

PUBLIC WANT KEVIN HART RETURNED AS HOST OF HOLLYWOOD
HOMO-FEST

Kevin Hart isn't the problem. The Gay Oscars are the problem.

Comedian/actor Kevin Hart resigned as host 91st annual Academy Awards. (Gregory Pace/Rex Shutterstock /Zuma Press/TNS)

 Michael Phillips

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Congratulations to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for putting out a fire it personally started by offering Kevin Hart the 2019 Oscars hosting gig.

Congratulations, and good luck solving your real problem.

At the moment, the Oscars epitomize the industry they were created to promote: confused. Defensive. Chagrined, temporarily. Buckling under the weight of nearly a century of sexism, misogyny, racism and fashion mishaps.

Can an American tradition nearly twice the age of the Super Bowl ever regain its relevance and its ratings?

To recap: Wednesday Kevin Hart was announced as the next Oscars host. On Thursday, refusing to muster a legitimate

apology for homophobic slurs in tweets and stand-up routines past, the popular comedian, movie star and self-branding expert “resigned.” [Between Lena Dunham and Kevin Hart](#), the art of the apology has rarely seen a less skillful couple of days.

Eventually Hart apologized, more or less, and by doing so he did all of us a favor.

He spared us the prospect of a middling, motor-mouth talent with a massive social media presence sweating to keep a bloated, antiquated hunk of network television under three hours.

He spared us the possibility of an opening monologue nervously acknowledging or conspicuously avoiding the objectionable comments he made a few years ago, back when times were less “sensitive” (his word), back when Hart wasn’t evolved enough to know better, way, way back in his early 30s.

Comedy’s a rough game. Risking offense is part of that game. Pick a better potential Oscar host, from Keegan-Michael Key to Jordan Peele to Sarah Silverman to Tiffany Haddish: There’s a good chance you’ll find a YouTube clip or an Instagram post constituting grounds for an apology, whether extorted by the academy or not.

But the academy has a far more serious problem than its misguided, un-vetted initial choice of Kevin Hart as Oscar emcee.

The problem is the irrelevant chore that the Oscars have become.

The Feb. 24 Oscars telecast marks the 91st edition of the tradition, begun in 1929 with a simple, 15-minute ceremony held at the Hollywood Roosevelt hotel. Last year's run, the 90th, garnered the worst TV ratings since TV came into the picture.

The 2018 show, the second to be hosted by Jimmy Kimmel, was far from the worst recent Oscars bash. But we're talking about a starry night now contending with a ridiculous degree of light pollution, emitted by other entertainment options.

If "Black Panther" wins the Oscar this year, that'll be different. That'll be what a lot of people want, including those inside the academy's Board of Governors; inside ABC-TV (home of the Oscars telecast); and inside the ABC's corporate owner, Disney, which runs Marvel. Which made "Black Panther." Which was a huge, ratings-friendly hit.

The old world is gone. For the movies, it's a bigger, broader, more interesting world now. It's getting there, anyway.

Six years ago, Oscars host and "Family Guy" creator Seth MacFarlane sang "We Saw Your Boobs" in the opening number, and the look on Charlize Theron's face — even if it was prerecorded — was like a message from the near future: Screw this boys' club humor. Enough. Time's up.

 'Black Panther'

T'Challa/Black Panther (Chadwick Boseman, left) and Erik Killmonger (Michael B. Jordan) face off in "Black Panther." (Matt Kennedy/Marvel Studios / TNS)

Four months ago, the academy's governors voted to create a new award to coexist alongside the "outstanding motion picture" category, recognizing "outstanding achievement in popular film." Enough with the "Spotlight"s and the "Moonlight"s and the "Shape of Water"s and all the other big Oscar winners that were, in many respects, small. Where's the award for the stockholder-friendly \$200 million franchise item?

The "popular" award, reportedly ordered by ABC-TV for the purposes of the show's declining ratings, failed to establish criteria or a voting process or eligibility or what the hell "popular" means. For now it's on hold.

These and other economically driven maneuvers came at a time when the academy got more serious about diversifying its voting ranks, at long last. That much the Oscars are doing right. It's going to be progressively less of a white male hangout, and we may see a shift in what sorts of movies reap the awards in future years.

Short of a merger with the looser, hipper, more nimble Golden Globes, an annual event that has out-hosted and out-funneled the Oscars for years now, I wonder if there's any way to creatively

reactivate the Oscars. We're living in a time of perpetual, distracting, cheap cliffhangers provided by a ratings-conscious president. America's relationship to many of its long-standing institutions, from the U.S. government to the Olympics, the Super Bowl, the Emmys and the Grammys — it's all eroding. And maybe inevitable.

Meantime I offer these reminders:

The Oscars should run 2.5 hours. At the most.

The Oscars should not implement a "people's choice" or "best big hit that didn't stink" award. Ever.

The Oscars should consider parting ways with ABC. By becoming less of a thing, pressurized by ratings expectations, it might just become a thing that feels new, not old.

Finally: The Oscars never should've gone after Kevin Hart. Homophobia aside, he's a medium-grade talent. There's enough medium-grade talents on that stage every year as it is.

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