

Sent on September 10, 2020 at 19:52 CDT to Alison Tozzi Liu, copied Clare Reichenbach, Michell Davis, Mary Blanton Ogushwitz, and Kristopher Moon.

Ms. Tozzi Liu,

As you are well aware, you have neither answered any questions nor resolved any of the issues that I've raised in the two emails that I sent to you and the James Beard Foundation's leadership on September 9 and 10. And although your colleagues copied to this exchange - Ms. Reichenbach, Dr. Davis, Ms. Blanton Ogushwitz, and Mr. Moon - have remained silent so far (because I assume that you have been speaking on their behalf), I welcome them to help clarify, answer, or resolve the many outstanding issues that you have collectively left open. But I suspect they will not, because the only options available are revealing and admitting that extremely poor or possibly unethical decision-making occurred within the foundation, or doubling down on what has amounted so far to intentional evasion, deception, and probably prevarication. I challenge all of you to prove me wrong.

Although you've given me no straightforward answers, what you have given me is a trail of half-truths, which seem contradictory, but in fact have been helpful in deducing what I suspect might be the truth. Perhaps it is such a discovery in my last email to you this morning, that explains why you have chosen to reply to my penultimate email from September 9 instead. So that you don't have the advantage of plausible deniability, I repeat it here in more direct terms: The clarification I seek in the last paragraph of no. 2 in the email I sent this morning (September 10) made me realize why you and others within leadership might have been so oddly fixated on the issue of the revote in public statements as well as in replies to me. As you know, it's an issue that I struggled to find relevant, and one that I had all but dismissed as a sophomoric smoke bomb. In fact, it is a smoke bomb - but not for the reasons I thought. I've realized that the denials coming from leadership - including you - of knowing "who *would* have won" or the identity of the "*ultimate* winners," are actually referring to the nonexistent results from a revote that I continue to question whether was actually approved (as you've claimed), and that everyone definitely knows didn't happen. However, these cleverly wordsmithed denials are deceitfully being sold and intended to be understood as denials of knowing the results of the general vote in May - which [is] the object of everyone's queries and curiosity, including mine. And this charade depends entirely on a revote being shoehorned, however clumsily or awkwardly, into the narrative. To say that the leadership's denials have been Delphic is an understatement.

My last two emails to you remain unanswered, and I remain open to any truth you and your colleagues can offer. If I can't get answers from you or your colleagues, then I shall resort to other channels and means obtaining them. Rest assured, I am neither the only nor, by a fair country mile, the sharpest person who is trying to figure out what actually happened, and who at the foundation is responsible. The truth will out, with or without your help.

Regardless, as employees of the James Beard Foundation, I would hope that you would defend and protect the foundation's integrity and well-being. However, your unwillingness to be transparent continues to damage both, and the foundation simply cannot credibly advocate for any chef, restaurant, farmer, hospitality worker, or culinary student (let alone an entire industry of them) being so severely handicapped. Nothing is beyond the repair of admission of wrongdoing, apology, and meaningful corrective action. I hope you will consider these options.

Regards,
Bonjwing Lee

bonjwing.com
@bonjwing

ulteriorepicture.com
@ulteriorepicture

On Sep 10, 2020, at 5:24 PM, Alison Tozzi Liu
<atozziliu@jamesbeard.org> wrote:

Bonjwing,

We've answered your previous questions in good faith, but we understand your frustration. In 30 years of the Beard Awards we had never had anyone withdraw or be removed after the vote. We didn't have systems in place to deal with it. During the review process we are going to look at all of this, including the points and questions you've raised, so we can understand what happened, what went wrong, and how we can set up systems so that next time it's there is a process in place.

Regards,
Alison

From: Bonjwing Lee <bonjwing@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, September 9, 2020 2:27 AM
To: Alison Tozzi Liu <atozziliu@jamesbeard.org>
Cc: Mitchell Davis <mdavis@jamesbeard.org>; Clare Reichenbach <creichenbach@jamesbeard.org>; Mary Blanton Ogushwitz <mary.blanton@magrinopr.com>
Subject: Re: JBFA

Ms. Tozzi Liu,

Thank you for attempting to answering my questions. Unfortunately, your attempt is woefully inadequate. Either you have tried to intellectually insult me with a bucket of red herrings, or you have misidentified or misunderstood nearly every issue I raised. I am happy to extend you the benefit of the doubt on the former, and shall assume the latter, and apologize for any parts of my email that may have been unclear or misleading. To that end, I rephrase my points below, clarifying each issue so that there can be little to no mistake about the answers I seek.

Begin forwarded message:

From: Bonjwing Lee <bonjwing@gmail.com>

Subject: Re: JBFA

Date: September 10, 2020 at 11:23:16 AM CDT

To: Alison Tozzi Liu <atozziliu@jamesbeard.org>

Cc: Mitchell Davis <mdavis@jamesbeard.org>, Clare Reichenbach <creichenbach@jamesbeard.org>, Mary Blanton Ogushwitz <mary.blanton@magrinopr.com>, Kristopher Moon <kmoon@jamesbeard.org>

Ms. Tozzi Liu,

Yesterday, in an article in The New York Times, Mr. Wells brought to light more information regarding the issues that I raised in my previous email to you. Although Mr. Wells only revealed slivers of the R&C committee's statement to the James Beard Foundation leadership, what I could glean from his reporting strongly suggests that you and other members of the foundation's leadership have not been straightforward – if not contradictory, then intentionally deceptive – in your public statements and replies to me.

