

SPRING/SUMMER 2020

# IMAGE



**OC**  
ADVOCATE

# MAGAZINE



# OCA

## Asian Pacific American Advocates

OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates is a national membership-driven organization of community advocates dedicated to advancing the social, political, and economic well-being of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) in the United States.

### To fulfill its mission, OCA has adapted the following goals to:

- Advocate for social justice, equal opportunity and fair treatment;
- Promote civic participation, education, and leadership;
- Advance coalitions and community building; and,
- Foster cultural heritage.

OCA takes no collective position on the politics of any foreign country, but instead focuses on the welfare and civil rights of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.



Founded as the Organization of Chinese Americans in 1973, OCA has grown to be a robust national advocacy organization to advance the civil and human rights of AAPIs and aspiring Americans. The organization presently has over 50 chapters, affiliates and partners, impacting more than tens of thousands of individuals across the country through local and national programming. The organization's headquarters remain in Washington, DC, allowing OCA to directly engage in critical public policy issues on a national level. It continues to largely remain as a grassroots constituency of advocates from all walks of life and diverse ethnic identities addressing uniquely local level issues impacting over 20 million Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders across the country.

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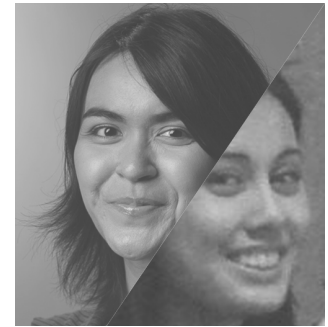
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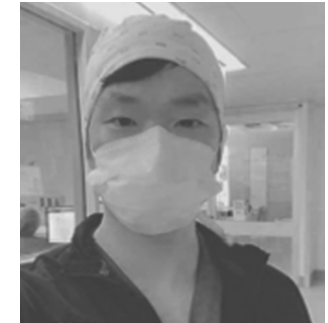
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# FROM THE BOARD



**SHARON  
M. WONG**

Hello OCA Family,

Although it is only August, 2020 has proven itself to be a year of ups and downs. We've seen the overwhelming successes of Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander presence and creativity in Media; from the Golden Globes to the Oscars, our community has left its mark. We've also experienced first hand and seen the detrimental impacts of racism and xenophobia towards our communities in the wake of a global pandemic. We are in a time where the digital space has grown larger and more present in our lives; OCA must look to the ways we will continue building up our communities and moving forward.

This edition of IMAGE draws on the work of former interns from the past two decades. I hope you enjoy the content that our team has put together. IMAGE highlights the change we can create together and is a representation of the advocacy and presence of OCA across the country. OCA must reflect on the change that it has created, and the possibility of progress that is the future.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sharon M. Wong".

Sharon M. Wong, OCA National President



**RITA PIN  
AHRENS**

Dear AdvOCAtes,

First and foremost, I hope you and all your friends and family are staying safe and healthy. 2020 has proven to be an incredibly tumultuous year for our entire country, and especially our community, as we face the dual pandemic of COVID-19 and anti-Asian hate. Throughout this crisis, however, I am proud to see how tightly knit our OCA family is and how passionate we are in serving the needs of our loved ones, our communities, and our country. At a time when we feel under assault, we have risen up in response. Whether it is collecting PPE for front line workers, delivering meals, registering voters, or making sure we are represented in the media and the arts, I have seen the great work that our chapters have done and will continue to do. We know we have power as a collective community, and that our power increases when we stand in solidarity with other communities in need, and when we bridge the gap between our respected elders and our empowered youth. We are resilient, and we will come out of this stronger together.

Thank you for all that you do and your continued support of OCA.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rita Pin Ahrens".

Rita Pin Ahrens, OCA Executive Director



# CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

## OCA Sacramento



In response to COVID-19, OCA Sacramento held several events to help their community. The Sacramento chapter held a DriveThru Distribution event in May where they helped over 400 families. And they



also held a Seniors Food Delivery in collaboration with the Filipino Community of Sacramento and Vicinity to provide meals to vulnerable seniors. OCA Sacramento also helped small businesses through their Small Business Administration Paycheck Protection Program, helped restaurant owners, and partnered with the Sacramento's Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement.



