

2018 DOCUMENTARY FILM DIVERSITY REPORT

JOURNEY TO THE ACADEMY AWARDS



The Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI) at American University's School of Communication, based in Washington, D.C., is a research center and innovation lab that creates, studies, and showcases media for social impact. Focusing on independent, documentary, entertainment, and public media, CMSI bridges boundaries between scholars, producers and communication practitioners who work across media production, media impact, public policy and audience engagement. The Center produces resources for the field and research, convenes conferences and events, and works collaboratively to understand and design media that matter.

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OVERVIEW



Culture paints a portrait of what we celebrate and who is worthy of our attention. As cultural critic and journalist Mary McNamara stated, “When we praise and reward certain stories or images, whether by big box office or gold statuary, we reveal what we as a society value, the kinds of people we find interesting, the characteristics we revere and revile. We show the paths we hope to choose or avoid and the lessons we have learned, or not learned, from history.”¹

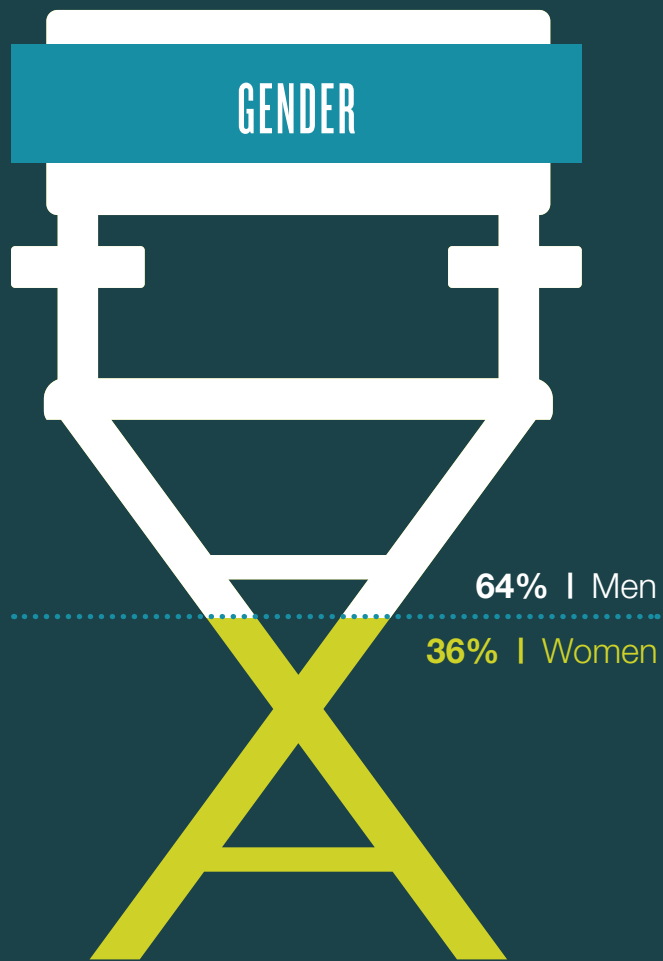
Through artistic expression, documentary films provide a portal into real lives, stories and social challenges. It is not only the story itself that reflects cultural meaning and value – who is telling the story matters.

This annual report illuminates the number of women and members of traditionally underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups as credited directors and producers in the highest film achievement for documentary film in the United States: **The Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature**. The CMSI 2018 Documentary Film Diversity Report examines documentary diversity in two levels: It spotlights the films and filmmakers nominated for the Academy Awards’ Best Documentary Feature award in 2018, and it showcases the numerical reality of diversity and representation within the streaming, social media era (from 2008 to 2018). Given the unique nature of documentary film, as both creative expression and reflection of real life, the report also examines the extent to which lauded documentary feature films’ dominant narratives focus on social issues or entertainment slice-of-life stories.

