



SPECIAL REPORT

Business & Media Institute

ADVANCING THE CULTURE OF FREE ENTERPRISE IN AMERICA



Business & Media Institute . 325 SOUTH PATRICK ST . ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314 . (703)683-9733 . www.BusinessandMedia.org

August 9, 2006

Bad Company II

Oscar-Nominated Movies Bash Business, but Hollywood Claims That's Entertainment

This is the second in a three-part look at how the American businessman is portrayed in the entertainment and news media. The Media Research Center's Business & Media Institute has released a report on how TV dramas portrayed businessmen as criminals. It also plans to examine how businessmen are characterized on TV news for release in early 2007.

In Part I, "For American Businessmen, Primetime is Crimetime," BMI found TV dramas overwhelmingly negative toward business by 4 to 1. Businessmen were portrayed as villains, not heroes. According to TV dramas, you were 21 times more likely to be kidnapped or murdered at the hands of a businessman than by the mob.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The top Oscar-nominated films of 2005 were newsworthy because of their overwhelmingly liberal agenda.

The movies the Hollywood elite chose to honor undermined traditional values, celebrated homosexual or transsexual lifestyles and attacked whole sectors of American business.

Three movies had the sole purpose of being hit pieces on entire industries – mining, oil and pharmaceuticals.

Businessmen fared even worse. Directors cast businessmen as villains, criminals, bigots and murderers. Only one major character actively engaged in business was both successful and ethical.

BMI looked at the 16 films that received 2005's 30 nominations for the top Oscar awards – Best Picture, Director, Actor, Actress, Supporting Actor and Supporting Actress.

The Oscars are the pinnacle of cinematic success and are an essential measure to determine how Hollywood perceives the American businessman.

In this look at the silver screen, BMI found:

- **It's a Crime:** Half of the movies earning top Oscar nominations (8 of 16) portrayed businessmen in either primary or secondary roles committing crimes – ranging from petty drug offenses to murder, mass murder and an international conspiracy to overthrow a nation's government.
- **Only One Ethical Businessman:** Only one major character out of more than 70 across all 16 movies was depicted as successful and ethical while actively engaged in business.
- **Bad Businessmen:** Businessmen were portrayed as either criminal or simply unethical four times as often as they were portrayed in a positive light. The star of "**Hustle & Flow**" funded his rap efforts by drug sales and prostitution. The owner of a small diner in "**A History of Violence**" went from local hero to murdering mobster almost overnight.
- **Bad Business:** Of the movies that included businessmen, 79 percent (11 out of 14) portrayed business in a negative way. Three (21 percent) were direct assaults on industry – oil, mining and pharmaceuticals.

To find out more information or to set up an interview, contact Colleen O'Boyle at 703-683-5004 ext. 122

- **The Worst Picture Is ...:** Director Stephen Gaghan won this award hands down. *"Syriana"* was an open attack on the oil industry, portraying energy companies working with the U.S. government to destabilize the Mideast and kill an aspiring leader. All of the prominent businessmen in the movie were unethical. One went so far as to leverage the death of his 6-year-old child to gain access to Arab leaders.

- **And the Best Picture Is ...:** *"Cinderella Man,"* the tale of a Depression-era boxer's second chance at stardom, was the highlight of the Academy Awards. Director Ron Howard's movie emphasized business ethics and, though the chief villain was somewhat of a business stereotype, even he wasn't truly sleazy.

- **The Worst Portrayal of a Businessman Is ...:** Tom Stall in *"A History of Violence"* "was just another hard-working small business owner and operator," until we found out he was a former mobster who proceeded to slaughter his way through the film.

- **The Best Portrayal of a Businessman Is ...:** *"Cinderella Man's"* Joe Gould was the kind of businessman anyone would want in his corner. Gould, a boxing manager, was the ideal risk-taker. He bet the furniture from his home on "something" he saw in a boxer. He even stood up to the deadly boxing champ Max Baer during the championship fight.