## OCA New Jersey

OCA New Jersey helped their community by forming their COVID-19 Community Relief Effort Committee and this committee helped groups across New Jersey. The New Jersey chapter gathered donations and had donation drop offs at Holy Name Hospital, St. Barnabas Medical Center, St. Joseph Medical Center, Jersey City Medical Center, Hackensack Medical Center, Middlesex County Emergency Food Network, Clara Mass Medical Center, Toni's Kitchen at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, and at the Food Bank at First Reform Church of Boonton.





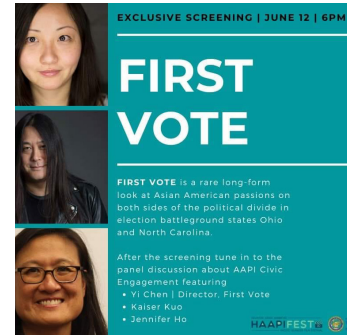
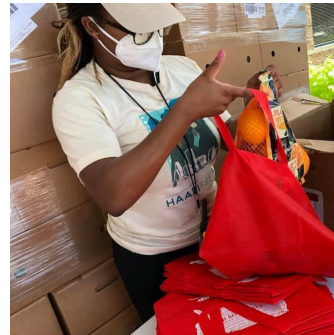
# CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

## OCA Greater Houston



OCA Greater Houston responded to the pandemic by participating in Asian Restaurant's Week LIFE Fund Campaign. Through this program, they purchased from locally-owned Asian

restaurants. This provided revenues for these businesses and also provided meals to front-line workers. The chapter also partnered with the Houston Food Bank to host their monthly HAAP Food Fair Drive-Thru with support from Texas Representative Gene Wu. And OCA Greater Houston held webinars and virtual events for their members.



## Association of Chinese Americans (OCA Detroit Chapter)



The Association of Chinese Americans (OCA Detroit Chapter) helped the Detroit area by donating 21,300 masks and 1,000 gowns to over 50 hospitals, nursing homes, hospices, police stations, fire departments, and shelters. They also donated 1,100 care packages to families and 1,000 Power-Up packs to frontline workers. Throughout these past few months, the Detroit chapter continued to provide resources to its community through virtual programming such as fitness classes, ESL classes, and online citizenship classes.







# Filmmaker Rachel Leyco Fights For a Stigma-free Future

By Michelle Yang,  
OCA Summer  
Cohort 2001

This piece was originally  
published in [Mochi Magazine](#).

# Filmmaker Rachel Leyco Fights For a Stigma-free Future

*“I used to be so ashamed of being Asian, being queer and being ‘crazy,’ but I love every part of my identity now,” explained Rachel Leyco, an award-winning Filipinx American filmmaker, writer, actress and activist.*

Her journey to find herself is a relatable one for so many who are part of the Asian diaspora. Born in the Philippines, Leyco immigrated to Texas at the age of four. She joked about having to “come out” multiple times — as an artist, as bisexual and as a woman with a mental illness. “I thought coming out as bisexual would be the toughest for my family, but I was wrong. It was my bipolar disorder II diagnosis that shook them. I didn’t expect it.”

When asked whether it was a challenge to pursue acting as an Asian American, Leyco answered, “My parents are registered nurses and never fully supported me — to them, [acting] was just a hobby. There were definitely times when I’d burst out crying in arguments with my mom about wanting to pursue acting as a career.” But Leyco was drawn to storytelling and acting at an early age: “It was a way for me to express all of my anxieties and depression...” By a stroke of random luck, her family later moved to California, which helped her enter the industry. She added, “It wasn’t until I received a College Television Award that my mom realized my potential... Now, my family is fully supportive of everything I do in my career.”

Leyco is a now rising star whose acting credits include roles in NBC’s “Chicago Fire,” BET’s “Games People Play” and the third season of Netflix’s “Atypical.” She won a Student Emmy at the 2013 College Television Awards for the pilot web series “The Sub Club.” Her short films, “Maple’s Tree” and “Bicultural,” were official selections in numerous film festivals around the world. From the outside, it’s easy to mistake Leyco’s life for one that is only glamorous and carefree. Her Instagram is filled with playful, sexy photos, many of her posing with co-stars on sets in tiny, outrageous outfits. Upon deeper inspection, the feed is peppered with original inspirational quotes and messages of advocacy for mental health. Leyco was diagnosed with bipolar disorder II in 2017 and has been a strong advocate for creating dialogue and awareness in communities all over the world. “I’m pretty damn proud of myself for not giving up and not allowing my depression to consume me in those worst moments, because I wouldn’t be here right now.”





