

## Oscar Politics

Ah, Academy Awards season. A time for Hollywood cynics to shine like stars.

Don't get me wrong: I enjoyed each of the five Best Picture nominees. But I wish I could say they're being honored solely for their artistic accomplishments. The truth is that industry politics are at least as important to winning a top Oscar as a great story or a stirring performance. As a small antidote to the self-congratulatory hoopla we're now hearing from Hollywood, here's a look at some of the *real* reasons the following films are up for Best Picture this season:

### Chicago

How does an entertaining—if never quite transporting—musical snag 13 Oscar nominations, making it the favorite to win as Best Picture at this year's Academy Awards? With lots of P.R., that's how. Miramax Films, known for its lavish and aggressive campaigns for awards, has carefully cultivated a climate in which an Oscar seems to be an inevitability. Of course a studio alone can't generate the kind of buzz necessary to make a film a contender. For that you need accomplices who allow all the promotion to affect their judgment—in this case *Entertainment Weekly*, which put *Chicago* on its first Oscar issue, and the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, which fawned over the film at its recent Golden Globes awards show. Just like that, a Best Picture favorite is born.

### The Hours

Since the Oscars are essentially Holly-

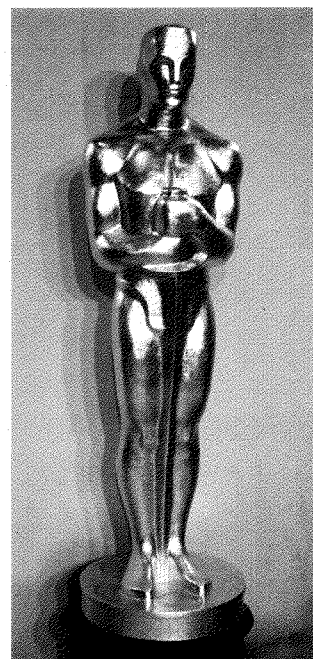
wood applauding itself, the nominees often reveal what the industry wants to see when it looks in the mirror. Something like *The Hours* makes Hollywood types feel good about themselves. An adaptation of an honored novel, which was itself based on a Virginia Woolf classic, the movie has the sort of literary patina that Oscar voters are suckers for. Nominating it allows them to drape themselves in a cloak of "culture."

### The Pianist

As creators of drama, the film industry loves it when an Oscar nomination comes with attendant drama of its own—especially the sort that's swirling around *The Pianist*. To begin with, the film represents the first time director Roman Polanski has tackled the Nazi occupation of Poland—which he lived through as an eight-year-old. Then there is the gossip about whether the exiled Polanski will return to Hollywood, which he fled in the 1970s after being charged with having sex with a 13-year-old girl. This kind of scuttlebutt earned Polanski not only a Best Picture nomination, but also a selection as Best Director.

### Gangs of New York

*Gangs of New York* also rides to Oscar night on a behind-the-screens story. This historical epic has moments of brilliance, but even its most enthusiastic supporters admit that it's deeply flawed. As the baby of director Martin Scorsese, however, the film gains the benefit of all doubts. Scorsese is a critic's darling who has been nominated for an Academy Award five



times without ever winning. Making him a finalist once again this year lets Oscar voters show that they know "quality" when they see it, and keep the critics from one-upping them. And if Scorsese wins, there'll be a great sentimental gusher.

### The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers

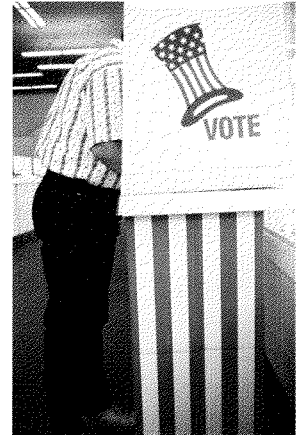
With just one noteworthy nomination, for Best Picture, the second *Lord of the Rings* installment is something of a lame-duck nominee. Oscar voters had to recognize it, if only to justify going ga-ga last year over its predecessor, *The Fellowship of the Ring*. On its merits, *Two Towers* deserves to compete for Best Picture, but it's clear the Academy voters exhausted their enthusiasm for this project last year, and are now just practicing retro-active self-validation.

But the swinging door of Oscar politics may tilt back in the direction of *Lord of the Rings* next year. Here's your first prediction for the Academy Awards champion of 2004: The final installment in the J. R. R. Tolkien trilogy—*The Return of the King*—will be hailed as epic filmmaking at its grandest. I'm just guessing. But if you're a Hollywood cynic, you might want to place your bet right now.

—Josh Larsen

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## POLITICS

### Latino Favors Are Fruitless

James Gimpel, *Latinos and the 2002 Election: Republicans Do Well When Latinos Stay Home*, Center for Immigration Studies, January 2003 (cis.org)

As part of an effort to attract more Latino voters to the GOP, the Bush administration has proposed increased immigration, amnesty for immigrants, and a new guest worker program. A new study from the Center for Immigration Studies, however, casts doubt on the viability of these efforts to draw Hispanics to Republicanism.

University of Maryland professor James Gimpel analyzed voting in several states with competitive Senate and gubernatorial races. He found that the Republicans sweep of 2002 election had little to do with the Latino vote. In fact, the victories were helped by Latino voter apathy. Lower-income Latinos and self-described independent voters (who tend to vote Democratic) stayed home on Election Day.

Yet the GOP ought not despair, says Gimpel. The truth is, there is no iron-clad Latino voting bloc. In Senate races, about one third of Latinos voted Republican, and in governors' races about half pulled the elephant lever. Latino voters are not of a radically different disposition

from non-Hispanic whites. Most said they would base their support of Bush's reelection on the state of the economy.

As Republicans develop their campaign strategy for the 2004 elections, Gimpel has a suggestion: "Playing ethnic politics with a group this diverse will continue to be a waste of time, and is as likely to insult and turn off Latinos (to say nothing of non-Latino voters) as it is to turn them on to Republican party politics."

—Rachel Jurado

### A Just War

Michael Novak, "War to Topple Saddam Is a Moral Obligation," *The Times* (London), February 12, 2003 (thetimes.co.uk)

As America girds for war against Iraq, theologians in major faiths, Roman Catholicism included, have come out in opposition to the conflict. In an article for *The Times*, AEI theologian Michael Novak argues that a war with Iraq is consistent with both the Catholic Church's teaching and the broader western tradition of just war.

To begin with, Novak points out that Catholic thinking places responsibility for declaring and waging war with public authorities—not men and women of the cloth. He points out that public authorities tend to have privileged intelligence about threats that cannot be made available to members of the public

and, in any case, they, not religious leaders, have the primary vocational responsibility to decide on questions of war and peace.

This question of ultimate responsibility aside, Novak argues that war sometimes becomes a moral obligation under the Church's doctrine of *jus ad bellum*. Under just war theory, war becomes not only good but morally obligatory when it forwards public authorities' obligations to charity and justice and "takes seriously a sinful world in which injustice and violence against the innocent will continue for all time."

Given how destructive, cruel, and willing to threaten peace the current regime in Iraq has become, Novak finds that a compelling case for war against Iraq exists if it continues to evade efforts to eliminate its weapons of mass destruction.

The entire legitimacy of the international order, Novak believes, may be at risk if countries do not act. On this basis, Novak argues that political leaders who take on faith promises by Iraq to disarm could actually commit a sin if their populations face attack from terrorists as a result of such inaction.

"Either the world community now upholds international order, or it backs down from its own solemn agreements," he writes.