I believe that the questions I asked and the issues I raised in that previous email to you on September 9, if answered honestly, should resolve the issues I raise in this one. But since you seemed to struggle with understanding issues in previous emails, as in my last one to you, I err on the side of clarity in this one. To my previous queries, I add

these contradictory statements, which I ask that you resolve in your answers to me. Since Mr. Moon made one of the statements that is being contradicted by reporting, I've added him back to this exchange so that he might have the opportunity to explain or clarify his statement to me.

1. Re: Whether the R&C committee recommended and/or approved a revote.

In Dr. Davis's email to the nominees in late August, he stated: "With the number of withdrawals and removals of nominees from the list due to personal or eligibility reasons, *the committee had agreed to hold a revote* with a clean, updated ballot; the thinking being that any judge that cast their ballot previously for those now removed from the list should have the chance to recast their vote for an eligible candidate. The results of the revote would have been tabulated by our accounting firm and we would have accepted the results unconditionally. However, I wanted to state unequivocally that the revote never happened."

In Kristopher Moon's response to me on September 5, he stated: "Given the withdrawal of some of the nominees because of the current crisis or for other personal reasons, and the removal of those determined to be ineligible, *the Restaurant and Chef Committee decided that it would be more appropriate to conduct a revote among the remaining nominees*. The revote was going to take place in mid-August but because of the Foundation's decision not to name additional winners this year, the revote never began."

In no. 1 of your response to me on September 8, you stated: "*The full Restaurant and Chef Subcommittee had agreed to the revote.*"

In no. 5 of your response to me on September 8, you stated: "As stated above, *the [R&C] committee had indeed agreed to a revote* of the entire voting body."

However, these statements are contradicted by the R&C committee's statement, which suggests that it was the foundation, and not the R&C committee, that suggested a revote, and one, I might add, that recommended disenfranchising past winners in favor of internally selected judges (including me). Furthermore, the committee rejected this proposal, alleging that it was an attempt to alter established procedures. In Mr. Wells's article of September 9, he reported that the R&C committee members stated that: "On a phone call in July that was arranged to discuss the new allegations, 'a Foundation employee revealed that there were not any Black people among this year's winners,' the statement from the restaurant-awards committee said. 'Apparently in response, the Foundation proposed a revote.' The

proposal was to strike nominees who had come under fire, and to send a revised ballot to a much smaller group of voters than before. Ballots would go to the awards committee itself and the 200 or so regional judges they select, but not to the largest bloc, the hundreds of past awardees whose vote is a perk of having won.”

In your response to me on September 8, you attempted to impeach Mr. Wells based on his participation as a member of the R&C committee 15 years ago. As I stated in no. 4 of my last email to you, it’s not clear to me (and I have yet to see proof) that Mr. Wells participated in drafting the current awards procedures. And, as I stated, “Even if he had participated in writing the current operating procedures... the issue here is not whether the procedures are flawed (and they very well may be), *but rather whether they were followed.*” The R&C committee seems to be suggesting that members of the foundation leadership were attempting to circumvent established procedure. Did the foundation’s leadership, or employees of the foundation attempt to side-step established procedure – including withholding information from the R&C committee and others - with regard to voting, revoting, or in making the decision to not name winners?

2. Re: Whether the members of the foundation knew the results of the general vote held in May, and therefore knew the demographic of the winners, and whether this knowledge contributed with the decision to not name winners.

In my previous email, I was willing to set this issue aside because there only seemed to be speculation as to whether lack of diversity played a role in the decision to not name winners. However, it seems that the R&C committee is questioning, if not suggesting that employees of the foundation did, indeed, know the results of the general election in May, as well as the demographic of the winners, and questions whether the demographic of the winners contributed to the decision to not name winners. In his article of September 9, Mr. Wells reported: “The committee statement, signed by all 20 members, concludes by asking the foundation to acknowledge that a list of winners for 2020 exists, to confirm that ‘demographics’ played a part in the decision not to release the list, and to explain, in essence, who at the foundation knew what about the winners, and when they knew it.”

Members of the foundation have flatly denied that this is true. In Dr. Davis’s email to nominees, he stated: “Next, I want to address with you directly the suggested narrative that the leadership of the Foundation knows who would have won the awards and are refusing to announce them. *This theory is false.*”

However, your response to me on Sept. 8 suggested that there was, indeed a lack of diversity among the winners from the general vote in May, because you claimed that it had nothing to do with the decision not to name winners. Yet, in the same response, you contradict yourself by insisting that the “ultimate winners” were not known. In no. 4 of your response to me, you stated: “... the false narrative that the Foundation canceled the Awards because the winners weren't diverse enough. *In reality, the lack of diversity in the original vote in May, and the eventual decision not to hand out individual Awards in August were not related.* As previously mentioned, there was to be a revote with eligible nominees and *therefore no-one had knowledge of the ultimate winners.*”

I want to clarify with you now that when Dr. Davis stated that the foundation did not know “who would have won the awards” and denied that the foundation is “refusing to announce them,” and when you stated that “no-one had knowledge of the ultimate winners,” that you are both referring to the results of the general election in May, and not referring to *who might have won if a revote had been held.* I assume you were both referring to the former, as the latter would be a senseless claim at best, and a purposely misleading diversion at worst. So, to be clear, I join the R&C committee in asking: Did any employees of the James Beard Foundation, including members of leadership like Dr. Davis and you, know the results of the general election in May?