One of her latest projects is the dramedy web series “Crazy,” co-created with Sheena Midori Brevig. The show, inspired by Leyco and Brevig’s real-life friendship, explores mental health through a queer, Asian American lens. “Crazy... Just Like You” is the full project name with a tagline that seeks to destigmatize mental illness. The team hopes to have the series ready for the film festival circuit in 2020. Leyco believes this project and its themes are vital because, “For me, self-care is not enough... We need community. Friendship. Because that’s when we feel connected, like we’re worthy and we belong.”

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***“For me, self-care is not enough... We need community. Friendship. Because that’s when we feel connected, like we’re worthy and we belong.”***

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On co-starring on Netflix’s “Atypical,” she shares, “It was a wonderful set to be on... the showrunners, execs, and a large part of the crew were women! ‘Atypical’ was, by far, the most happiest and welcoming group of people I’ve worked with on a film set.” Many people may not realize that serious mental health conditions, like bipolar disorder, are also classified under the American Disabilities Act. “[The show] did such an amazing job bringing real people on the spectrum on-screen in Season 2. I can say that Season 3 will have even more authentic representation of people with disabilities... I’m beyond grateful to be a part of a show like this — one with a mission and heart to tell underrepresented stories.”

Leyco talks of Asian American representation improving with the recent successes of “[Crazy Rich Asians](#)” and “[Always Be My Maybe](#),” but in small strides. “Overall, there are more diversity initiatives and opportunities... I’ve definitely been in more audition rooms the last two years... But unless the creator, writer [or] producer of a project is Asian American, the role most likely won’t be as authentic or accurate to our experiences. There may still be tropes and stereotypes that will exist.” Leyco continues, “Nonetheless, progress is progress! There are definitely several projects in the works by and for Asian Americans. And it’s an exciting time to finally have our voices heard!”

Rachel Leyco and I have much in common. We’re both immigrants, writers and mental health advocates who live with bipolar disorder. Neither of us allow our diagnosis to define us or prevent us from fighting for our dreams. As if everything we have in common were not enough, Leyco shares my love for a certain badass South Asian superboss: “My ultimate goal is to become a showrunner on my own TV series and write, act and direct — basically ‘Mindy Kaling’ it, ya know! (Yes, I used Mindy Kaling as a verb.)”

Leyco continues the fierce fight for a stigma-free future with every successful project, with every moment well-lived. Follow her inspirational adventures and latest works on [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

Link to the original article [here](#).

# About

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Michelle Yang, MBA, OCA intern 2001, is a mental health advocate who speaks and writes about the intersection of Asian American identity, feminism, and mental health. Tired of the stigma, she is empowered to humanize and normalize mental illnesses as another part of the human condition. Her articles have been featured in InStyle, HuffPost, Shondaland, and more.



Follow her [@michelleyangwriter](https://twitter.com/michelleyangwriter).

# Michelle

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# Yang





ALLISON C.T. WU  
WINTER 2019  
INTERN

# WHAT'S **NOT** FUNNY ABOUT **CHARLYNE** YI?



# What's **Not** Funny About **Charlyne Yi**?

**By: Allison C.T. Wu**  
**OCA Intern from**  
**Winter 2019**

*Allison is a recent Teach For America alum (D.C. Region '17). She spent two challenging yet rewarding years teaching 7th grade English Language Arts at a public middle school in Prince George's County, Maryland. She is a Smith College alumna and graduated with a B.A. in English and a minor in Asian/Pacific/American Studies. While attending Smith College, Allison was president of Smith's Food Recovery Network chapter for three years, a proud member of PAIA - Pan Asians in Action, and an excellent strategist in storing as much food as possible from dining halls in her Costco tupperware containers. A DMV native, she is a former, competitive Tae Kwon Do athlete who holds a third-degree black belt (and yes, she can still throw a mean roundhouse kick). She is passionate about AAPI advocacy, writing as a means for fighting, and working with children. She finds herself driven to give light to the stories that are hidden and help those who are hurting. In her free time, Allison enjoys cracking jokes with her family and friends, seeing at least two movies per week, and trying to be grateful for the here and now.*

