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<div align="center">Hollywood: The Land of Stolen Dreams</div>

I.       **Introduction**

In the United States, Hollywood is known as the land of dreams. It is a place where stories of all kinds are brought to life for people around the world to see. It is a place so magical and wanted that hundreds and even thousands of people have likely dreamt of making a break in this remarkable land of storytelling with hopes of gaining recognition and celebrity. Dozens of actors have even said that they had given up everything in their lives just so they could move to Los Angeles and hope to get noticed and find an opportunity – everything for a chance of being recognized by millions of people worldwide. Indeed, this journey may sound like a fairy tale with a happy ending, and some have been lucky to have their dreams come true. The reality of the fight to be in this industry, however, is not at all like a fairy tale.

In the past five years, online movements, such as the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, have been fighting to hold Hollywood accountable for a history of injustices against women and other minorities, and continue to demand that more change occur. These injustices have recently become more obvious as people started to consider demographic changes in the US population and media audiences. At present, ethnic and racial minorities make up 40% of US population, and this percentage is expected to grow and become a majority by 2050 (Molina-Guzmán). So far, many changes in diversity have in fact taken effect, with more women and minorities on lead roles of record-breaking films, such as Gal Gadot in *Wonder Woman* (2017) or Chadwick Boseman in *Black Panther* (2018)*.* Undoubtedly, it

seems as though Hollywood is moving past predominantly white and male led films. This change in recent years has led many people to believe that diversity is finally taking over the industry and that true diversity has ultimately been accomplished. Nevertheless, there are still many who remain attentive to the reality behind the scenes and do not let themselves be convinced that the industry has truly become diverse.

II.        **Opposing View**

Those in defense of the film industry argue that Hollywood has undergone an enormous amount of change in diversity that should be praised and not continuously ignored. According to UCLA's seventh Hollywood Diversity Report, between 2011 and 2019 the percentage of women in film in lead roles increased by 18.5%, which almost closes the gap between 55.9% of male leads to 44.1% of female leads (Hunt and Ramón). In addition, the same study has found an increase of 11% of female directors. More important than the increase in inclusion itself is the fact that women are also selling big on the big screen. Films like Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* (2019) show just a sliver of women's competence for directing, writing, and acting, but they also show that women on and behind the screens can sell big in the box office.

As for racial representation, the UCLA report indicates that the number of people of color in film lead roles has also had a steady increase of 17.1% from 2011 to 2019. Although the disparity gap between people of color and white leads remains wide, a difference of 27.6% to 72.4%, the report shows that the numbers should continue to increase given that a decline has not occurred since 2014. Certainly, more people of color are making their way into the spotlight both in film and television. For example, actors and directors Regina King, Viola Davis, or Ava DuVernay, are slowly but surely becoming household names in the world of entertainment. Considering this, many believe that the number of people of color on- and off-screen can only go up from now on.

In terms of LGBTQ+ representation, more characters are starting to make their break, with 47 LGBTQ+ characters in films released in 2015. Although many times such characters are not in lead roles, there are exceptions. For example, Barry Jenkin's 2016 film *Moonlight*, a movie about a black gay man whose story is not limited only to his race or sexuality but to the overall complexity of his life, received so much praise and recognition from the critics that it ran for Best Picture at the Oscars of 2017. What is more, despite the momentary glitch at the award show, where it was announced that *La La Land* (2016) had won Best Picture, it was *Moonlight* that took the award home. The win sparked hope for improvement of representation of LGBTQ+ individuals on-screen ("Portrayal of LGBTQ individuals in TV, film") and it is a win that is continuously celebrated in the community.

Inarguably, one cannot ignore the fact that more films are coming out where women and other minorities are proving to be talented, deserving stars. More women have taken on lead roles as superheroes, CEOs, or other figures of power, such as Brie Larson as superhero Carol Danvers in *Captain Marvel* (2017), or Saoirse Ronan as Jo March in the adaptation of *Little Women* (2019). Not only that, but both of those movies were directed by women, Anna Boden and Greta Gerwig respectively. The same progress is true for people of color, with the best example currently being Marvel's *Black Panther* (2018), which has a cast mainly comprised of people of color, or for LGBTQ+ representation as the Academy award-winning *Moonlight* has shown. But despite all that, it is important to note that numbers only are not representative of the issue in its entirety.