3. Re: Helping chefs cover up alleged wrongdoing.

Since I have struggled to get straightforward answers from you about basic procedural issues regarding the voting process and the decision to not name winners, I've not pursued one of the allegations against the foundation that I find most troubling. But here, I add it to the list of growing clarifications I seek. In Mr. Wells's article in The New York Times on August 25, he cited a nominee who claims that, after being confronted with non-specific allegations, a representative of the foundation “suggested withdrawing from the ballot. ‘She said, “I’m in P.R., so I can give you a bunch of examples of how to do this.””

No. 4(b) of my response to you touches upon this issue tangentially. The foundation has consistently maintained that nominees were only asked to withdraw or were removed for being “deemed ineligible.” But, as I clarified, “The issue here is whether any member or members of the James Beard Foundation – in leadership, the Awards Committee, or the subcommittees (namely the R&C subcommittee) – *deemed a*

nominee to be “ineligible” based on unproven, unspecified, or anonymous allegations.” As I said, if this is so, this is problematic.

However, if this is not so, then this suggests that nominees did withdraw or were removed for legitimate reasons – namely that they, indeed, were disqualified for provable wrongdoing. If so, then what Mr. Wells reported suggests that at least one representative of the foundation was volunteering to help nominees to cover-up their wrongdoing, and withdraw in a manner that would avoid admission of wrongdoing or public scrutiny. And if this is true, then this flies in the face of the foundation’s stated mission to help correct longstanding, improper behavior in the restaurant industry. This makes the foundation complicit in it. So, I ask you: have you participated in, or are aware of any one within the James Beard Foundation who offered nominees examples of or helped with withdrawing from the awards in a way that would evade, ignore, or purposely mislead the public with regard to the actual reason of the disqualification or withdrawal?

As I stated in a previous email to you, the foundation has left many of us with more questions than answers. And as more information is being revealed, it is becoming more apparent that the foundation – including you – is not being straightforward.

You stated in a previous email that we are all operating under extraordinary circumstances. I don’t disagree. And I understand that extraordinary circumstances often require extraordinary action.

However, as I stated in no. 6 of my email to you on September 5, I maintain that “Basic principles of justice, fairness, and ethics are not suspended just because we are in the midst of a pandemic.” Please prove to me that this has not been the case with regard to the foundation’s actions, and in its subsequent responses - including yours - to me and countless others.

If mistakes were made, I hope the foundation realizes that the best path forward – for the sake of all, including the industry for which the foundation claims to advocate – is an admission, apologies, and corrective action going forward. However, if mistakes were not made, then the R&C committee and many others, including me, are owed clarifications and explanations. In either scenario, and in all possibilities in between, transparency is what everyone deserves.

I look forward to your response to me in these matters, and those I raised in my previous email to you on September 9.

Regards
Bonjwing Lee
Regards,
B.

bonjwing.com
@bonjwing

ulteriorepicture.com
@ulteriorepicture

On Sep 9, 2020, at 1:27 AM, Bonjwing Lee
<bonjwing@gmail.com> wrote:

Ms. Tozzi Liu,

Thank you for attempting to answering my questions. Unfortunately, your attempt is woefully inadequate. Either you have tried to intellectually insult me with a bucket of red herrings, or you have misidentified or misunderstood nearly every issue I raised. I am happy to extend you the benefit of the doubt on the former, and shall assume the latter, and apologize for any parts of my email that may have been unclear or misleading. To that end, I rephrase my points below, clarifying each issue so that there can be little to no mistake about the answers I seek.

But first, let me begin by correcting you on the purpose of my email, which you seemed to have misapprehended. "Thorough" though it might have been, the thrust of it was not "opinion." The only opinion I expressed was in the second half of no. 3, which I address below. Any "opinion" I expressed about the cancelation of the awards in no. 6 turns entirely on whether any procedural or ethical boundaries might have been breached in the decision-making process. If procedural or ethical boundaries were crossed, then it is not opinion to say that the awards should not have been canceled - it would be fact. To be clear: **obtaining transparency and accountability on these issues is what I seek**, and not merely a moment to express disappointment or difference.

I revisit each point in the same order as in my original message to you.

1. Thank you for stating the structure of the Awards Committee and subcommittees. I am aware of this hierarchy. However, what's not clear to me is which part or parts of the Awards Committee was aware of which issues in the road to leading to a decision to cancel the awards. That is why I referred to the committees generally under the umbrella of the Awards Committee. However, since it was the Restaurant and Chef Awards that was canceled, let's focus on what happened with this subcommittee.

(a) The issue is not whether the R&C subcommittee agreed to a revote, although, if in fact it did approve a revote, that would create more questions about why that revote was later reversed by the subcommittee that approved it, as you claim. The main issue here is whether the R&C subcommittee held a vote to cancel the awards. According to your response, the idea of canceling the awards "came out" of this subcommittee. In what form? Did the entire subcommittee vote and agree to cancel the awards? Or was this a suggestion by one or a few members that was merely considered, but never approved by the subcommittee?

(b) If the subcommittee did vote in agreement to cancel the awards, then, I arrive at the question I foreshadowed above: why did it do so after agreeing to hold a revote? Was the subcommittee presented with valid evidence of wrongdoing among the nominees?

