

Still under-represented in Hollywood, study shows

Written by Zenitha Prince, Special to the NNPA from the Afro-American Newspaper



Hollywood continues to be a bastion of homogeneity where people of color are underrepresented, according to a new study from the University of Southern California at Annenberg.

Professor Stacy L. Smith and her team analyzed 500 top U.S. box office films released in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2012 for the racial and ethnic representation both behind the camera and in more than 20,000 speaking roles.

They found that in 2012, only 10.8 percent of speaking characters were Black, 4.2 percent were Hispanic, 5 percent were Asian, and 3.6 from other (or mixed race) ethnicities. Comparatively, over three-quarters of all speaking characters were White (76.3 percent).

Broken down per film, the analysis found that in nearly 40 percent of all movies released in 2012, Black characters comprise less than 5 percent of the speaking cast, while only 9 percent of movies met national demographic trends and had Black actors comprising 12 to 14.9 percent of the cast.

"There is still a noticeable lack of diversity across the landscape of popular films," Smith, the principal investigator, said in a statement. "This year is the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights movement, and the Census shows that the population of the United States is more diverse than ever. Our film content, however, depicts something very different."

The scarcity of Black faces occurs not only on the screen, but also in the director's chair, the report found. Among a total of 565 directors and 500 top-grossing films from 2007 to 2012, only 33 (5.8 percent) films had directors who were Black. Accounting for multiple films directed by the same person, only 22 unique Black directors helmed top-grossing films in the last five years, and only two of those directors are female.

"It is hard to believe that across all of these top directing jobs, there are only two qualified Black females. Other talented Black female directors exist. Where are they?" Smith said.

The absence of directors of color influences the number of minority actors getting jobs, as

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minority directors are more likely to hire actors of color, the report found. For example, among films that had a Black director, 52.6 percent of that movie's speaking characters were Black, compared to just 9.9 percent for films with non-Black directors, the study found.

"Quite simply, when we see diversity behind the camera, we see a difference in the percentage of diverse characters on screen," said Marc Choueiti, a co-author of the study. "The question is: are these directors encouraged to create more diverse stories that reflect the world? Or is the type of story they are entrusted with an exclusive story about their own racial or ethnic group?"

To view the report, visit www.annenberg.usc.edu or [click here](#) .