BMI Recommends:

- **Make Movies That Reflect Reality:** Half of the major Oscar nominations went to films depicting businessmen as crooks. That's just film companies falling for an easy stereotype. Paul Verhoeven, who directed *"Basic Instinct"* and *"Total Recall,"* said in 1995 that "We just show things as they are." If Hollywood wants to portray things "as they are," it can't pretend the majority of businessmen are criminals.

- **Show Business Heroes:** *"Cinderella Man"* showed that Hollywood is capable of depicting heroic and ethical businessmen. If Hollywood is going to portray bad businessmen, it needs to balance the anti-business rhetoric with more positive businessman role models.

- **Make Films People Want:** Not one of the three anti-industry films - *"Syriana," "North Country,"* and *"The Constant Gardener"* - cracked the top 50 box office hits for the year. Hollywood executives might consider what audiences want rather than simply bashing business.



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DAN GAINOR

THE BOONE PICKENS FREE MARKET FELLOW

By any measure, the 2006 Academy Award nominees were a celebration of liberal "values." They undermined traditional beliefs, celebrated homosexual or transsexual lifestyles and attacked whole sectors of the American business community.

It was a banner year for the Hollywood elite. But it was far from a financial success. Total box office receipts dropped more than \$1 billion in 2005. That was a 6.2-percent decline and the first drop since 1991, according to www.boxofficemojo.com.

But Oscar time let the big names in Hollywood stop dwelling on the red ink and look to Oscar's golden gleam. Sixteen films from 2005 were nominated for the six most prestigious Academy Awards - Best Picture, Director, Actor, Actress, Supporting Actor and Supporting Actress.

Anti-business themes were prominent among the films chosen for those 30 spots. Businesses and businessmen were depicted in a predominantly negative fashion.

Most of the businessmen who had prominent roles were portrayed in some negative way - as obnoxious, bigoted, immoral or worse.

In fact, half of the movies earning top Oscar nominations (8 of 16) portrayed businessmen in either primary or secondary roles committing crimes.

The list of their crimes was staggering - drug use, drug smuggling, prostitution, corruption, assault, attempted murder, murder and genocide.

One of the characters in "The Constant Gardener" tried to defend how a business had used poor Africans as guinea pigs for a new drug.

"We're not killing people who wouldn't be dead otherwise," he claimed.

That was one of three films that marshaled direct assaults against entire industries: coal mining ("North Country"); oil ("Syriana"); and pharmaceuticals ("The Constant Gardener").

Half of the movies earning top Oscar nominations portrayed businessmen committing crimes.

The first two, along with "Good Night, and Good Luck," were decidedly liberal and/or anti-business propaganda pictures sponsored by eBay billionaire Jeff Skoll.

Hollywood directors hid behind claims that these movies reflected reality. All three of the Skoll productions were purportedly based on history.

Half of the top Oscar nominees made similar claims or were at least "inspired by actual events."

But they weren't a balanced look at history. They were Hollywood's choice of topics, scripts, directors, actors and message. Rather than reflect history, they reflected the deliberate politicization of it.

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Hollywood: Partners in Crime

Businessmen appeared as both heroes and villains, but even the good guys were often depicted as doing bad things. In the 14 movies that included businessmen, nearly half of all the businessmen were portrayed as criminals (42 percent or 15 out of 36).

Their crimes ranged from petty drug offenses to murder, mass murder and an international conspiracy to overthrow a nation's government.

The crimes read like a police blotter from the bad part of town. The Johnny Cash biography "Walk the Line" showed the self-made businessman's descent into drugs and drug smuggling to feed his habit.

42 percent of all businessmen in the nominated movies were portrayed as criminals.

One of the store owners in "Crash" grew so angry after a robbery that he tried to murder the locksmith who had fixed his door - nearly killing the man's daughter in the process.

"Brokeback Mountain" boss Joe Aguirre wasn't just a mean bigot, he was a crook as well. Shepherd Jack Twist took a moral tone in response - upset that Aguirre made one of them stay with the flock overnight against the law. Twist complained that he "ain't got no right making us do somethin' against the rules."

