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Slap Heard Around the World: The Voices We Didn't Hear As a Result

How the altercation --likely a publicity stunt-- between Chris Rock and Will Smith undermined the accomplishments of those who have and continue to pave the way for marginalized (communities), in turn curing the Academy's fever for attention.



(Courtesy of fox59.com)

Spanning from 1929, the year in which the first Academy Award was granted to a Motion Picture and broadcasted on the radio, to the early 2000s when television sets were found in nearly every home, there was no electronic more indulged in. Families would center themselves in front of their television sets for hours just to splurge on a “guilty pleasure” program or to enjoy the newest movie released on cable. Award shows reigned the most attractive to the American audience across the board, indulging in a lifestyle as outlandish as those maintained by the elite, and imagining ourselves being sewn into the silk and suede which these stars sported, was a dream in itself.

However, as the 21st century progressed and the coronavirus pandemic swept across the nation, the interest in cable television programs began to dwindle. The rise of “quick content,” be it on separate streaming platforms such as Hulu, Netflix, Apple TV plus, etc., has substantially subtracted the average traction in cable television. Our insatiable need to “watch what we want when we want” has been accommodated by these “fast streaming” services; what more can we ask of our entertainment platforms? The fulfillment of this insatiability means a grave loss in viewers internationally for those local and wide-scale news programs, game shows such as *Jeopardy* or *Wheel of Fortune*, and award shows--specifically the Oscars, which formerly attracted fanatics across the world. According to [deadline.com](https://www.deadline.com), this airing was “the second least-watched and lowest-rated Academy Awards ever.” Surely these numbers would spike from 16.6 million viewers to a sum of 615,000 more following the unfiltered altercation between Chris Rock and Will Smith--influenced by a joke made about Jada Pinket Smith’s hair loss, which is a result of an autoimmune disorder that she suffers from (alopecia), and her resemblance to “GI Jane.” Because this award show saw such a surge in viewers in a short-lived time period, this calls upon the idea of “fever for attention.” Did the producers or writers of this award show suspect that viewership would dwindle and therefore mapped out a scheme that they believed would gain more traction? And in doing so, did they intend to disregard those honorees that paved the way for historically marginalized groups?

A “stumbling show” overturns into a “stunning spectacle,” as highlighted by [deadline.com](https://www.deadline.com). The extent to which the media promoted memes, articles, or speculation regarding the severity of the scheme and whether or not it was a product of the producers who wished to pocket the interest of millions satiated the void of viewership that was lacking in the past. Perhaps watching black ties transition into “black eyes” with an open-hand sandwich was

the remedy for the lack of viewers? The Academy, immediately following the incident, [clarified](#) that this slap was not scripted and that they do not “condone [or endorse] violence of any form.”

While after the matter, Will Smith was served a slice of golden cake, whereupon he [“apologized to the academy”](#) for his ill-behavior and was honored by that same Academy, which had promoted their lack of tolerance for violence in the first place. Smith did not reap any immediate consequence and, in fact, was not encouraged to resign from Academy membership but rather chose to do so on his own after the matter; needless to state, the Academy took no head when it came to punishment, which makes many viewers, including myself, believe that this slap was a publicity stunt, intended to inflate the numbers which had depreciated starkly within the past few years.

What is the issue with profiting off of these antics? In complete oblivion to the audience and honorees, the Academy implemented this “hand-sandwich,” disregarding those who were to be recognized for their accomplishments in the artistic arena. Just a few audience-woes later would be the Oscar awarded to the 2021 film, ***King Richard***. This film depicted the uprising of athletes Venus and Serena Williams and their ongoing persistence, which engraved their names in all-star tennis history. The focal point of this film is the power of African American women and their ongoing perseverance in the wake of socio-economic obstacles. The Academy, by supposedly implementing this slap, re-choreographed that scenario aiming at the shenanigans rather than the admirable women who have and continue to pave the way for equal rights and recognition on behalf of a historically marginalized race and gender. Neither individual was called to the stage nor even mentioned; upon apology when receiving his oscar, Smith regarded the two individuals and their father, Richard Williams, whom he portrayed. But a sly remark

would not suffice for the recognition the Williams sisters should have been granted; while the slap contused the ego of both actor Will Smith and comedian Chris Rock, it sliced through the wound of accomplishments made on behalf of Venus, Serena, and hundreds of other African American men and women sitting in that arena, leaving no more than an unbandaged, blood-weeping (wound). Perhaps if this scheme were not to be incorporated, we would have heard and honored those voices instead of universally tuning in to the “slap heard around the world.”

The issue is not that this slap was (likely) scripted; rather it is the fact that in order to satiate greed and appreciate views, the Academy chose to undermine the accomplishments of those who were and are discriminated against for their gender or race. The media should instead focus on the accomplishments of those who were formerly subordinated, breaking the barrier to ensure an equal playing field for all and advantage or disadvantage for none. Something which cannot be done if the Academy and large-scale media platforms continue to prioritize profit and viewership over civil liberties and advances.