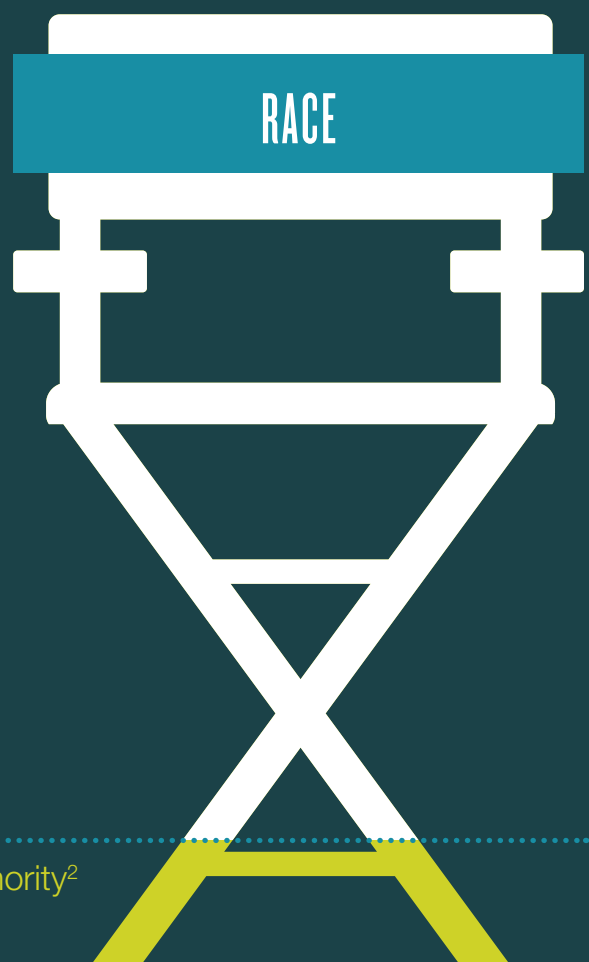


THE BIG PICTURE

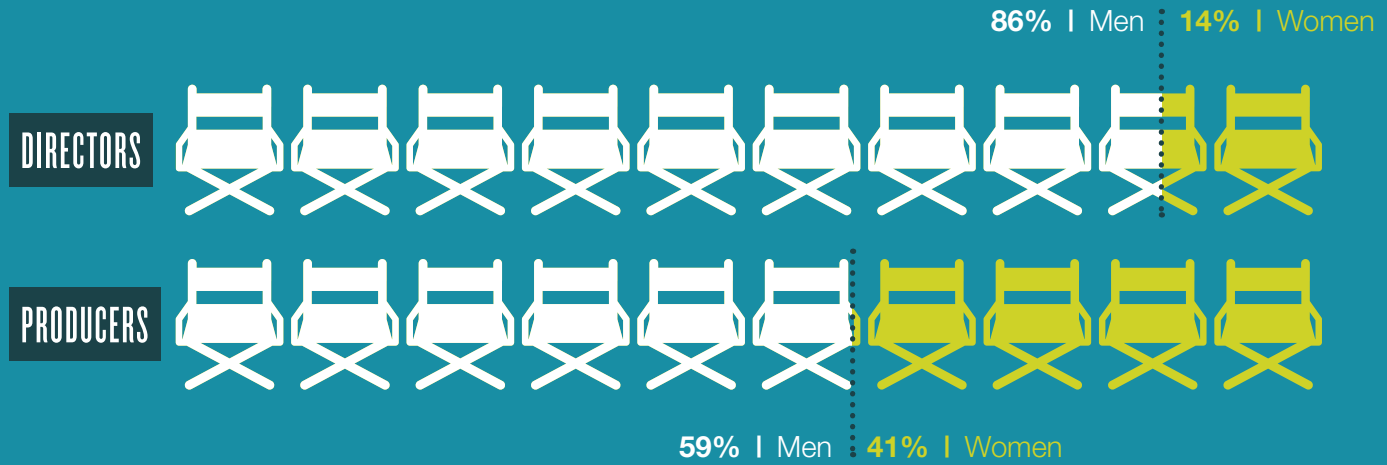
2008-2018 ALL FILMMAKERS TOTALS



87% | White
12% | Racial / Ethnic Minority²



2018 OSCAR™-NOMINATED DOCUMENTARY FEATURE DIRECTORS & PRODUCERS: GENDER