But those were the amateur criminals. The others were far worse. Movie watchers only got a peak at the true background of "A History of Violence" businessman-hero Tom Stall, a former mobster and murderer. Even then, he slaughtered his way through the second half of the film.

"Hustle & Flow" focused on a pimp who used bribery, prostitution and drug dealing to launch a legitimate business career. But the movie, which won an Oscar for the song "It's Hard Out Here for a Pimp," also delivered one of the most appalling scenes of criminal behavior.

The pimp mentioned in the title track - Djay - needed to upgrade his musical equipment to make a quality recording and told a pawn broker he would trade the services of one of his hookers for what he needed.

He then told Nola, who he often called his "primary investor," that she needed to help.

"I need that microphone," he told her. "I want you to

go back there and be friendly with him and bring that microphone out with you, OK?"

Even Nola was angry over the degrading act. The other businessman naturally went along. Most of the main characters in "Hustle & Flow" embraced some sort of criminal behavior.



Oilman Danny Dalton gives voice to the anti-business nature of 'Syriana' by embracing 'corruption.'

Djay's rationale for his criminal behavior was far from the worst.

One character in "Syriana" combined criminal behavior with hubris, despite being caught.

Oilman Danny Dalton was implicated in a federal investigation over an oil merger. When confronted, he launched into a memorable tirade that reflected the overall attitude toward business in many of the nominated films:

"Corruption charges! Corruption? Corruption is government intrusion into market efficiencies in the form of regulations. That's Milton Friedman. He got a Goddamn Nobel Prize. We have laws against it precisely so we can get away with it. Corruption is our protection. Corruption keeps us safe and warm. Corruption is why you and I are prancing around in here instead of fighting over scraps of meat out in the streets. Corruption is why we win," ranted Dalton.

He was right in part. "Syriana" star George Clooney won an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor for one of the film's CIA operatives doing the bidding of Big Oil.

Businessmen: Hollywood's Latest Bad Boys

Businessmen didn't have to commit crimes to be portrayed negatively. They were also obnoxious, immoral and so caught up in their pursuit of success that they let family obligations slide.

Businessmen were depicted as either criminal or simply unethical four times as often (28 to 7) as they were portrayed in a positive light.

None of the portrayals stood out any more than the hero from the movie "A History of Violence." Husband, family man and small-restaurant owner Tom Stall led an almost laughably idyllic life.

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He had a beautiful home, a loving wife, a wonderful young daughter and a teenaged son so responsible that he even avoided fighting when goaded. As his wife Edie told Tom, "You're the best man I've ever known."

Only in Hollywood would that foreshadow disaster.

When deadly criminals tried to rob his diner and were about to kill a waitress, Stall leapt across the counter and battled the two men – killing both in an act of bravery.

A TV news announcer continued the good-guy fantasy: "Tom Stall was just another hard-working small business owner and operator in Millbrook, Indiana."

But we soon learned that Stall was once a violent criminal and now on the run from his former life. In the space of a few minutes, he went from local hero to murdering mobster – almost overnight.

"A History of Violence" had a lot of competition to see which movie could present the worst businessmen. In "Syriana," energy analyst Bryan Woodman's son died in the swimming pool of an Arab leader. Woodman then parlayed that sense of obligation into business success.

His wife Julie asked him about his incredible behavior: "Here's a question: How do you think it looks to profit off the death of your 6-year-old?"

Although Bryan was offended by both the question and the financial favors, he took them eagerly.

The gun store owner in "Crash" was so overwhelmingly bigoted that he mocked a customer before a sale was completed, telling the Iranian man, "Yo, Osama, plan the jihad on your own time."

Some of the other films reverted to more traditional Hollywood stereotypes. The widow in "Mrs. Henderson Presents" was urged to find a "hobby." In a typical silver screen portrayal of rich people who play at business, Henderson tried several things to amuse herself.

"I am bored with widowhood. I have to smile at everyone. I never had to smile at everyone before. In India, there were always people to look down upon," she moaned.