(c) If the subcommittee did not agree to cancel the awards, why did the co-chairs and vice chair unilaterally agree to the cancellation at the Awards Committee level, along with leadership? In your response, you only mention assent from these three members of the R&C subcommittee. Did they do this with the knowledge and support of all of the R&C subcommittee members? If not, why not?

(d) Who was in charge of "investigating" allegations against nominees? Was it the R&C subcommittee, or the Awards Committee, or leadership? Was it a combination

of all of them? Were the results of the “investigations” shared with all members of leadership, the Awards Committee, and subcommittees **before** the decision was made to cancel the awards? If not, then on what basis did the members of leadership, the Awards Committee, and subcommittees proceed to cancel the awards, despite a standing approval to hold a revote?

2. Your response here did not address the question I asked. Your response addressed issues that I hope to resolve with honest answers to subsections (a) through (d) of the preceding point. Let me rephrase the question I asked in this point: An apology was issued by Dr. Davis to the nominees for the way in which the cancelation was communicated to them. Why did this burden fall in the leadership’s lap, and not carried about by the R&C subcommittee, which not only has purview over the R&C awards, but according to you, also originated and approved the decision to cancel the R&C awards? And, if the wrong for which Dr. Davis apologized was in the manner of the communication (as stated in his email), then the same wrong was perpetrated upon the voting body and the members. But as I previously pointed out, none of us received an apology for the way in which the cancelation was communicated to us. As you noted, these latter parties learned of the cancelation at the same time as the public. While I understand that regional judges generally do receive communications from the R&C subcommittee, I’m not sure that I should have received notice from this subcommittee given that leadership decided to bear the burden of apology to the nominees. So, I ask again, why was a similar apology not given to the voting body and to the members? To my knowledge, we only received a notification of the cancelation at the same time that it was announced to the public.

3. The issue here is not whether it is prudent for a nonprofit organization to use its leverage – including awards – “to make a positive change in this world.” The issue here is whether an award that is entitled “Best Chef” should be used for anything other than celebrating and rewarding excellence and merit in the culinary arts. ***It is my opinion that [it] should not.*** If the James Beard Foundation wishes to use its awards as a form of

affirmative action, then I suggest that it rename its awards accordingly. This is what I meant in my original email to Kristopher Moon when I wrote: "If the foundation's awards are to resume in the future, the foundation needs to be clear about what the awards mean, and then commit to faithfully awarding according to those standards. Anything short of that is inadequate." I take no issue with the foundation's other programming, which works in areas of diversity and advocacy. However, to my understanding, that is not the stated goal and purpose of its awards that confer the superlative title of "Best" upon chefs and restaurants.

4. Re: Allegations that a lack of diversity among winners may have played a role in the decision to cancel the awards. As I said in my last email, I am willing to set this issue aside, as, thus far, this issue has amounted to speculation. However, as I noted, actions and attitudes by the foundation in recent years have not helped to invalidate or discourage the speculation. I reiterate: I hope that the foundation considers this moving forward.

Re: Mr. Wells's writing. I was well-aware of Mr. Wells's participation on the R&C subcommittee a decade and a half ago, before I read his article. And I agree that Mr. Wells should have disclosed this in his piece, and I am glad to hear that The New York Times has amended its article with a correction. However, this factoid does not alter or nullify the issues at hand. Even if he had participated in writing the current operating procedures (and it's not clear to me to what extent, if any, he participated in creating the *current* operating procedures), the issue here is not whether the procedures are flawed (and they very well may be), but rather whether they were followed.

(a) You allege that Mr. Wells's reporting was biased, and that it created a "false narrative." However, you still have not pointed to anything specific that Mr. Wells reported that was factually inaccurate. What was factually inaccurate in his article? What facts were missing that would make his reporting less bias?

(b) You say that only nominees who “did not meet eligibility requirements as stated” were given the opportunity to withdraw, or were removed. To be clear, the issue here is not whether nominees were asked to withdraw or were removed for being deemed ineligible. It seems that they were. And this is not disputed by either Mr. Wells’s reporting or by you. The issue here is whether any member or members of the James Beard Foundation – in leadership, the Awards Committee, or the subcommittees (namely the R&C subcommittee) – **deemed a nominee to be “ineligible” based on unproven, unspecified, or anonymous allegations.** If so, then as I stated in my prior email, this is problematic, and demands public accounting. If you fail to understand why this is problematic, I will be happy to explain. But a simple illustration might be found in the frustrations *you claim to have* with Mr. Wells’s reporting.

5. Your response here is immensely puzzling, if not also running dangerously close to intellectual belittlement. Allow me to remind you, as I stated above: whether the R&C subcommittee recommended and approved a revote is not the issue. Furthermore, a revote would not have disenfranchised the voting body, but rather quite the opposite. To be sure, it would not have resolved the issue of whether the nominees who withdrew or were removed had lost their place for valid reasons – this would still have been an open question to resolve. But, at least the remaining nominees and the voting body would have had the opportunity to re-ballot the awards. So, I’m not sure why you are repeatedly bringing up an aborted revote, when I am talking about the total disenfranchisement that replaced it. Either you have, once again, misidentified a rather clear issue, or, you have reshuffled the deck chairs hoping that it might magically change the issue at hand, or that I might not notice. Either way, I reassure you that the answer I seek is not among them. According to you, the revote was recommended and approved by the R&C subcommittee. If so, then, as I asked above in no. 1, what changed that would suddenly cause that same subcommittee, or the umbrella Awards Committee, or the leadership, or a combination of the three (determining who, exactly, made this decision is the purpose of the foregoing questions) to suddenly reverse course and override a

revote in favor of complete disenfranchisement – without consulting or notifying the electorate before making the decision to do so? That this happened is wrong. And I am trying to determine why it happened, and who is responsible for this decision.