**At first glance, Charlyne Yi's got it all.** She's multi-talented - a rising actress, comedian, writer, and musician. She's entered into film and television with a subtle yet noticeable presence. Yi has starred in roles alongside stars such as Jennifer Lopez, Katharine Heigl, and Paul Rudd. She was nominated for "Comedy Film Award for Best Actress" for playing her fictional self in *Paper Heart*. Yi's also made appearances on popular television series and late-night shows such as *House*, *Jane the Virgin*, and *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*. She's even been a regular voice actor on the animated television series *Summer Camp Island*. And if that wasn't enough, she's published two books.

Despite Yi's steady success on and off-screen, there has been a disturbing presence of anti-Asian racism and tropes superimposed upon her through her numerous film and television roles. These roles seemingly relegate her to a version of herself which is stunted, not fully human, and a caricature of herself. This piece examines why a successful actress such as Yi was cast in such a degrading film role and how anti-Asian racism afflicts Yi's ability to be presented as fully human on screen.

A significant film role that Yi has starred in is in Jennifer Lopez's *Second Act*. *Second-*



*Act* is a rom-com about a woman who pursues a second career mid-life at a corporation. Yi plays the character of Ariana, an assistant to J. Lo's character. The various aspects of Ariana's personality reflect multiple, racist issues.

Part of Yi's personality is one that classically fits the trope of the meek, emasculated Asian American male. She is submissive, unconfident, and socially awkward. The audience is first introduced to Yi as she is reacting with great fear. Hildy - a white, blonde woman who is both one of J. Lo's new assistants and direct supervisor of Yi - explains exasperatedly that Yi is uncomfortable with the skyscraper office. Hildy's reaction to Yi's fear of heights is exasperation, making the audience sympathize with Hildy due to the burden of Yi as a nuisance. Here, our first impression of Yi is founded upon her social awkwardness and her being an unwanted presence. Additionally, Yi's social awkwardness promotes her as a consistent source of mockery - for example, when she pushes her forehead against the elevator doors due to her fear of heights and then falls face flat onto the ground when the elevator doors open. Since *Second Act* is a romantic comedy, the argument that Yi is simply comedic relief is unfounded, as the entire genre of the film is comedy. Yi is pitted as the butt of the jokes for no reason except for ridicule.

Yi's emasculation continues through Hildy consistently shutting Yi down. I argue that their entire relationship is based upon Hildy's

denigration of Yi. The optics of their relationship are worsened by Hildy's identity as a white, blonde woman. Hildy functions as the white boss oppressing the Asian subordinate. Yi falls victim to perpetuates the idea of Asian American males having undeveloped, stunted personalities. This is a rampant stereotype that has historically been superimposed upon Asian American males and more recently, Asian American females, in American media. For example:

### Male sidekicks:

- Bruce Lee in *Green Hornet*
- Hop Sing in *Bonanza*
- Long Duck in *16 Candles*
- Hashi in *Johnny Quest*
- Charley in *Mr. Magoo*

### Female sidekicks:

- Lane Kim in *Gilmore Girls*
- Marianne in *Friends From College*
- Tina Cohen-Chang in *Glee*



Disturbingly, what accompanies Yi's emasculation is an odd, sexual characteristic. For instance, during one scene, Yi suddenly kisses Chase - the quirky white male chemist - by exaggeratedly biting down on his bottom lip. Another example is when Chase asks Yi if she is kinky, and Yi responds with an inconclusive statement but hinting that she is - Chase is enthusiastic. Chase's gleeful response after finding out that Yi is kinky symbolizes the historical

narrative of the white man's glee in discovering and exploiting the "hidden treasure" of the

Orient. Here, Yi's sexual kinkiness is desirable, and something only discoverable by her white male partner. The fact that Yi's sexual "prow-ess" is initially hidden and mysterious, simultaneously enforces and recalls the stereotype of the Asian female prostitute. Overall, Yi's relationship with Chase solidifies the exotification of Asian women by white men.