2018 OSCAR™-NOMINATED DOCUMENTARY FEATURE DIRECTORS & PRODUCERS: RACE & ETHNICITY³



PRIMARY NARRATIVE IN OSCAR-NOMINATED DOCUMENTARY FEATURE FILMS: SOCIAL ISSUE VS. ENTERTAINMENT

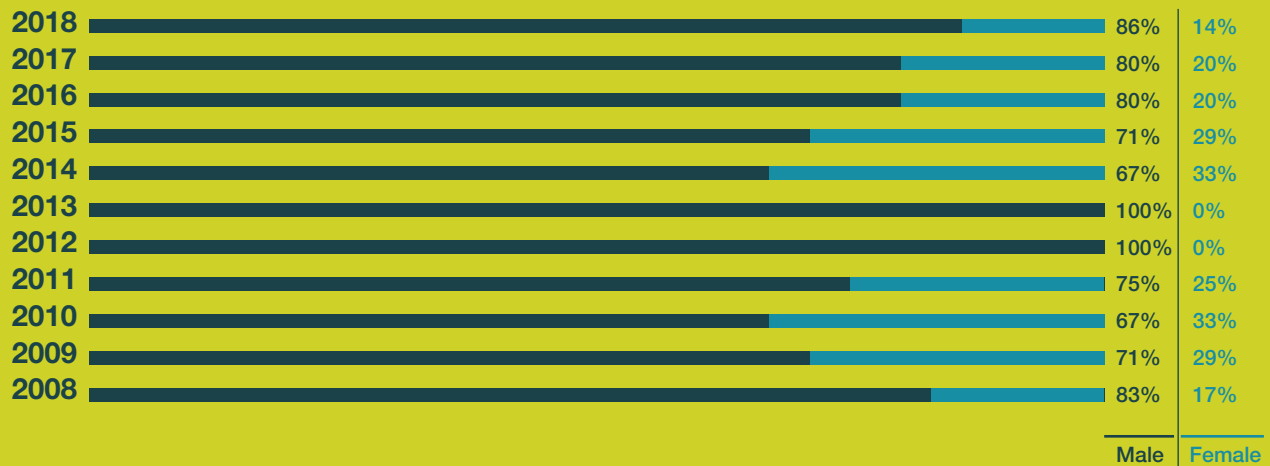


HOW DOES 2018 COMPARE TO THE PAST DECADE FOR OSCAR-NOMINATED DOCUMENTARY FEATURE FILMS?

