



Hollywood: Her Story June 2020 ENewsletter Honoring African Americans and the Oscars

In the current environment, as the U.S. is confronting the issue of racism, we want to acknowledge the African-American women who were the firsts in receiving Oscar nods for acting. Although significant roles have not always been available for African-American women and they faced a substantial amount of stereotyping, these talented actresses have nevertheless claimed their place in film industry history. To quote Oscar-winner Viola Davis, "The only thing that separates women of color from anyone else is opportunity." To their credit, these actresses seized the opportunities that came their way.



In 1940, **Hattie McDaniel** was the first African American, male or female, to win an Oscar. The Best Supporting Actress award came after she appeared as Mammy in *Gone with the Wind*. She and the other African-American actors from *Gone with the Wind* were prohibited from attending the film's premiere in 1939 due to the segregation in force at that time in Atlanta, Georgia. McDaniel had to be escorted into the Academy Award presentation in 1940 because of the strict no-blacks policy at the Cocoanut Grove nightclub and could not sit with the other actors. Although limited in the types of roles offered to her because of her race, Hattie McDaniel is still credited with 83 roles, but estimated to have appeared in more than 300. The best-known African-American actor of her time, she appeared with Hollywood's biggest stars. McDaniel has been featured on a U.S. postage stamp.



It took more than 50 years for another African-American woman to win the Best Supporting Actress Oscar. That happened in 1991 when **Whoopi Goldberg** won for her role in *Ghost*. One of the fifteen individuals to have won an Oscar, Grammy, Emmy and Tony, Goldberg is also a comedian, author and television personality. She had been nominated for the 1986 Best Actress Oscar for her role as Celle in *The Color Purple* prior to her Oscar win, making her the first African American to have received nominations for both Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress. Goldberg has also been named a Disney Legend.



The first African-American actress to be nominated for the Best Actress in a Leading Role Oscar, **Dorothy Dandridge** earned that distinction in 1955 for her performance in *Carmen Jones*. She performed in movies for almost thirty years, but racism and the associated dearth of parts open for her limited her film choices.



Almost fifty years later, in 2002, **Halle Berry** became the first African-American woman to win the Academy Award for Best Actress for her role in *Monster's Ball*. Berry had produced and starred in the 1999 television movie on Dandridge's life titled *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge* for which Berry won an Emmy, a Golden Globe and a Screen Actors Guild Award. Berry acknowledged Dandridge during her remarks on the receipt of her Oscar. Berry and Dandridge had both been born at the same hospital in Cleveland, Ohio.

Women in front of and behind the camera make the movies that we all welcome into our hearts and homes. Women across all the areas of moviemaking from actress to animator, editor to stuntwoman, costume designer to screenwriter, producer to director have contributed to the success of the movie industry since its founding in the 1890s. Help us celebrate these women who are written into movie history in *Hollywood: Her Story*.

Jill S. Tietjen and Barbara Bridges

[Visit Our Website](#)