Finally, she set her sights on reviving an abandoned theater. After initial success, the venture faltered. Her natural solution was *au naturel*.

"We've had some good shows, but they're obviously not daring enough. Why don't we get rid of the clothes?"

Mrs. Henderson asked. Soon after that, the theater began to convince young actresses to pose nude for the sake of showbiz.

One of the two main villains of "Cinderella Man" was another character drawn straight from central casting - the greedy and mean businessman Jimmy Johnston. He forced boxer James Braddock to watch film of two other boxers literally killed in the ring.

Johnston argued, "If I'm gonna promote this fight, I'm not gettin' hung out to dry if somethin' happens to you."

Modern boxing fans might think Johnston was cut from a similar mold to a Don King. However, Johnston was set up to be the villain.

Even though he stood in Braddock's way at nearly every turn, many of his objections appeared legitimate.

None of Director Ron Howard's portrayals was overly negative.

In "Good Night, and Good Luck," CBS executive William Paley initially gave the impression that he would flout convention and deliver a pro-business performance.

When veteran newsman Edward R. Murrow began to fight the government and Sen. Joe McCarthy, Paley gave his support. "I'm with you today, Ed, and I'm with you tomorrow," he explained.

And he was with Murrow ... until he pulled the rug out from under him late in the movie.

Only one major character out of more than 70 across all 16 movies was depicted as successful and ethical while actively engaged in business. That was "Cinderella Man's" Joe Gould, the manager for boxer James Braddock.

Show Business Shows Business at its Worst

Bad businessmen had to work somewhere. Of course their companies embodied all of the same horrible traits. Of the movies that included businessmen, 79 percent (11 out of 14) portrayed business in a negative way. Three (21 percent) were direct assaults on industry – oil, mining and pharmaceuticals.

None was as bad as "The Constant Gardener." That film told the story of an Amnesty International activist's battle against evil pharmaceutical companies intent on testing drugs on unwitting African villagers.

Of the movies that included businessmen, 79 percent portrayed business in a negative way.



'The Constant Gardener's' Justin Quayle found a drug company conspiracy behind his wife's death.

for nothing."

As her investigation led her deeper into a conspiracy of murder, Tessa sought out other activists who delivered a typical anti-industry position.

"Whenever there are drug companies testing on people they think are expendable, you'll find organizations like ours trying to fight back. Of course, the problem is that they have millions to spend on PR while we work with volunteers and a few donated computers," complained another activist named Birgit.

A doctor who had worked for the pharmaceutical firms summed up the movie's attack: "Big pharmaceuticals are right up there with the arms dealers," argued Dr. Lorbeer.

After Tessa was murdered at the hands of drug company hit men, she was lionized at her funeral by her cousin Arthur "Ham" Hammond.

He used the occasion to blast industry one last time: "So who has committed murder? Not, of course, the highly respectable firm of KDH Pharmaceutical, which has enjoyed record profits this quarter... and has now licensed ZimbaMed of Harare... to continue testing Dypraxa in Africa."

Viewers of the film might notice the similarity between the logo for Dypraxa, which figures prominently in the film, and the real-life logo for Roche Pharmaceuticals. Rather than playing an evil role, Roche manufactures many lifesaving drugs including Tamiflu, which is highly sought as a possible way to defeat a worldwide avian flu epidemic.

"The Constant Gardener" reflected a relatively constant theme: that business is bad or even evil. "Syriana" showed oil companies as even more powerful and dangerous.

The tests had deadly results, but none of the businesspeople cared.

This was no surprise to one of the stars, an activist named Tessa. "They're a drug company, Arnold. No drug company does something

What "Syriana" lacked in obvious business villainy, it made up in the extent of its anti-oil industry claims.

Director Stephen Gaghan depicted energy companies working with the U.S. government to destabilize the Mideast and kill an aspiring leader. All of the prominent businessmen in the movie were unethical.