If Yi's subjugation wasn't clear enough, she is conclusively dehumanized through her physical appearance as a dorky, unappealing physical presence juxtaposed against the sex symbol of J. Lo. Echoes of Bruce Lee in *Green Hornet* arise here - but at least Lee's character was presented with a sexually attractive masculinity that also made him physically quite capable. By experiencing oppression directly from Hildy and indirectly through her contrast with J. Lo, Yi is presented as the most unwanted female presence in a film based upon female empowerment.

***“By experiencing oppression directly from Hildy and indirectly through her contrast with J. Lo, Yi is presented as the most unwanted female presence in a film based upon female empowerment.”***

Yi's bizarre, simultaneous emasculation and hypersexualization results in her comprehensive dehumanization in *Second Act*. Thus Yi is rendered as a social pariah. Why does this dehumanization of Yi occur in a film seemingly intended on uplifting women of color? We can interpret this phenomenon by viewing Hollywood as a cultural, political “center” of power while marginalized groups are on the “periphery” as lesser powers. “Our conception of center–periphery relationships here is that they are relationships of inequality existing in geographical space.”<sup>[1]</sup> As one of the many centers of white, patriarchal power,

Hollywood inhibits its peripheral subordinates through restricted access in representing their full selves, their full humanity, within film roles. Within *Second Act*, we observe Hollywood's action of oppression: repressing one marginalized group as another rises. The dehumanization of Yi is thus a direct product of Latinx women gaining power within the system of white, patriarchal supremacy.

Yi's stripped humanity in the wake of the elevation of Latinx women reflects philosopher Herbert Marcuse's idea of one dimensional thinking. “One dimensional thinking does not demand change nor does it recognize the degree to which the individual is a victim of forces of domination in society.”<sup>[2]</sup> *Second Act's* refusal to uplift all women of color reflects a whittling away of critical thinking and worst, a whittling away of critical demand for social change. Instead, we are left with a failed attempt to upend the pervasive white, patriarchal narratives that Hollywood has historically overwhelmed our viewership with due to the film's repression of Yi's humanity and the ultimate oppression of all women of color.

We should recall Audre Lorde's wisdom: “For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support.”<sup>[3]</sup> *Second Act* embraces the master's house through using the master's tools to keep another marginalized group down thus keeping all marginalized groups oppressed. One may argue that this simultaneous uplifting and oppressing may be an unavoidable yet practical stepping stone toward full liberation from the system of white, patriarchal oppression, but when closely examined,

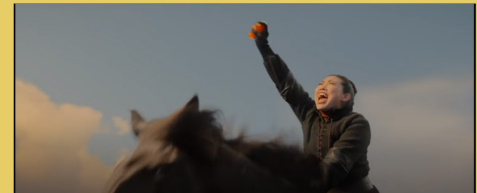


it is simply an action designed to perpetuate a system of inequity.

It becomes tempting, to allow subtle racism to slip by when trying to make a mark in Hollywood. When trying to access the historically racist, sexist and powerful industry of Hollywood, how much of playing the oppressor's game becomes necessary to enact social change? Is it even possible as a person of color, particularly a woman of color, to get one foot through the door of Hollywood without having to sacrifice parts of one's personality and humanity? Although extraordinarily difficult, I argue that it is possible. Nora Lum - known popularly by her stage name, Awkwafina - and Ali Wong - comedian and screenwriter of hit TV series, *Fresh Off the Boat* - are excellent examples of humanized, anti-repressed Asian American female entertainers.

Both women manifest social change through centering their own stories and experiences upon the foundation of intersectional identity. They strategically utilize diversity of genre to dismantle the system of Hollywood through an array of entertainment and storytelling practices such as acting, comedy, writing, producing, and rapping.

Both Awkwafina and Wong upturn the center of white patriarchy and diminish it. They are their own centers. By doing so, they call in women of color to share their own narratives, manifesting a new center of inclusive power of their own making.



[1] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/center-periphery>

[2] <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/marcuse>

[3] [http://s18.middlebury.edu/AMST0325A/Lorde\\_The\\_Masters\\_Tools.pdf](http://s18.middlebury.edu/AMST0325A/Lorde_The_Masters_Tools.pdf)



**Allison C.T. Wu**  
**Winter 2019 Intern**

# LET'S AIM BEYOND REPRESENTATION

by Shawn Jain

Author Bio: Shawn Jain was an OCA intern placed in Speaker Pelosi's office in 2007.

