

Turning Down an Academy Award: Marlon Brando declined Best Actor Oscar

By [Global Research News](#)

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*On March 5, 1973, the actor Marlon Brando declines the Academy Award for Best Actor for his career-reviving performance in *The Godfather*. The [Native American](#) actress Sacheen Littlefeather attended the ceremony in Brando's place, stating that the actor "very regretfully" could not accept the award, as he was protesting Hollywood's portrayal of [Native Americans](#) in film.*

Now revered by many as the greatest actor of his generation, Brando earned his first Oscar nomination for his portrayal of the brutish Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951). The role was a reprisal of Brando's incendiary performance in the 1947 stage production of [Tennessee](#) Williams' play, which first brought him to the public's attention. Nominated again for roles in *Viva Zapata!* (1952) and *Julius Caesar* (1953), he won his first Academy Award for *On the Waterfront* (1954).

Brando's career went into decline in the [1960s](#), with expensive flops such as *One-Eyed Jacks* (1961), which he also directed, and *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962). Aside from his preternatural talent, the actor had become notorious for his moodiness and demanding on-set behavior, as well as his tumultuous off-screen life. Francis Ford Coppola, the young director of *The Godfather*, had to fight to get him cast in the coveted role of Vito Corleone. Brando won the role only after undergoing a screen test and cutting his fee to \$250,000—far less than what he had commanded a decade earlier. With one of the most memorable screen performances of all time, Brando rejuvenated his career, and *The Godfather* became an almost-immediate classic.

On the eve of the 1972 Oscars, Brando announced that he would boycott the ceremony, and would send Littlefeather in his place. After Brando's name was announced as Best Actor, the presenter Roger Moore (star of several James Bond films) attempted to hand the Oscar to Littlefeather, but she brushed it aside, saying that Brando could not accept the award. Littlefeather read a portion of a lengthy statement Brando had written, the entirety of which was later published in the press, including *The New York Times*. "The motion picture community has been as responsible as any," Brando wrote, "for degrading the Indian and making a mockery of his character, describing his as savage, hostile and evil."

Brando had been involved in social causes for years, speaking publicly in support of the formation of a Jewish state in the 1940s, as well as for African-American civil rights and the Black Panther Party. His Oscar statement expressed support for the American Indian Movement (AIM) and referenced the ongoing situation at [Wounded Knee](#), the [South Dakota](#) town that had been seized by AIM members the previous month and was currently under

siege by U.S. military forces. Wounded Knee had also been the site of a massacre of Native Americans by U.S. government forces in 1890.

Brando was the second performer to turn down a Best Actor Oscar; the first was George C. Scott, who politely declined to accept his award for *Patton* in 1971 and reportedly said of the Academy Awards hoopla: "I don't want any part of it." Scott had previously declined a Best Supporting Actor nomination for *The Hustler* (1961).

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