

“Judas and the Black Messiah” Makes History with Best Picture Nomination, but Both Titular Roles are Categorized as Supporting Actors

Hayley Croke



Daniel Kaluuya (far left) and Lakeith Stanfield (far right) in a shot from “Judas and the Black Messiah.” The film makes history as the first Best Picture nominee with an entirely Black production team, but fails to land Best Actor nomination as both leads of the film fall into the Best Supporting Actor category.

(Photo Courtesy/Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.)

Academy Awards history has been made before Oscars night has even dawned on Hollywood. “Judas and the Black Messiah” has become the first Best Picture nomination with an all-Black production team in a year with the most diverse nomination pool the academy has ever seen.

“Judas and the Black Messiah” is based on the real story of Fred Hampton (Daniel Kaluuya), the Illinois chapter chairman of the Black Panther Party, who worked to improve Chicago's multicultural community prior to his murder in an early morning FBI raid. The raid was planned with information secured by FBI informant William O'Neal (Lakeith Stanfield). The

film revolves around the impact Hampton made before his untimely death at age 21, and serves as a look into how O'Neal grappled with his part in Hampton's demise.

Why It's Newsworthy: This is a landmark year of nominees including the first all-Black production team to be nominated for Best Picture, the first time two women have been nominated for Best Director in the same year (one of which is the first woman of color to be nominated), and the first Asian-American Best Actor nominee.

The production team consisting of Shaka King, Ryan Coogler and Charles King are all first time nominees. Shaka King is also up for Best Original Screenplay, but missed out for a Best Director nomination. In an interview with [Deadline](#) Shaka King said this historical feat was "bittersweet," as it took 93 years for Black creators to be recognized at this level.

Dr. Christopher Sieving, associate professor at the University of Georgia and author of "Soul Searching: Black-Themed Cinema from the March on Washington to the Rise of Blaxploitation," points out how Hollywood has given wavering attention to African American films throughout film history, but this type of recognition at this point in time may cement a peak.

"We're probably, right now, at a peak of African American representation, not just in terms of actors on the screen but in terms of the creative teams behind movies, the producing teams, the range of stories that are able to be told."

The nomination for Best Picture was not the only surprise for the film, however, as Lakeith Stanfield earned his first mainstream (and Oscar) nomination of the award season. Stanfield had previously gone un-nominated by the Golden Globes and the British Academy Film Awards.

While fans were happy about Stanfield's recognition by the Academy, it left many confused. Stanfield's nomination was in the Best Supporting Actor category despite being the metaphorical "Judas" in "Judas and the Black Messiah." His nomination was read just two names after his co-star's, Daniel Kaluuya. Kaluuya has been racking up nominations throughout the award season for his role, but many were left questioning this choice from the Academy, leading them to wonder who the lead of the film was if it wasn't either of them.

Dr. Sieving shed some light on the situation, stating that the Oscars have a history of bizarre category placements.

"There's long been really blurry lines separating the lead acting and the supporting acting categories. There have been many instances in the past where an actor who has the most screen time in a film will be nominated in the supporting category for a variety of reasons. It's also the case that the studios push actors for nominations really based on who they think has the best chance of being nominated in a particular category."

"Judas and the Black Messiah " seems to fall under the latter explanation. [Vox](#) reports that it's probable Stanfield was submitted to both the Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor categories, but earned more votes to qualify in the top five for Best Supporting Actor.

Dr. Sieving acknowledges that while this is the likely case, it warrants a degree of backlash toward the Academy, “It truly doesn't look good for a film about this particular story, and the significance of this story within recent African American history. It seems like a slight. But I also think it's got a lot to do with just the politics of negotiating these categories.”