### III.        My Viewpoint & Thesis Statement

Admittedly, the film industry has accomplished great achievements regarding minority representation on the screens, but the fact remains that representation on-screen is often stereotypical and one-dimensional, and many women and other minorities continue to struggle in other sectors. As a matter of fact, although women may be taking on lead roles more often, the quality of female representation is often inaccurate and appealing to sexist views or gender roles. For example, Gal Gadot

in her role as Wonder Woman may make an enormous positive impact for young girls who can now believe that women can be resilient, smart, *and* a superhero, but the depiction of said superhero as inspired by the original comics' costume continues to serve the male gaze. Indeed, female superheroes are often depicted wearing tight costumes that accentuate their hips or chest and almost always show too much skin. Such depiction of women's physique only contributes to societal expectations of women's appearance, body, and manner of dressing. Not only that, but women in superhero lead roles tend to receive backlash and gratuitous online hate by spectators, as was the case with Brie Larson when it was announced that she would be playing superhero Captain Marvel. Male viewers spent months harassing the actress online claiming she did not have the right body nor was pretty enough for the role, not to mention their demands for her to "smile more" in the film posters. Moreover, when female characters are not the lead in a film, they are often there to support the male character and play into gender roles ("Diversity in Entertainment"), as seen in movies such as the 007 series, where a sexy female character's main intention is to bring sensuality to the film or serve as a caring guide to the male lead, with little to no real purpose to the plot. In other words, inclusivity should only be considered absolute progress if the depiction of women is representative of reality and not of male expectations only.

In addition to that, a research conducted by University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee labor economist John Heywood and his co-researchers has found that there still exists an enormous gender pay disparity in Hollywood. Heywood has found, after considering several implications, such as followers on Twitter or length of career, that there is a difference of about $1 million dollars between male and female pay in Hollywood. Heywood emphasizes that the issue does not lie in women's willingness to demand a higher pay, given that the actors themselves do not negotiate payments with the studios. Therefore, one agent or company who negotiates for male and female actors alike will try to make a good deal for all parties, given that they tend to receive a percentage of the star's payment. That indicates that the issue has

nothing to do with women's assertiveness, but rather the studios' willingness to pay an amount equal or close to a male actor's pay (Vickery). These findings further suggest that an increase in the number of women in speaking roles or lead roles does not truly indicate that the issue has been resolved, but rather that inequality remains prevalent in other less noticeable ways.

Moving beyond the screen, while women may finally be making a break in the directing sector, at least in television, the number of female film directors remains astonishingly low compared to male directors. In the first place, it should be noted that at least half of students in film schools are female; nonetheless, compared to male directors who make it in the industry, only a small percentage of film directors are women, standing at about 15.1% compared to 84.9% for male directors (Lyden; Hunt and Ramón). In a review of the documentary film *Half the Picture* (2018), directed by Amy Adrion, this disparity is explored by emphasizing the main points made in the documentary film, which intends to show the viewer the struggles that women suffer in the sector. In the film, directors Ava DuVernay and Brenda Chapman, among others, explain that the system in the industry is "built for women to fail". Women are often passed over with the excuse that they are not talented or competent enough to direct a feature film, even for movies that are *about* women, as it happened with Brenda Chapman and the animated Disney film *Brave* (2012), which she ended up co-directing with Mark Andrews (Lyden). In a way, women's voices are being stifled and they are forced to let men tell stories about women in a manner that they deem appropriate. It then becomes unclear what it truly takes for women to be allowed to have the space for directing a film, when they cannot even direct films that talk about their own experiences.

