispanics or Asian-Americans, however.)

William Goldstein, a composer and longtime academy member, chastised the academy in a Los Angeles Times editorial for "capitulating to political correctness" while missing the bigger picture.

"The set of voters that they're going to get rid of have seen more movies and have more context in which to judge something than any newbie coming into the academy," Goldstein told The

“Hollywood wants to deal with this as a communications crisis, not a crisis of substance

in the academy should dignify any accusations of racism," Lurie said in an interview, "but there obviously are biases that are created by the demographics of the academy."

The typically slow-moving academy acted swiftly last week, holding an emergency meeting of its Board of Governors. In the wake of a second straight year of all-White acting nominees — and calls for a

members who have been active in the industry within the past 10 years, with a few exceptions like for previous Oscar nominees. The academy also set a goal to double minority and female members by 2020.

Some academy members, while applauding efforts to diversify the academy, said taking away voting rights from older members smacks of ageism, and that they



PHOTO BY EVAN AGOSTINI/INVISION/AP FILE

In this Friday, Jan. 15, 2016 file photo, director Spike Lee attends the premiere of HBO's new drama series "Vinyl," at the Ziegfeld Theatre, in New York. Change at the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, where membership is for life, does not come easily. As Lee said on Tuesday, Jan. 19, 2016, its 6,000-plus membership can't be changed "hocus pocus, presto chango" overnight.

Associated Press. "You can bring in more women, you can bring in more anybody. Everybody's a human being. They're going to vote what they're going to vote. Nothing's going to change."

The academy indirectly responded to the furor

in the "frequently asked questions" section of its website on Monday. "We're not excluding older members," it reads. "These rules are not about age."

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