The film was overflowing with oil company scenery - wells, refineries, fancy conference rooms. All of it was made possible "provided there's still chaos in the Middle East," as one character put it.

And everywhere were lawyers pretending to uncover corruption. "Now the job is find the problem, fix the problem and if you don't find a problem, then there is no problem," explained lawyer Sydney Hewitt.

But corruption was a given in the oil-fueled world of "Syriana." "You know, if people in oil deals talked to U.S. attorneys, there'd be no oil business," explained Hewitt.



New 'North Country' miner Josie Aimes gets a lesson in sexual harassment from supervisor Arlen Pavitch.

Rather than roaming all over the world, "North Country" brought evil business back to small town America. The movie told the story of the first women miners. "In 1975, the iron mines of Northern Minnesota hired their first female miner. By 1989, male employees still outnumbered females by thirty to one," read the introduction.

But six new women employees entered the nearly all-male world at their own risk. There they were abused, assaulted and sexually harassed on a daily if not hourly basis.

New employee Josie Aimes, the daughter of another miner, got a rude awakening on her first day from supervisor Arlen Pavitch.

"You'll be hauling, lifting, driving and all sorts of things a woman shouldn't be doing if you ask me, but the Supreme Court didn't ask me, did they?" he told the women.

The work atmosphere was almost toxic, with one supervisor, a former boyfriend of Josie's, who actually assaulted her. Large obscenities were written in the women's dressing room. And through it all ran the backdrop of the Anita Hill sexual harassment hearings on TV.

The company, Pearson's Taconite And Steel, Inc., didn't just ignore the problems, it took the side of the abusers and tried to force out Josie for complaining. Owner Don Pearson asked, "Do the Minnesota Vikings have to put a girl in at quarterback? Of course not. Some things are for men and some things are for women."

When the case went to court, he even went out and deliberately hired a female lawyer for appearances. As he put it, "I hired you because you're the smartest woman lawyer I could find."

Creating 'Social Change,' One Movie at a Time

It wasn't an accident that so many movies put out by Hollywood were liberal. Several were deliberately left-wing. Three of the films were products of Participant Productions, a company that claimed on its Web site "a mission to make the world a better place."

Participant, founded by eBay billionaire Jeff Skoll, said it was "dedicated to creating a whole new kind of action flick, where positive social change is the true measure of success."

Skoll backed "Syriana," "Good Night, and Good Luck," and "North Country" because of their left-wing social messages. In a Jan. 8, 2006, article about the company, London Observer writer Gaby Wood called "Syriana" "the most political film to have come out of Hollywood since there was a war in Vietnam."

According to Wood, "In the words of Meredith Blake, the firm's executive vice-president: 'Our product is social change, and the movies are a vehicle for that social change.'"

Participant worked hard at that goal. Through its Web site, www.participate.net, the firm pushed a liberal agenda with each one of those pictures. For the Murrow movie, Participant teamed up with the ACLU, Salon.com and PBS to promote its image of journalism.

One view of that "journalism" was included in the film itself. The character of Murrow gave the classic liberal justification for one-sided reporting. "I've served my conscience and I can't for the life of me find any justification for this and I simply cannot accept there are, on every story, two equal and logical sides to an argument. Call it editorializing if you like," he told his viewers.

The Businessman You Would Want in Your Corner

There was only one businessman deserving of Oscar honors. Joe Gould combined brains and bravery with the willingness to go to the mat for others. As manager for boxer James Braddock, Gould wouldn't back down from anyone - even the deadly champion Max Baer, whom he called a "punk" for being rude to Mrs. Braddock.

Actor Paul Giamatti filled the "Cinderella Man" role with wit and charm and showed Hollywood does know how to depict businessmen as heroes. Giamatti earned a nomination for Best Supporting Actor for his portrayal.

Gould was there throughout Braddock's career - as rising star, as has-been and resurrected as a contender. Early on, he kept Braddock in shape despite a grueling schedule. When the boxer's career hit rock bottom, Gould tried to help him financially - even battling to get him one last, good-paying bout to help care for a starving and freezing Depression-era family.