Furthermore, it may be that racial and ethnic representation is growing, but people of color are often portrayed based on stereotypical and one-dimensional views. Although *Moonlight* was indeed a revolutionary film, stories with people of color rarely cover all the complexities of the character beyond his or her race and ethnicity. To explain, a study conducted by management consulting firm McKinsey &

Company tried to uncover why racial and ethnic representation remains so backwards. The study

included interviews of several individuals in the industry, including producers, writers, and directors that

revealed that executives interested in exploring "Black content" often look for "Wakanda or poverty,

with no in-between". That then leaves Black actors with no choice, forcing them to take on roles that

will portray a stereotypical character that is not representative of their communities (King). As a result, it

is all too common for Blacks to be portrayed as criminals, Hispanics as mafia leaders, or Asians as either

tremendously intelligent or as poor local restaurant owners only.

The same study looked to investigate the public's views on the issue of representation and how

important it was to them. The result showed some divisiveness – while some people passionately

believe that there should be better representation in entertainment, others remain essentially

indifferent and believe that racial representation has nothing to do with a film's storyline (King).  Once

again, it is important to emphasize that representation on-screen does not equal absolute progress. On

the contrary, more people of color on-screen could very well be used to portray a false image of

marginalized communities and solidify misconceptions that already exist in a society where it is easier to

use ignorance as a scapegoat for outright hatred.

In a similar fashion, the issue of quantity versus quality is ever so represent in LGBTQ+

representation. According to GLAAD's eighth annual Studio Responsibility Index, or SRI, although the

numbers remain low compared to other groups, the percentage of LGBTQ+ characters in film has

increased extensively. Nevertheless, LGBTQ-inclusive films continue to take a stereotypical and one-

dimensional approach to a community that is much more than just their sexual orientation and/or

gender identity. Many times, LGBTQ+ characters' personalities are based solely on their sexual

orientation and have no other significant substance, ignoring all the complexities of what it means not

only to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transexual, but just another regular human being. What is more, the

little representation that exists does not always include people of color, people with disabilities, or

transgenders. In fact, the SRI has found zero transgender characters in the 118 LGBTQ-inclusive major

studio films of 2019. Moreover, the duration of screen time for LGBTQ+ characters is often too short,

given that they are mostly not in lead roles. To illustrate this point, the SRI has found a continuous

problem in several 2019 films, where only nine out of twenty-two films included LGBTQ characters who

had more than ten minutes of screen time ("GLAAD's 2020 Studio Responsibility Index"). Therefore,

while it is true that LGBTQ+ characters are becoming a part of the story, they are given no true

substance and are often sidelined in the narrative.

   To this end, recognizing these facts is a first step for both audiences and those within the industry to

provide a wider and safer space for minorities in the film industry. Many researchers and professionals

in the industry agree that if minorities have the space to tell their story, accuracy and quality of

representation could substantially improve ("Diversity in Entertainment"). That space should include not

only speaking or leading roles, but also roles for minorities to write, produce, and direct authentic

stories. That is important not only for a representative image of society in entertainment media, but also

as a means of helping minorities identify with stories and characters that they see on the big screen. In

fact, psychologists have brought attention to the negative, mental consequences of groups that are

underrepresented in entertainment media ("Diversity in Entertainment"), which means that shifting the

current system to a more diverse one will benefit many people, especially young people, allowing them

to become more accepting of their individual identity or culture. Thus, for this new phase of the film

industry to succeed, audiences must recognize current achievements and reinforce their benefits, but

they should also continue to demand further improvements, especially in the creative sectors.


**III. Common Ground & Proposition**

      By celebrating what has been accomplished so far but also demanding and encouraging further

progress, it could become easier for studios and executives to see that they do not take the risk of doing

poorly in the box office or losing any relevance. On the contrary, if they were willing to not only reinforce diversity on-screen but also behind the scenes, they will see that diversity sells. To illustrate this point, the study conducted by McKinsey & Company has found that Hollywood's consistent disregard for minorities, especially racial minorities, is leading them to lose $10 billion dollars annually (Sperling). Therefore, it is no longer possible to justify lack of diversity on the grounds that "white faces sell better", because it has become clear that audiences expect to see diversity both on and behind the screens.

