

## The State of Our Film Nation

BY ADMIN · APRIL 4, 2019

By Bochen Zhang

There's a term I learned when I first moved to the U.S. called "Monday morning quarterbacking." It's something we do after football games, apparently. Every year it's something we do after the Oscars, too. This year was no exception.

Each year, I wonder: who is making these choices? We know that the Academy is still 74% white and 69% male [👉](#). Of course, we need more diversity, but the Academy is making progress. Some wonder why this can't happen faster.

As a woman of color in one of the most exciting film cultures in the world, I'm starting to understand why. You see, our film nation works as both a democracy and a republic. We each get to make our own choices for how we spend our money at the movies and each one of those choices influences the market for the types of movies that will be greenlit. It's very democratic in that way.

However, our movie nation is also like a republic, because someone has to make the choice for the kind of movies that are made and easily accessible to large audiences. Now that I am no longer simply a film-lover, but a filmmaker, I see that it's my small choices that help determine the landscape of the film universe.

Here's a quick example. Awhile back I was asked to read a script for a horror film. Horror films are entertaining, they're scary, people love them. Those are enough reasons for me to take on the project. However, this film seemed to add nothing more than gore and misery, so it wasn't for me. It's hard to turn down work as a freelancer. Who knows when you'll get that chance again. But I had to make the choice based on what I think are important stories to tell and what content I want to help bring to life. It's a choice I am privileged to make, but it's also my responsibility. I am a reflection of the women and people of color who might one day watch what I make. My choices are a small drip in the ocean, but I want to do right by the people I'm here representing.



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Just two weeks after turning down the horror script, I got a call. Would I like to work on a European art house film with a director and cinematographer I've stanned for years? Uh...yes, please.

Not long after that I was invited to become a judge for a noteworthy film festival. My first thought was that I shouldn't be the one judging my peers and their incredible films. But then I realized, I am here as a representative of women, people of color and immigrants. I have a responsibility to choose on behalf of diverse audiences, whomever they may be. I might not get a chance to choose at the highest level, the Academy, but there are plenty more like me. They are representatives of their communities, making small, everyday choices in the film world. As the years go on, we will have more and more opportunities to make bigger and bigger choices.


Just wait Oscars, we're coming.

*Author: Bochen Zhang is a Los Angeles-based producer. Her work has been broadcast on AMC, HBO, Disney Channel, Lifetime, and Bounce Network. Bochen serves as s film festival judge and has been a guest lecture at University of New Orleans Film Department since 2015. She is a graduate of the American Film Institute and is originally from Beijing, China. She will be a guest speaker at USC Cinematic Arts Talent Week Monday, April 8, 2019.*

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