But a surprise victory earned Braddock a second chance, and it was then Gould truly showed his mettle by gambling everything he owned on the fighter. Gould literally sold nearly all of his furniture to bet on "something" he saw in Braddock.

By the time Braddock had a shot at the title, boxer and manager worked as a seamless team. The diminutive Gould wasn't even intimidated by the dangerous Baer. Gould goaded him and, at one point in the fight, verbally distracted him so Braddock could land several punches.

Gould's brains and heart made him a winner.



Manager Joe Gould, center, shares his hopes for Jim Braddock with Braddock's wife, left, and Gould's wife, right. They sit on the few pieces of furniture he had left.

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Visitors to the "North Country" campaign part of Participant's Web site were urged to sign a "Women-Friendly Workplace Pledge."

That document urged companies to "have an affirmative action program to ensure that we include women and people of color in the recruitment, hiring and promotion of employees," as well as provide benefits for abortion services and to same-sex couples.

The "Syriana" activists were encouraged to "Join the Virtual March to Stop Global Warming." That fit well with the company's 2006 projects, which include the Al Gore global warming movie "An Inconvenient Truth" and the anti-food industry movie "Fast Food Nation."

Liberal themes were prominent in most of the top nominated films. Three touched on homosexuality or transsexual characters, though only the award-winning "Brokeback Mountain" took businessmen to task.

"The Constant Gardener" might as well have been another Participant production. It portrayed a heroic activist community against big evil drug companies.

Even a liberal businesswoman was treated as suspect and not entirely a good person in the movie "Junebug." When we first met gallery owner Madeleine, she was hosting an "auction of visionary art to benefit the re-election of Rep. Jesse Jackson, Jr."

Jackson, according to the Americans for Democratic Action, had a perfect liberal score in 2005 - 100 out of 100.

Madeleine fit the liberal mold and eschewed church when her husband and his family went. But, even by left-wing standards, she failed ethically and said she wouldn't do business with a Jewish man in a desperate attempt to sign a talented and strange artist. Her quest for success also led her to abandon her in-laws in a time of family crisis.

The Good Guys

Though Hollywood pounded audiences with negative images of businessmen, there were a few positives. "Cinderella Man" delivered the best business themes and generally moral messages that could be applied to the corporate world.

Besides the strong role of manager Joe Gould, the film showed how boxer Jim Braddock was forced to apply for government relief during the Depression. After his life turned around, he gave it back.

When asked, Braddock gave a huge endorsement of

the American system: "I believe we live in a great country, a country that's great enough to help a man financially when he's in trouble. But lately, I've had some good fortune, and I'm back in the black. And I just thought I should return it."

Braddock took a similar traditional approach to stealing, telling his son, "just cause things ain't easy, that don't give you the excuse to take what's not yours, does it?"

"Pride & Prejudice" was the only other movie that showed an upstanding businessman in a major role. However, only casual mention was made of Mr. Darcy's business dealings.

Despite the liberal plot of "TransAmerica," it didn't follow the typical Hollywood approach to business. Bree Osbourne encountered two businessmen in her odyssey to switch from a man to a woman, but both were presented as kind, helpful and supportive.

Methodology

Determining which movies to analyze for the Business & Media Institute's (BMI) ongoing study of the American businessman was relatively easy. We let Hollywood decide. That was done by choosing the major Academy Award nominees - Best Picture, Director, Actor, Actress, Supporting Actor and Supporting Actress.

Those categories encompass the most notable Oscar awards. Sixteen movies received those 30 nominations in 2006.

BMI staff then watched each movie, noting how businessmen were portrayed. The characters who counted as businessmen were executives, store owners, managers and independent business operators.

Of the 16, 14 included depictions of businessmen. Two movies, "Capote" and "Munich," were excluded because they either had no businessmen or those who were included used the roles merely as fronts for spying.

The remaining 14 films were grouped in various ways. Criminal actions were the most clear-cut to tally. Other non-criminal businessmen were grouped into three categories - good, bad and neutral. The characters fell into the first two categories if their actions were overtly positive or negative.