6. Here, again, you confuse opinion with fact. As I stated above, disagreeing with the cancelation of the awards is only opinion if the cancelation was based on procedurally and ethically permissible decision-making. I am questioning whether it was, and I ask you to focus on honestly answering the questions I've asked above so that I might determine ***whether or not it was a procedurally permissible or ethical action to take – not whether it was the best or reasonable decision in a year of tough decisions***. While you may be receiving complaints based on the latter, I am trying to determine the former.

I hope that the issues I raise and the answers I seek have been made sufficiently clear in this email. Please do let me know if you have any questions. I look forward to your response.

Regards,
B.

bonjwing.com
@bonjwing

ulteriorepicture.com
@ulteriorepicture

On Sep 8, 2020, at 10:59 AM, Alison Tozzi Liu
<atozziliu@jamesbeard.org> wrote:

Bonjwing,

Thank you for investing the time and thought
in sending this thorough opinion. Please
see replies to your questions in red below.

1. I make no allegations or assumptions about who, or which groups of people within the foundation made the decision [not] to name winners, a key element - if not *the* key element - of an awards ceremony. However, what I do know, is that the Awards Committee seems not to have been consulted about the final decision. This is confirmed in the foundation's statement, which admits that the committee's decision to hold a revote was preempted by the foundation's decision with regard to the cancellation of the awards. Is this correct? If so, why was the Awards Committee not consulted before the foundation moved to invalidate the voting body and override the Awards Committee's decision for a revote?

To clarify, there's an Awards Committee that oversees all of the JBF awards programs and a Restaurant and Chefs Subcommittee that oversees the Restaurant and Chef Awards. (There are four other subcommittees for awards, the chair of each sits on the Awards Committee.) We believe you are referring to the Restaurant and Chef Subcommittee when you say "Awards Committee." Just want to make sure we are talking about the same bodies. The full Restaurant and Chef Subcommittee had agreed to the revote. The decision not to hand out awards in September was originated in the Restaurant and Chef subcommittee, and agreed to by the subcommittee chair, co-chair, and vice chair,

the Awards committee chair, and
Foundation's leadership.

2. An apology was issued to the nominees for the way in which the cancellation of the awards was communicated (or not communicated) to them. Has the foundation issued an apology to the Awards Committee? If not, why? I have not seen an apology issued to the voting body, or to the the foundation's members. Will apologies be forthcoming?

As stated above, the subcommittee was aware this discussion was taking place and were on multiple emails about it, with many weighing in for and against. The final decision was discussed with the committee chair and co-chair, the Awards committee chair, and Foundation leadership. The subcommittee members generally communicate directly to the judges in their region, save for onboarding documents issued by the Foundation. Relationships with the judges are handled solely by the committee. The voting body received notification about not naming winners from the Foundation on the day the announcement was made public. We have also communicated with the previous winners who are part of the voting body. The Foundation has been in communication with our members regarding this decision.

3. I take the foundation at its word that the results of the vote did not influence its decision to cancel the awards. I admit that

this is speculation on my part, based partly on Mr. Wells's reporting, but mostly on what I have observed over the past few years. To that point: while I don't question the foundation's good intentions in trying to advance social justice and diversity causes, I ask that the foundation seriously reevaluate the way it does so. I believe that the foundation could be a positive force in both advancing social justice *and* celebrating excellence within the restaurant industry. However, it needs to be very careful where those two spheres overlap. It is my perception (and the perception of many) that the foundation has often conflated the two, which diminishes both causes as well as all involved.

We don't disagree with your point about reevaluating the decision-making process pertaining to the Awards. We have been undergoing an audit as well as strategic planning process to determine how the Foundation can best support the industry to survive and rebuild stronger. However, we do feel that the values of gender and racial equity, sustainability, and inclusivity do have a place in the Awards, as well as all of our programs. As a nonprofit organization, we have a duty to make positive change in the world. We have a duty not just to those at the top of the industry, but for everyone who has devoted his or her life and livelihood to it. We also have the right to use the levers we have to make change as we best see fit—which includes the Awards themselves. It is clearly stated in the eligibility requirements that we believe that the definition of good food

extends beyond what's on the plate. Your comments suggest that you don't agree that should be the case. Is this correct?