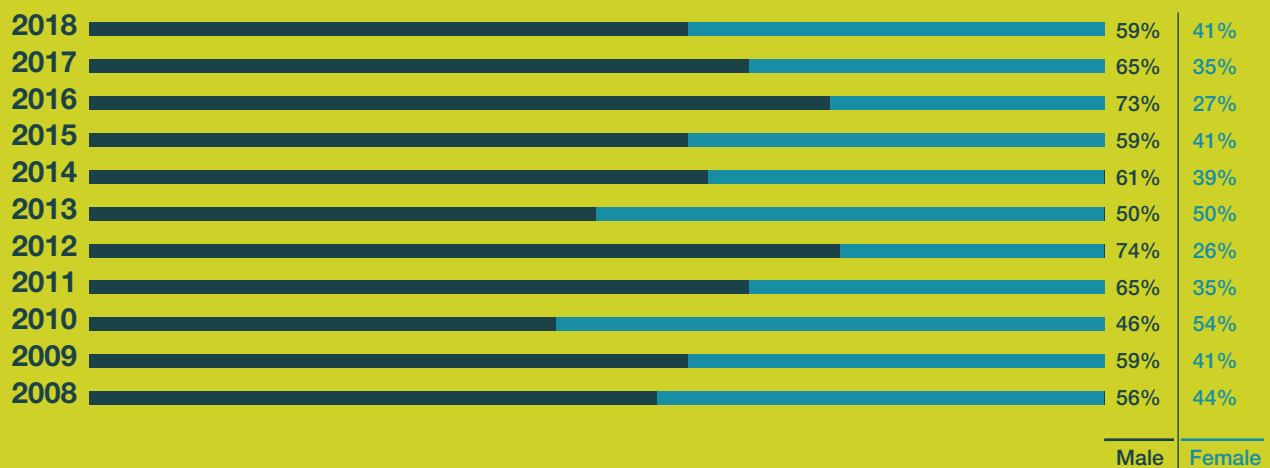
2008 TO 2018 OSCAR-NOMINATED DOCUMENTARY GENDER DIVERSITY: TIME TREND

2008-2018: OSCAR-NOMINATED DOCUMENTARY DIRECTORS AND PRODUCERS: GENDER

DIRECTORS



PRODUCERS

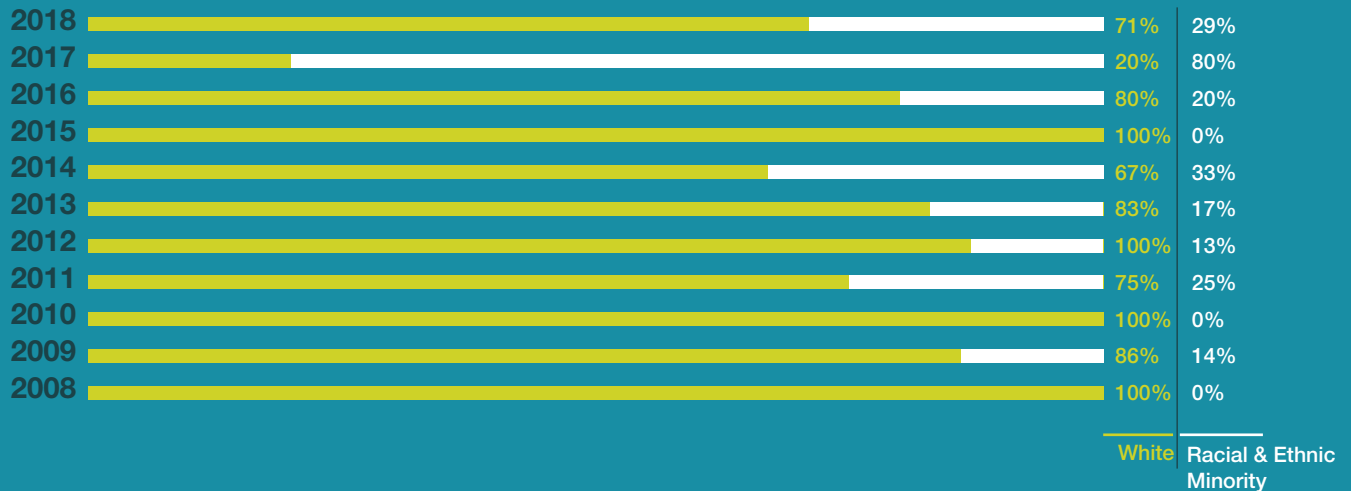


HOW DOES 2018 COMPARE TO THE PAST DECADE FOR OSCAR-NOMINATED DOCUMENTARY FEATURE FILMS?