For example: though he was a secondary character in "Crash," Pop Ryan was lauded by his son as a model employer in one scene. He clearly fell into the "good" category.

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There were nearly twice as many “bad” examples who, although not criminals, still portrayed businessmen negatively. Case in point: energy analyst Bryan Woodman, who used his son's death to achieve business success. While certainly legal, it was astoundingly heartless.

The movies' overall attitudes toward business were graded in a similar way. Movies depicting businessmen as criminals were counted as anti-business. In addition, three other movies depicted either immoral or unethical business characters.

Conclusion

It was easy to conclude that the top Oscar films of 2006 portrayed business in a negative light. It didn't matter whether it was unethical or illegal behavior, businessmen were there to take the blame and to play the bad guys.

But the silver screen wasn't always anti-business. Even the Depression-era film “Grapes of Wrath” included positive and negative portrayals of businessmen. That wasn't the case with the 2006 Academy Awards. The movies Hollywood selected as the best treated businessmen the worst.

That was the most essential point about the films in this study. These were the movies that Hollywood considered important. They certainly weren't the most watched. The year's two most popular films – “Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith” and “Chronicles of Narnia” – brought in more domestic revenue than the total of the top 16 Oscar nominees combined.

But neither of those top-grossing movies was chosen for a major award. “Walk the Line,” about country star Johnny Cash, was the only one of the major nominees to bring in more than \$100 million.

The movies that were chosen weren't just ideologically liberal; many attempted to portray a one-sided view of history. As the film “Mrs. Henderson Presents” made clear, it was “inspired by true events.” Half of the top Oscar nominees made similar claims.

But the result in many of these movies wasn't history, it was commentary. “North Country” made no attempt to characterize the mining business fairly. “Syriana” certainly didn't pretend to give oilmen an even-handed treatment. But both claimed to be founded in fact.

Yet audiences were left to wonder if these purportedly “true” movies really represented reality, when many only represented a slanted view.

Already the 2006 movies are on track to repeat the

problems of the previous year. Slanted documentaries like “An Inconvenient Truth” and “Who Killed the Electric Car?” have picked up where “Syriana” and “The Constant Gardener” left off.

Meryl Streep's role in “The Devil Wears Prada” has added another iconic evil boss to the growing Hollywood pantheon. Even the kids' movie “Hoot” set up “greedy” businessmen as the enemies of nature. Hollywood executives have found a strategy they like and they're sticking to it.

Recommendations

Hollywood didn't start depicting businessmen as the chief villains overnight. So change can't occur rapidly, either. But Hollywood executives have a moral obligation to viewers to do a better job of presenting both sides of business.

The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) movie ratings system acknowledges that some content can be inappropriate for young audiences. Those ratings protect audiences from objectionable content such as violence or nudity, but there is no such rating for anti-business movies. If there were, several major Oscar nominees would have earned the strongest rating possible.

That bias against both businessmen and the businesses they work for has a harmful impact and could damage belief in another essential American value – belief in the free enterprise system. That bias needs to change.

To accomplish that goal, BMI recommends:

- **Make Movies That Reflect Reality:** Half of the major Oscar nominations went to films depicting businessmen as crooks. That's just film companies falling for an easy stereotype. Paul Verhoeven, who directed “Basic Instinct” and “Total Recall,” said in 1995 that “We just show things as they are.” If Hollywood wants to portray things “as they are,” it can't pretend the majority of businessmen are criminals.

- **Show Business Heroes:** “Cinderella Man” showed that Hollywood is capable of depicting heroic and ethical businessmen. If Hollywood is going to portray bad businessmen, it needs to balance the anti-business rhetoric with more positive businessman role models.

- **Make Films People Want:** Not one of the three anti-industry films – “Syriana,” “North Country,” and “Constant Gardener” – cracked the top 50 box office hits for the year. Hollywood executives might consider what audiences want rather than simply bashing business.

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