4. The foundation's statement to which you directed me does not address which aspects of Mr. Wells's reporting is inaccurate or deficient. I have spoken with Mr. Wells, as well as with many others and I have been given no indication that any of his reporting is false. While I understand that the nature of the allegations against some of the nominees is sensitive material - and for those reasons, they cannot be published - if there is any truth to the reporting that the foundation asked, suggested, or forced nominees to withdraw based on anonymous, unspecified, or unproven allegations, then this is problematic, and the foundation needs to account for this publicly. If not, then the foundation has every right (and should) refute these rather astonishing charges. However, thus far, it has not. Why? With all due respect, the James Beard Foundation may be a body politic, but it is not a body judicial. I understand - as do many, if not most - that there have been longstanding problems within the restaurant industry, with regard to pay inequity, racism, misogyny, sexism, abuse, harassment, and worse. And I have openly applauded, and continue to applaud the foundation's

programming and work in these areas. However, when it comes to allegations against duly elected nominees for the foundation's awards, which purport to celebrate merit, the voting body - not the foundation's leadership - should have the final say in who advances, or who is eliminated. In a free society, innocence is the presumption, not guilt. And we have systems and structures for determining innocence and guilt, *which are conducted publicly* so that all may see the guilt proven or innocence maintained. Without further explanation and refutation by the foundation, what appears to have happened here is that a small group of people at the very top of the organization have decided to engage in private judicial decision-making - without consulting the Awards Committee, or notifying the voting body. This is not justice. This is the opposite of justice. If this is true, why? If this is not true, again, an explanation is necessary.

As you might imagine, trying to counter a narrative created by one of the most powerful food journalists in the country is not an easy task for a nonprofit organization. We have many problems with the article and wrote to the New York Times editors immediately to correct the inaccuracies and ask for multiple updates to be made. The editors stood behind the reporting, which we maintain is biased, but did post an update to show that Pete Wells was on the Awards committee for two

years. (While Wells states in the article that he has won awards, he did not disclose that he had ever been on the committee, nor that in 2005 he participated in the creation of the current operating procedures). The correction appeared several days after the article published and does not seem to appear in any of the many syndicated versions of the article. We believe the article created a false narrative that: 1) the Foundation removed certain nominees because we “deemed them too controversial” (in reality, the nominees who did not meet eligibility requirements as stated were given the opportunity to withdraw or were removed. The subcommittee recommended and agreed on this course of action, and 2) the false narrative that the Foundation canceled the Awards because the winners weren't diverse enough. In reality, the lack of diversity in the original vote in May, and the eventual decision not to hand out individual Awards in August were not related. As previously mentioned, there was to be a revote with eligible nominees and therefore no-one had knowledge of the ultimate winners.

5. I make no allegation that the foundation *intended* to invalidate the vote of hundreds. But that is the inescapable [effect] of the foundation's decision. Without further explanation, I conclude that this is wrong. And being so, an apology is owed.

As stated above, the committee had indeed agreed to a revote of the entire voting body. We regret that this information wasn't communicated with you, but we were moving down that path. We know that you are aware that this is an extraordinary year in every way, not just for the industry, but also for the foundation and the world at large. In the course of running this organization we speak regularly with dozens of chefs, operators, and other culinary professionals across the country who are fighting for their livelihoods and survival. We feel very strongly that we need to prioritize their needs right now.

6. While I understand the foundation's stated reason for not wanting to name winners, I think it's based on tremendously flawed logic. By not naming winners, one does not save the rest from becoming losers. Should we then celebrate all of the semifinalists as well? Do we invalidate all past winners? Should we not be celebrating the Classics, or the Lifetime Achievement honoree, as naming them excludes countless others? Of course not. Award-giving, by its very nature, is an exercise in exclusion. If the James Beard Foundation wishes to continue giving out awards, then it had better prepare itself for it. And if the foundation believes its decision has been a compassionate thing to do for an industry that is struggling in the midst of a pandemic, it is fooling itself.

Rather, it has invalidated hundreds of votes, overridden a committee without notice or consultation, and missed an opportunity to distinguishing excellence in the restaurant industry. As a result, it has demolished trust in an organization that could have been a leader during these trying times - leaving many of us with more questions than answers; disappointed nominees; and essentially canceled the industry's annual rally to celebrate, inspire, and aspire. And, again, if the reporting is true (and I have yet to be shown evidence that Mr. Wells's evidence is false or incomplete), in doing all of this, the foundation has crossed procedural, if not also ethical boundaries. Basic principles of justice, fairness, and ethics are not suspended just because we are in the midst of a pandemic.

We respect your opinion and you have every right to disagree with the decision. We believe that this is an extraordinary year and that nothing about the status quo can be taken at face value. We have spoken to and heard from many nominees and past winners over the past few weeks who support the decision. We have also heard from many in the industry outside the awards ecosystem who have also applauded the decision. In fact, we've learned that many more nominees had considered pulling out because of the current climate in the industry and were relieved when the decision was made. Of course, there are those who dissent and of course everyone is entitled to their opinions and the emotions

experienced from this decision. There was no “good” decision to be made that would have pleased everyone, but we feel that the best decision for the overall good of our broader community was made under these extreme circumstances.

I’m sure that the foundation’s leadership is aware that many are extremely displeased with the decision to cancel the awards. However, it’s not entirely clear to me that the foundation’s leadership understands what about the cancelation upsets so many, including me. And if the leadership struggles [or] has failed to grasp this frustration and anger, I hope that the foregoing provides a clearer picture of how the foundation’s actions are being perceived and understood by others. Whether the foundation realizes it or not, it has created a public relations disaster, in addition to a crisis within the organization. I hope you will work hard to resolve both. I look forward to your response.

Thank you for raising your concerns and taking the time to communicate your perspective. As you can see, the decisions around this year’s Awards were complex and multifaceted; we have done our absolute best to navigate this incredibly challenging landscape with the best interests of our broadest community at heart. We recognize your frustration and disagreement, but we also hope that we’ve provided some clarification in answering your questions.