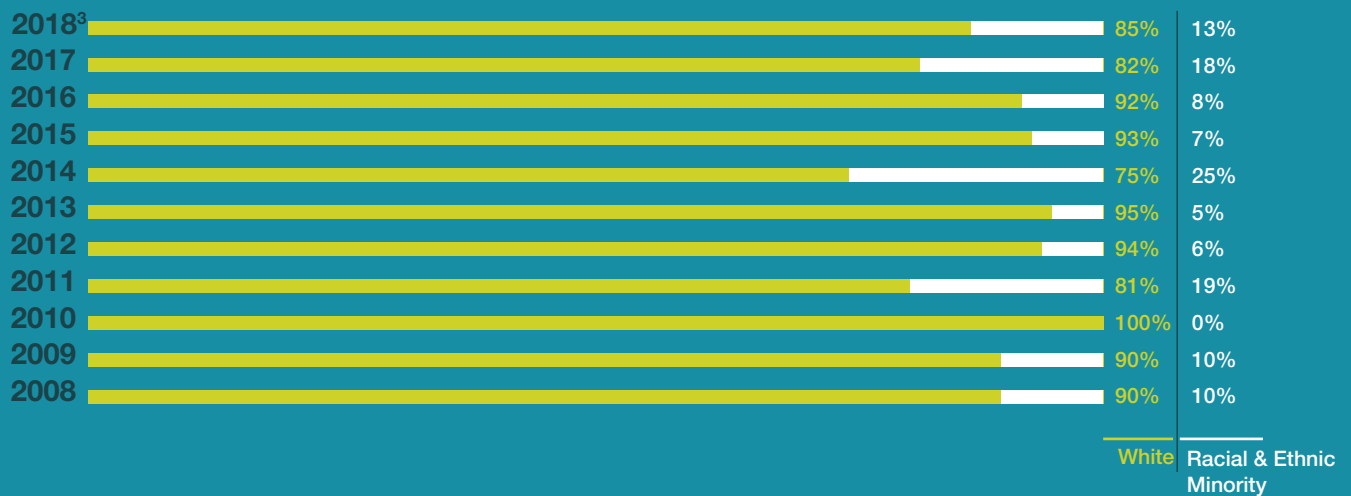
2008 TO 2018 OSCAR-NOMINATED DOCUMENTARY RACIAL & ETHNIC DIVERSITY: TIME TREND

2008-2018: OSCAR-NOMINATED DOCUMENTARY DIRECTORS AND PRODUCERS: RACE & ETHNICITY³

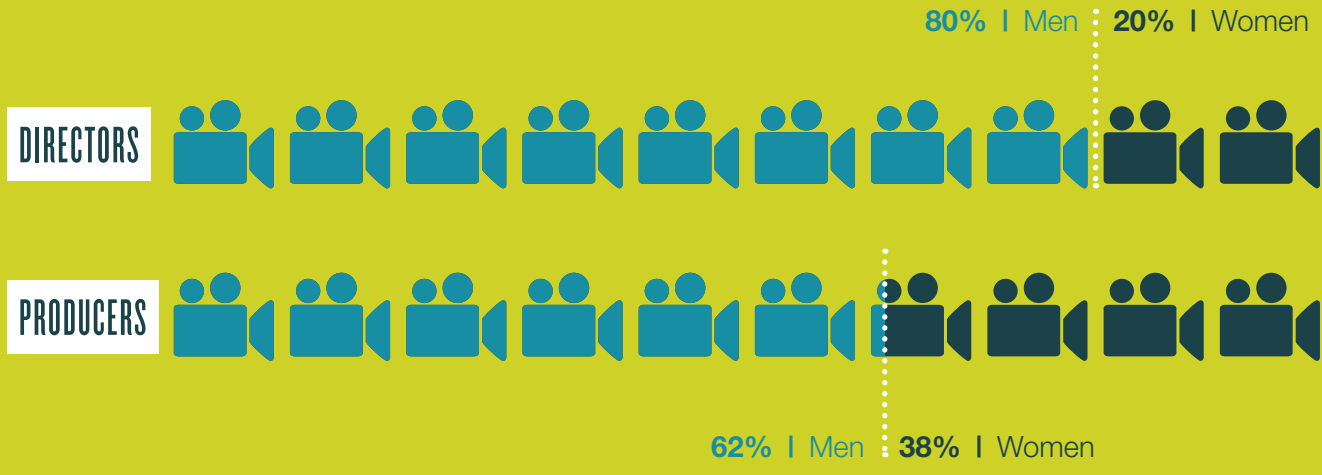
DIRECTORS



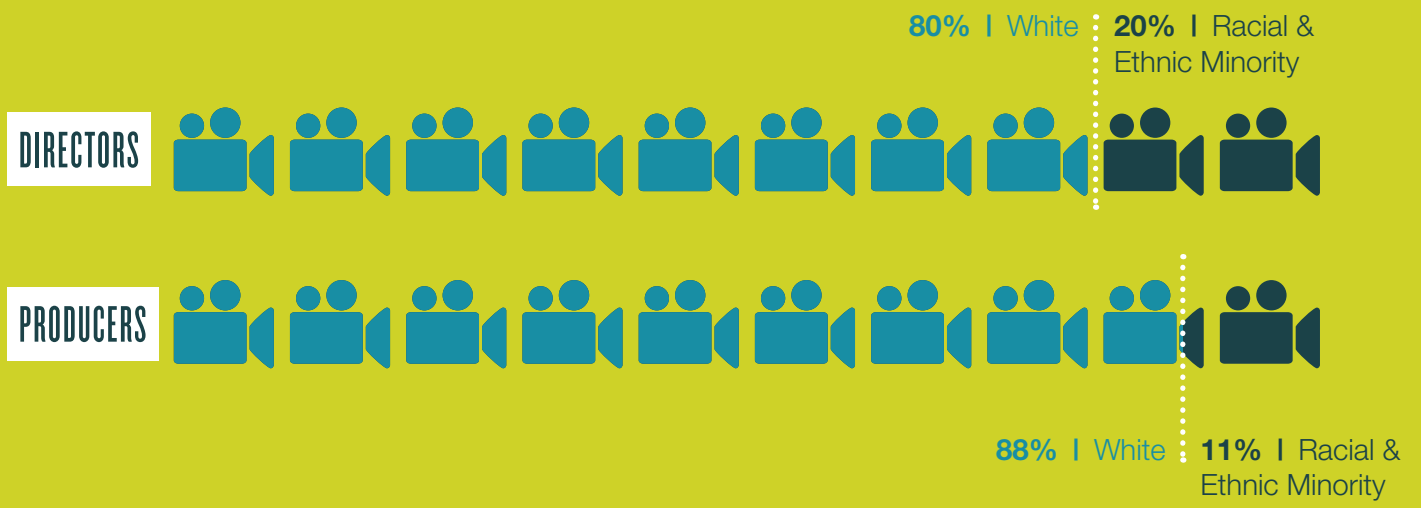
PRODUCERS



2008 TO 2018 OSCAR-NOMINATED DOCUMENTARY FEATURE DIRECTORS & PRODUCERS: GENDER



2008 TO 2018 OSCAR-NOMINATED DOCUMENTARY FEATURE DIRECTORS & PRODUCERS: RACE & ETHNICITY⁴



2008 TO 2018 PRIMARY NARRATIVE IN OSCAR-NOMINATED DOCUMENTARY FEATURE FILMS: SOCIAL ISSUE VS. ENTERTAINMENT



2018 OSCAR-NOMINATED DOCUMENTARY FEATURES DIVERSITY REPORT

2018 NOMINEES FOR BEST DOCUMENTARY FEATURE⁵



“Abacus: Small Enough to Jail”

Mitten Media, Motto Pictures, Kartemquin Educational Films and WGBH/FRONTLINE
Director: Steve James



“Faces Places”

Ciné Tamaris
Directors: J.R., Agnes Varda



“Icarus”

Netflix Documentary in association with Impact Partners, Diamond Docs, Chicago Media Project and Alex Productions
Director: Bryan Fogel



“Last Men in Aleppo”

Larm Film and Aleppo Media Center
Directors: Feras Fayyad, Steen Johannessen



“Strong Island”

Yanceville Films and Louverture Films
Director: Yance Ford

METHODOLOGY



From 2008 to 2018 (11 years), 55 films were nominated for Best Documentary Feature in the annual awards given by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Combined, 543 filmmakers – both credited directors and producers of the nominated films – were examined. A total of 71 filmmakers were formally credited as directors. All directors were coded for this analysis, including any instances in which a director was credited as a “co-director.” A total of 472 filmmakers were formally credited as producers. This study included the following credited producer roles in analysis: executive producer, producer and co-producer. If a director was formally credited additionally as a producer in the same film, that individual was counted in both the director and producer categories.

