

## Special Oscar Column:

As the big day approaches, the question remains: Who will take home Oscar gold this Sunday night? For the benefit of movie-lovers and audiences, we've put together this list of predictions for the main categories of American cinema's top award.

**Picture:** "The Father," "Judas and the Black Messiah," "Mank," "Minari," "Nomadland," "Promising Young Woman," "Sound of Metal," "The Trial of the Chicago 7"

Though a couple of the titles ("Mank," "The Trial of the Chicago 7") might qualify as standard "prestige" releases, most of the nominations this year belong surprisingly (and appreciatively) to more idiosyncratic releases. Based on award recognition, the top choice clearly belongs to "Nomadland," which scored top prizes at festivals in Venice and Toronto as well as various critics' circles. Despite the surprise win of "Parasite" last year, however, don't discard the possibility of the Academy opting to go instead with a more traditional crowd-pleaser like "The Trial of the Chicago 7."

Overlooked: "Da Five Bloods," "First Cow," "On the Rocks," "Small Axe: Lovers Rock," "Vitalina Verela"

**Director:** Lee Isaac Chung ("Minari"), Emerald Fennell ("Promising Young Woman"), David Fincher ("Mank"), Thomas Vinterberg ("Another Round"), Chloe Zhao ("Nomadland")

In a category traditionally filled with veterans, the field is refreshingly populated with first-timers this year. (Fincher is the only previous nominee.) There's a tendency, particularly in recent years, of Picture and Director awards going to different films, though this year it looks safe to bet on both going to the same title, namely "Nomadland's" Chloe Zhao. Having swept the awards season, Zhao seems poised to become the first woman to win Best Director since Kathryn Bigelow in 2010 for "The Hurt Locker." (Her triumph would mark another landmark, as the first female Asian filmmaker to win.)

Overlooked: Spike Lee ("Da 5 Bloods"), Paul Greengrass ("News of the World"), Darius Marder ("Sound of Metal"), Kelly Reichardt ("First Cow"), Leigh Whannell ("The Invisible Man")

**Actor:** Riz Ahmed ("The Sound of Metal"), Chadwick Boseman ("Ma Rainey's Black Bottom"), Anthony Hopkins ("The Father"), Gary Oldman ("Mank"), Steven Yeun ("Minari")

Keeping with this year's unconventional choices, the award could very possibly be a posthumous one for Boseman, whose untimely passing gave his electrifying turn an extra layer of poignancy. (The fact that he was not nominated for his work in "Da 5 Bloods" adds to the feeling of the award as a recognition of a brilliant award.) Having already won Oscars before, veterans Hopkins and Oldman have lower odds despite excellent work in their respective films. Yeun and Ahmed would also be deserving picks, each actor endowing their complex characters with emotional urgency.

Overlooked: Ben Affleck ("The Way Back"), Kingsley Ben-Adir ("One Night in Miami"), Willem Dafoe ("Tommaso"), Delroy Lindo ("Da 5 Bloods"), Tom Hanks ("News of the World")

**Actress:** Viola Davis (“Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom”), Andra Day (“The United States vs. Billie Holiday”), Vanessa Kirby (“Pieces of a Woman”), Frances McDormand (“Nomadland”), Carey Mulligan (“Promising Young Woman”)

As in the Best Actor field, there’s a mix of veterans and first-timers. Unlike the Best Actor field, however, there’s no consensus for a favorite, giving the category an exciting uncertainty. Kirby and Day enjoyed breakout roles in underseen films, and Mulligan embodied her tricky role with ferocious aplomb. Most eyes however are on the race between Davis and McDormand. Both would be deserving winners, though Boseman’s near-guaranteed win might work against Davis, as rarely Best Actor and Best Actress go to the same film. Would that open the way for a third statuette for McDormand? Tune in to find out.

Overlooked: Jasmine Batchelor (“The Surrogate”), Carrie Coon (“The Nest”), Sidney Flanigan (“Never Rarely Sometimes Always”), Cristin Milioti (“Palm Springs”), Elisabeth Moss (“Shirley”)

**Supporting Actor:** Sacha Baron Cohen (“The Trial of the Chicago 7”), Daniel Kaluuya (“Judas and the Black Messiah”), Leslie Odom Jr. (“One Night in Miami...”), Paul Raci (“Sound of Metal”), Lakeith Stanfield (“Judas and the Black Messiah”)

The Supporting Actor category is a reliable field for choice acting, and this year is not different. What’s strange is how many of these performances could qualify as leads in their respective movies, especially in the case of Kaluuya and Stanfield. (Co-starring performers cutting into each other’s screen time are not uncommon in Oscar history.) With the same happening to Cohen and Odom Jr., that leaves the favorite spot to a legitimate supporting turn—Raci, whose lived-in quality added immensely to “Sound of Metal’s” sense of veracity and discovery.

Overlooked: Bill Murray (“On the Rocks”), Mark Rylance (“The Trial of the Chicago 7”), David Strathairn (“Nomadland”), Stanley Tucci (“Supernova”), Glynn Turman (“Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom”)

**Supporting Actress:** Maria Bakalova (“Borat Subsequent Moviefilm”), Glenn Close (“Hillbilly Elegy”), Olivia Colman (“The Father”), Amanda Seyfried (“Mank”), Youn Yuh-jung (“Minari”)

Several first-timers square off against veteran hopefuls and winners. Young actresses often score breakthrough successes in this field, which could help out Bakalova and Seyfried. For many, the battle is between Close (who’s been repeatedly nominated but has yet to win) and Colman (who, in a surprise upset, defeated Close for Best Actress a few years back). Most Oscar experts however are betting on Youn, who is leading the critical wave for “Minari” and who embodies another favorite Academy scenario, the foreign-language seasoned hand discovered by American audiences.

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