


Diddy called out the Grammys for ignoring black artists during a pre-awards gala. The issue was still true when the ceremony took place on Sunday.

 [washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2020/01/27/diddy-called-out-grammys-ignoring-black-artists-issue-](https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2020/01/27/diddy-called-out-grammys-ignoring-black-artists-issue-)

By Bethonie
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The Grammy Awards featured virtually no mention of the chaos surrounding the Recording Academy, including allegations of gender discrimination and sexual harassment from its ousted CEO in the week leading up to Sunday night's ceremony. But the mounting scrutiny over the organization's recognition — or lack thereof — of black and female artists did not go unnoticed as the music industry gathered in Los Angeles this weekend.

Hip-hop mogul Diddy, who received the academy's salute to industry icons award, addressed the controversy toward the end of a passionate, nearly one-hour speech at Clive Davis's annual pre-Grammys gala on Saturday.

"I say this with love to the Grammys, because you really need to know this. Every year, y'all be killing us, man," he began. "I'm talking about the pain — I'm speaking for all the artists here, producers, the executives — the amount of time that it takes to make these records, to pour your heart out into it, and you just want an even playing field?"

"We are passionate. For most of us, this is all we got. This is our only hope," he added, following a nod to Erykah Badu's "Tyrone," which starts with the singer announcing, indelibly, that as an artist, she's "sensitive about" her work.

"Truth be told, hip-hop has never been respected by the Grammys," he added. "Black music has never been respected by the Grammys to the point that it should be."

"So, right now, this current situation — it's not a revelation," Diddy continued, alluding to the bombshell complaint Deborah Dugan, the Recording Academy's first female president and CEO, filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission last week. "This thing's been going on. And it's not just going on in music, it's going on in film, it's going on in sports, it's been going on around the world."

The apparent lack of diversity within the academy's leadership has been criticized for years. But the implications of the organization's issues with representation are a key point in Dugan's EEOC complaint. Her filing — which followed the academy's announcement that she had been placed on administrative leave less than six months into the gig — included bombshell allegations of sexual misconduct and alleged a "boy's club" culture at the organization behind "music's biggest night."

The filing also highlighted the diversity issues that have plagued the Grammys, where black artists have repeatedly been relegated to the R&B and rap categories, failing to win — and, in some cases, receive nominations — for major awards. Just 10 black artists have won album of the year since the first Grammys' ceremony in 1959. Only one rap album — “SpeakerBoxxx/The Love Below,” Outkast's genre-bending 2003 effort — has received the honor to date.

“For years, we've been allowing institutions that have never had our best interests at heart to judge us. And that stops right now,” Diddy said to cheers and applause from a crowd that included Quincy Jones, Cardi B, Jay-Z and Beyoncé. Beyoncé's epic sixth album, “Lemonade,” famously lost the 2017 album of the year award to Adele's “25.”

The mogul called on his peers to demand change, while evoking the trendsetting nature of hip-hop. “We have the power, we decide what's hot,” he said. “If we don't go, nobody goes. If we don't support, nobody supports. We control what's cool, we control what's hot. We control what your kids listen to, what they dance to. We control what's in video games. ... We control everything.”

Diddy isn't the first black artist to slam the Grammy awards for its strained history with the hip-hop community. Other critics have included Frank Ocean, Kanye West and Drake, whose speech was cut off at least year's ceremony after he lamented an environment where awards were decided by “a bunch of people that might not understand, you know, what a mixed-race kid from Canada has to say or a fly Spanish girl from New York.”

Sunday's ceremony was a markedly somber affair, taking place just hours after the death of NBA legend Kobe Bryant, who died alongside his 13-year-old daughter, Gianna, in a helicopter crash in Los Angeles. But the academy's turmoil remained, as Diddy called it in his pre-Grammys speech, an elephant in the room. Speaking to reporters backstage, Tyler, the Creator — whose work is often referred to as alternative hip-hop — discussed his ambivalence over winning the award for best rap album.

“On one side, I'm very grateful that what I made could just be acknowledged in a world like this,” he said. “But also, it sucks that whenever we, and I mean guys that look like me, do anything that's genre-bending, they always put it in a 'rap' or 'urban' category.”

“I don't like that 'urban' word. To me, it's just a politically correct way to say the n-word,” he added. “Why can't we just be in pop?”

On Sunday, the Grammy for best urban contemporary album, a category that was created in 2013, went to Lizzo for “Cuz I Love You.” Despite scoring the most nominations, Lizzo was completely shut out of the top four categories — which were swept by teen phenom Billie

Eilish — and walked away with just two additional awards: best traditional R&B performance and best pop solo performance, which was incidentally the only award she was given during the telecast.

The Recording Academy has denied the many allegations in Dugan's report, slamming them as "unsubstantiated attacks." But in a letter to its members Sunday, interim CEO Harvey Mason Jr. acknowledged that the music industry "and academy have alienated some of our own artists — in particular, through a lack of diversity that, in many cases, results in a culture that leans toward exclusion rather than inclusion."

To that end, Mason said the organization would hire a diversity and inclusion officer, in addition to establishing a fellowship "that will be responsible for independent review and recording of the progress of the academy's diversity and inclusion efforts." He also pledged the immediate creation of a fund that would be distributed annually to "women in music" organizations, though the letter provided little detail on the newly announced positions.

Mason also said the academy would "recommit to meeting all 18" recommendations from the diversity task force that was created after Dugan's predecessor was widely criticized for suggesting, after the 2018 ceremony, that women needed to "step up" to win Grammys.

As reported by Variety, the task force — led by Michelle Obama's former chief of staff, Tina Tchen — outlined a number of ways for the academy and its leadership to better represent the diversity of the music industry. The group also issued a stern statement last week in response to Dugan's EEOC complaint, urging the academy to "implement all of the changes in the report ... without any delay" before the task force reconvenes in 90 days.

Diddy, who did not appear to be at the Grammys ceremony Sunday, also gave the academy a deadline.

"I'm officially starting the clock. Y'all got 365 days," Diddy said, later adding, "We need the artists to take back control. We need transparency. We need diversity. This is the room that has the power to make the change that needs to be made."