This content analysis employed visual coding with multiple sources to assign broad categories in terms of gender and racial and ethnic minority groups. Data was collected and checked using a cross-referenced combination of the official film websites, IMDB profiles, and media coverage about each film and filmmaker. Best efforts were made to verify each available data point through multiple sources of public information and additional assessment with International Documentary Association personnel. With regard to race and ethnicity, for this analysis, only “white” and “racial and ethnic minority” were coded, given the known limitations of using visual and media data (photos, IMDB profiles, media articles) alone. More granular and precise racial and ethnic identifications of film directors and producers—beyond broad categories here—were not determined, given the potential challenges in visual identifications cross-referenced with media articles. Judgments about broad gender categories were additionally made with names and pronouns (she/he) in media articles, along with visual, photographic information. Across the 2018 films, about 2% of producers were unable to be categorized, and across the full group of 2008-2018 films, about 1% of filmmakers (directors/producers combined) were unable to be categorized. Past decade data (2008-2017) is based on data curation and analysis completed for an earlier study; multiple trained independent researchers worked with the study’s principal investigator to check and verify data. A sample (20%) of films in the 2008-2017 sample was independently coded in order to verify intercoder reliability.⁶ Krippendorff’s alpha (α) was at least .83 on the variables included here, with an average of 96 percent agreement.

¹ McNamara, M. (2016, January 16). Why the #OscarsSoWhite fuss matters. Los Angeles Times. <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/tv/showtracker/la-et-st-0119-why-the-oscarssowhite-fuss-matters-20160119-column.html>.

² Approximately 1% of 2008-2018 filmmakers group was unable to be verified by race/ethnicity.

³ Approximately 2% of 2008-2018 filmmakers group was unable to be verified by race/ethnicity.

⁴ Approximately 1% of the 2008-2018 producers group was unable to be verified by race/ethnicity.

⁵ Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences (n.d.). 2018 Oscar Nominees. <http://oscar.go.com/nominees/documentary-feature>

⁶ Krippendorff, K. (2004). Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.



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