Alison Tozzi Liu

Vice President of Marketing,
Communications, and Content
Pronouns: She, her, hers

James Beard Foundation
34 West 15th Street, 4th Floor
New York, NY 10011
T 212 627 1111 X553
atliu@jamesbeard.org

jamesbeard.org

@beardfoundation/@atozziliu

From: Bonjwing Lee <bonjwing@gmail.com>

Sent: Saturday, September 5, 2020 3:14 PM

Cc: Mitchell Davis <mdavis@jamesbeard.org>;

Clare Reichenbach

<creichenbach@jamesbeard.org>; Alison Tozzi Liu

<atozziliu@jamesbeard.org>; Mary Blanton

Ogushwitz <mary.blanton@magrinopr.com>

Subject: Re: JBFA

Kris,

Thank you for your speedy response. I have moved you to BCC, and respond to the group regarding a number of issues you raised:

1. I make no allegations or assumptions about who, or which groups of people within the foundation made the decision to name winners, a key element - if not *the* key element - of an awards ceremony. However, what I do know, is that the Awards Committee seems not to have been consulted about the final decision. This is confirmed in the foundation's statement, which admits that the committee's decision to hold a revote was preempted by the foundation's decision with regard to the

cancellation of the awards. Is this correct? If so, why was the Awards Committee not consulted before the foundation moved to invalidate the voting body and override the Awards Committee's decision for a revote?

2. An apology was issued to the nominees for the way in which the cancellation of the awards was communicated (or not communicated) to them. Has the foundation issued an apology to the Awards Committee? If not, why? I have not seen an apology issued to the voting body, or to the the foundation's members. Will apologies be forthcoming?

3. I take the foundation at its word that the results of the vote did not influence its decision to cancel the awards. I admit that this is speculation on my part, based partly on Mr. Wells's reporting, but mostly on what I have observed over the past few years. To that point: while I don't question the foundation's good intentions in trying to advance social justice and diversity causes, I ask that the foundation seriously reevaluate the way it does so. I believe that the foundation could be a positive force in both advancing social justice *and* celebrating excellence within the restaurant industry. However, it needs to be very careful where those two spheres overlap. It is my perception (and the perception of many) that the foundation has often conflated the two, which diminishes both causes as well as all involved.

4. The foundation's statement to which you directed me does not address which aspects of Mr. Wells's reporting is inaccurate or deficient. I have spoken with Mr. Wells, as well as with many others and I have been given no indication that any of his reporting is false. While I understand that the nature of the allegations against some of the nominees is

sensitive material - and for those reasons, they cannot be published - if there is any truth to the reporting that the foundation asked, suggested, or forced nominees to withdraw based on anonymous, unspecified, or unproven allegations, then this is problematic, and the foundation needs to account for this publicly. If not, then the foundation has every right (and should) refute these rather astonishing charges. However, thus far, it has not. Why? With all due respect, the James Beard Foundation may be a body politic, but it is not a body judicial. I understand - as do many, if not most - that there have been longstanding problems within the restaurant industry, with regard to pay inequity, racism, misogyny, sexism, abuse, harassment, and worse. And I have openly applauded, and continue to applaud the foundation's programming and work in these areas. However, when it comes to allegations against duly elected nominees for the foundation's awards, which purport to celebrate merit, the voting body - not the foundation's leadership - should have the final say in who advances, or who is eliminated. In a free society, innocence is the presumption, not guilt. And we have systems and structures for determining innocence and guilt, *which are conducted publicly* so that all may see the guilt proven or innocence maintained. Without further explanation and refutation by the foundation, what appears to have happened here is that a small group of people at the very top of the organization have decided to engage in private judicial decision-making - without consulting the Awards Committee, or notifying the voting body. This is not justice. This is the opposite of justice. If this is true, why? If this is not true, again, an explanation is necessary.

5. I make no allegation that the foundation *intended* to invalidate the vote of hundreds. But that is the inescapable [effect] of the

foundation's decision. Without further explanation, I conclude that this is wrong. And being so, an apology is owed.

6. While I understand the foundation's stated reason for not wanting to name winners, I think it's based on tremendously flawed logic. By not naming winners, one does not save the rest from becoming losers. Should we then celebrate all of the semifinalists as well? Do we invalidate all past winners? Should we not be celebrating the Classics, or the Lifetime Achievement honoree, as naming them excludes countless others? Of course not. Award-giving, by its very nature, is an exercise in exclusion. If the James Beard Foundation wishes to continue giving out awards, then it had better prepare itself for it. And if the foundation believes its decision has been a compassionate thing to do for an industry that is struggling in the midst of a pandemic, it is fooling itself. Rather, it has invalidated hundreds of votes, overridden a committee without notice or consultation, and missed an opportunity to distinguishing excellence in the restaurant industry. As a result, it has demolished trust in an organization that could have been a leader during these trying times - leaving many of us with more questions than answers; disappointed nominees; and essentially canceled the industry's annual rally to celebrate, inspire, and aspire. And, again, if the reporting is true (and I have yet to be shown evidence that Mr. Wells's evidence is false or incomplete), in doing all of this, the foundation has crossed procedural, if not also ethical boundaries. Basic principles of justice, fairness, and ethics are not suspended just because we are in the midst of a pandemic.

