

Hope for the Future and the Film Industry



By
Forrest Tuff

As I reflect on the past events of 2020 as an African-American male entrepreneur, many thoughts come to mind. What began as a promising year of "2020 Vision" quickly mutated into "Survival of the Fittest" during one of the most controversial and emotionally charged years in modern history. After experiencing events such as the Black Lives Matter protests (following the tragic deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd) and the shutdown of the entertainment industry, due to COVID-19, it was time to buckle down and reassess my aspirations. Like so many others, I had to think outside-the-box in order to create revenue opportunities. Admittedly, while this was very challenging at first it was also extremely liberating. Realizing that organizations were reevaluating their business models and more receptive to opportunity in the areas of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), I was prepared to seize all opportunities. It was exciting to know that companies such as Amazon, Hulu and Netflix were procuring new content from diverse independent production companies. As the year progressed, many events would take place that would change the landscape of America and the entertainment industry forever.

During the pandemic, we experienced the

impeachment of former president Donald Trump, Murder hornets in the U.S. West-coast wildfires, the Stock Market crash of 2020, the Beirut explosion, the deaths of hi-profile, iconic personalities such as Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Civil Rights Leader John Lewis, future Hall of Fame NBA player Kobe Bryant, Actor Chadwick Boseman and the conviction of Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein. To add insult to injury, 2021 kept the ball rolling with the US Capitol in DC being stormed and vandalized by American citizens and the 2nd impeachment of former President Donald Trump. Interestingly, humanity is resilient and we remain optimistic about our future. It seems we can take the worst beating and somehow manage to get up, dust ourselves off and give it another go.

This gives me hope. You see, what I failed to mention is the positivity that arose from these tragedies. **Diverse** individuals subjected themselves to experimental tests so that we could have a Coronavirus vaccine and many Essential Workers such as healthcare professionals, truck drivers, grocery and farm workers, to name a few, risked their lives to keep the economy afloat while families, friends and businesses began utilizing on-line meeting platforms. **Equity** was shown

with the Supreme Court ruling a person could not be fired for their sexual orientation or preference, Kamala Harris, the 1st ever African/Asian American woman was elected as a VP candidate and Native Americans were elected to Congress. **Inclusion** was promoted with Democrats and Republicans working together in Congress to pass the Cares Act and many White Americans accepted "hard truths" concerning the disparity between races and used their voice to speak up, take action and protest for minority groups. Kudos!

I hope the positive DEI momentum will continue into the post-COVID film industry once society returns to a semblance of normalcy? Is it possible that Hollywood will further recognize the contributions of under-represented groups? In a study conducted annually by UCLA called, "The UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report", they looked at the highest-grossing films of 2018 and 2019 and compared the percentage of lead roles given to women and minorities, as well as the percentage of overall roles.

The diversity of lead roles for both women and minorities improved by 3% (41%-44.1% from 2018-2019. In 2018, 41% of lead roles went to women; in 2019, 44.1% of lead roles went to women. In 2018, 26.6% of lead roles went to minorities; in 2019, 27.6% of lead roles went to minorities

Minorities were better represented across all roles in film, rising from 30.9% in 2018 to 32.7% in 2019. Therefore, the movies we watched in 2019 were slightly less dominated by white males. Movies that featured a diverse cast were actually out-earning their less-diverse counterparts. In 2019, seven out of ten of the top 10 highest-grossing films had casts that were over 21% minority. In fact, a Korean movie (Parasite) had an unprecedented sweep during the 2020 Oscars.

This is great news and could very well explain why onscreen diversity is on the rise. Although, disparities still exist in producer and director roles in Hollywood, progress is progress – right! For now, I'll be thankful for new experiences, hope for the future and progress of DEI in a post-COVID film industry. Nevertheless, until that day, I'm reminded to live by my mantra, "Creators will create."



Forrest Tuff is the Founder and CEO of One Vision Productions, a multimedia agency that specializes in video production, film, aerial drone services, new media, photography and innovative graphic design. Known as the Filmpreneur® he has more than 200 credits in film and television.