Perhaps for these reasons some parties in the industry have already been trying to save face, as is the case with the Academy Awards. In September of 2020, amidst the tragedy of George Floyd's murder by police brutality, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) decided to establish a new set of rules for Oscars eligibility designed to encourage studios to create a more equitable representation on- and off-screen. The rules are divided into four Standards, A through D, each of which studios should meet some criteria to be eligible for nomination. Interestingly, some of the standards demand reinforcement of inclusion of groups that are usually predominant in certain sectors regardless. For example, part of Standard D asks that publicity and distribution executives on a film are from an underrepresented group – considering that many women and gay men already work in publicity, for instance, it is easy for any studio to check that box. This new set of rules may give the impression that it will be easy for studios to check the simplest boxes, but Oscar voters will still have to analyze which diversity standards a contender has met and which films merely "skated by with a handful of interns" (Buchanan). In essence, these new rules indicate that diversity standards are not difficult to meet, and it is only a matter of interest and desire to build a creative environment that is accurately representative of the US population and moviegoers.

Moreover, diversity both on and behind the screens could serve as inspiration for minorities that want to have a career in the industry or simply to relate to what they are watching on the screen.

As of right now, film production remains highly limited to a small social network of people who have the financial means to produce a film (Molina-Guzmán), which makes it much harder for newcomers to make a break. Therefore, it would be advantageous for studios and film executives to invest in a higher budget for the hiring of minorities in several creative sectors and encourage more accurate diverse representation. That is beneficial to the industry in two ways: one is that it will continue the cycle of diversity in the industry – more minorities will take on lead roles, assume roles as directors, writers, or others, and consequently minority characters will be more accurately represented; the second benefit is that this diversity will maintain and even grow the flow of moviegoers, which will consequently result in more financial growth.

Despite all that, for some, coming to this conclusion may suggest that including minorities just for the sake of pleasing audiences may enable *tokenism*, which simply means an unsubstantial inclusion of a minority person or group ("Diversity in Entertainment"). However, as minority representation stands now, this concept has already been implemented in such a subtle way that many people seem to ignore it. As previously stated, minority characters are often unsubstantial characters that are cast to the sidelines of the storyline, usually on a film or television show that is written, produced, and/or directed by a man or a white person. That already suggests that they are included for the sake of avoiding negative repercussions for lack of diversity on-screen and that studios believe that "checking a box" means that their job is done. For this reason, by turning the need for minority inclusion into more of a social statement, as audiences and several celebrities have been fighting to do so, tokenism could soon be out of the picture and minority representation could be as normal as the presence of a regular white and male talent. The fact remains that change has got to start somewhere, and the best place to start is by making continuous demands for change and applying certain rules that studios must follow. Although it may seem forced at first, it will be nonetheless effective.

IV.      **Conclusion**

In essence, the overall agreement should be not to ignore or undermine progress, but to acknowledge that more change and improvement must occur. Indeed, audiences and professionals within the industry should celebrate that representation of minorities has increased and improved throughout the years. Audiences now see more and more minorities portraying powerful characters or directing films that succeed in the box office, such as Regina King, Greta Gerwig, Chloe Zhao, or Jordan Peele, just to name a few. Letting this progress go unnoticed goes against the true desire for change. Nevertheless, audiences should not forget that there is still room for further improvement, and there should be demands for decision-makers in the industry to allow that more women and other minorities take on executive roles, such as screenwriters, casting directors, film directors, or producers. Applying such changes in the industry will help Hollywood evolve and become more representative of the US population, an advantage that will benefit audiences that feel misrepresented and marginalized, but that will also financially benefit the film industry and help it grow. In the end, more diversity and minority representation will benefit all and help realize what is supposed to be Hollywood's main goal: to tell stories and make people's dreams come true.

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