I'm sure that the foundation's leadership is aware that many are extremely displeased with the decision to cancel the awards. However, it's not entirely clear to me that the

foundation's leadership understands what about the cancelation upsets so many, including me. And if the leadership struggles [or] has failed to grasp this frustration and anger, I hope that the foregoing provides a clearer picture of how the foundation's actions are being perceived and understood by others. Whether the foundation realizes it or not, it has created a public relations disaster, in addition to a crisis within the organization. I hope you will work hard to resolve both. I look forward to your response.

Regards,
B.

bonjwing.com
@bonjwing

ulteriorepicture.com
@ulteriorepicture

On Sep 5, 2020, at 12:12 PM,
Kristopher Moon
<kmoon@jamesbeard.org> wrote:

Dear Bonjwing,

Thank you for your email. Given the friendly professional relationship we have had for a number of years and the mutual respect we have shown to each other, I was a bit taken aback by your email.

As an officer of the James Beard Foundation, I am one of a number of stakeholders that participate in decision-making on behalf of the organization. As a non-profit organization, we are governed by a full board of directors which includes an Executive Committee. Strategic and fiduciary decisions are not made

by one person alone, but in consult with a number of key stakeholders who help guide the Foundation and its programs.

In your note below, you raise the question of accuracy in the reporting. The reporting is not fully accurate, nor telling the full story, and we have clarified some of the misunderstandings around the decision not to announce winners this year in a [statement](#) released earlier this week.

I'm sorry to hear that you feel your voice - and the voices of hundreds of voters - has been invalidated as that was certainly not the intention. Given the withdrawal of some of the nominees because of the current crisis or for other personal reasons, and the removal of those determined to be ineligible, the Restaurant and Chef Committee decided that it would be more appropriate to conduct a revote among the remaining nominees. The revote was going to take place in mid-August but because of the Foundation's decision not to name additional winners this year, the revote never began.

I've cc'ed Mitchell Davis, Chief Strategy Officer, who oversees the Awards, Clare Reichenbach, our CEO, as well as a few of my colleagues in our communications team. Mitchell and/or Clare would be the best people for you to connect with for further discussion awards decisions, as well as our intentions for the awards moving forward.

Regards,
Kris

—
Kris Moon

Chief Operating Officer
Pronouns: He, him, his

James Beard Foundation
34 west 15th street, 4th floor
New York, NY 10011

T 212 627 5252
M 917 608 8302
E kmoon@jamesbeard.org

Jamesbeard.org
[@beardfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/beardfoundation)
[@kristophermoon](https://www.instagram.com/kristophermoon)

--

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Bonjwing Lee**
<bonjwing@gmail.com>
Date: Fri, Sep 4, 2020 at 8:03 PM
Subject: JBFA
To: Kristopher Moon
<kriskmoon@gmail.com>

Kris,

I hope you are well.

As you can probably guess, I am
writing to you about the cancellation

of the James Beard Foundation Awards. I don't know what, if any role you have played in the decision-making. But you are my only contact in the leadership of the foundation, and one, which I might add, in whom I have had a great deal of respect - a confidence that I hope I have not misplaced and that you will give me no reason to withdraw.

While I have been honored to serve at the award's committee's pleasure for 14 years, I have struggled with my place in the voting body. I value and recognize the need for fresh, new voices in the conversation, and believe that I've had more than my fair share of time at the table. Yet, despite my instincts to relinquish my seat to another, I have not done so because I fear the type of voice that would replace me. I believe that the foundation and its awards can be a positive force for recognizing and celebrating hard work, talent, achievement, and excellence in the restaurant industry. Increasingly, however, I have felt that the awards do not reflect or aspire to that. Instead, the foundation and its awards (and, indeed, many in the industry at large) have slowly killed meritocracy in favor of promoting a hodgepodge of social agendas, which, however important, I believe

would be more appropriately advanced under the aegis of the foundation's other programs (and there seems to truly be a lot of good programming there). Because of this, I have continued to serve out of a sense of duty and commitment to champion those who I think truly deserve recognition based on merit, and not the arbitrary affirmative action of an insular group.

But, this year, it seems that even my small voice has been invalidated. By canceling the awards, the foundation has disenfranchised hundreds of voters, including me, in order to further its social agenda. Additionally, if reporting is accurate, it has attempted to, and in some cases successfully disqualified nominees and/or winners based on unproven, sometimes unspecified allegations - and some from anonymous sources. For reasons that should be obvious to all, this is reprehensible and unacceptable behavior. And to anyone within the foundation to whom this is not obvious, I enthusiastically invite them to reach out to me so that I might help them understand the moral and ethical boundaries that have been crossed.

I don't know how or whether the foundation will regain its credibility. Regardless, the foundation needs to issue a public apology - to the voting body, for disenfranchisement; to the awards committee for overreach and complete disregard; to the foundation's members, for deceit; and to the public, to which the foundation owes its nonprofit status. That one has not already been swiftly and emphatically made to all parties is shocking. If the foundation's awards are to resume in the future, the foundation needs to be clear about what the awards mean, and then commit to faithfully awarding according to those standards. Anything short of that is inadequate.

I hope that you will share this email with every member of the foundation's leadership, especially Dr. Mitchell Davis.

Regards,

B.

bonjwing.com

@bonjwing

ulteriorepicure.com

@ulteriorepicure

--

Kris Moon

917.608.8302

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the James Beard Foundation. Do not click links or

open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the James Beard Foundation. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.