A California native, he received his B.A. from UC Berkeley and then moved to the East Coast where he worked in strategic communications (primarily health-related and for nonprofits) before the acting bug came back to bite him. He then attended the A.R.T. Institute at Harvard University/ Moscow Art Theater School and received his MFA in Acting in 2018. Based in New York City, he has been pursuing acting primarily since then though still works in communications on the side.

Follow him: @shawnjain on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) and [www.shawnkjain.com](http://www.shawnkjain.com).



There's a photo on my bookshelf at my Mom's house of a production of GUYS AND DOLLS I did in high school in 2003 (I was Big Julie, if you were wondering). I was one of only two students of color in the production. And when I would go home and turn on the TV, the only South Asian character I recall seeing on television was voiced by a white man in a cartoon (Apu in The Simpsons).

So when I was an undergraduate student at UC Berkeley, I saw an Asian-American theatre group called Theatre Rice! (yes, it had that name because Asian people eat rice) tabling on the famed Sproul Plaza. I became a member and it was thrilling to create and collaborate with fellow students who, like me, felt tokenized, or, perhaps worse, invisible in high school and college theatre departments.

It also helped me find community on a large campus. It was through this group that I made a connection with someone who told me about the OCA summer internships in Washington, DC.

However, I think even by the time I graduated college (though I couldn't put words to it then), I knew that representation was an insufficient goal, whether it be in art, politics, or business. Now, with the coronavirus pandemic affecting every corner of the globe, it should be crystal clear to all of us that we need way more than representation. Artists must push to upend unjust systems: racial and economic. Actors and other creatives play a critically important role in bringing about a new world order.

Here's how to go about doing that: stories are an innate part of what makes us human. The way we understand the world is through stories. Today, we see this most clearly on television and streaming services. Everyone I know is fully invested in at least one show with long character arcs. The stories move us, they reveal things about us and humanity at large, and they entertain. We invest in stories because we are hardwired to.

There can be a dark side to storytelling too. I would argue that in every presidential election in my lifetime, the candidate who has had the most memorable message has won. Even if the story is utter nonsense and baseless propaganda, like about having Mexico pay for a border wall, there are elements of strong storytelling inherent in these messages that are undeniable. We can mock these messages and the people who believe in them. Or we can learn to emulate them for positive ends.

We have the capacity to do this. Because when done best, stories, regardless of medium (on screen, on stage, in pages, or in our ears), are layered and complex. They aren't attached to black and white or good and evil,

but rather have hues of gray. They also have a strong and simple emotional core that audiences can sink their teeth into. This is true of *Parasite*, it's true of *Star Wars*, it's true of Shakespeare's plays, hell it's true of the docuseries *Cheer*. And this is critically important because when we truly internalize the fact that every human being has intrinsic worth, we cannot also see our current world as acceptable.

If we are forced to reckon with the fact that every person has inherent value, we can't treat people as disposable "unskilled" workers. The coronavirus pandemic has made this obvious. Most jobs are low-paying, and as a society, we would not be able to function without these truly essential workers. We would literally not have food to eat.

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed just how cruel and unusual our economic system is, and all of us, including artists, have to call a spade a spade and work to rectify it. That has to be our rallying cry because representation is simply not enough. If we truly believe every human being is worthy, representation can't be. Stories have played a leading role in changing the course of history before, whether it be *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the plays of Bertolt Brecht, or social media content that led to the Arab Spring. Stories can also be unapologetically raw and vulnerable, like the television series *Ramy*, which hold great value. A new world is not only possible; it is necessary. And just as Donald Trump has used racist narratives to attain power and wealth his entire career, let's create stories that push humanity in a positive direction.



*Qi is that which gives life.*

# AMERICAN QI

An Excerpt

WRITTEN BY AMANDA L. ANDREI

DRAWN BY NADIA MUJALLI

In a search to heal her traumas and health, a young woman visits an acupuncturist whose methods invoke her to reimagine

## **Synopsis**

Frustrated with awkward and traumatic encounters with the American medical system, Candle, a young mixed Filipina American woman, seeks out alternative medicine to heal her body and mind. She finds a healer and mother figure in Camilla, a Chinese acupuncturist who guides her on her health journey to regain control of herself and her destiny. But as Candle goes deeper into traditional Chinese medicine, she finds that she's tapped into systems that are vastly deeper and wilder than she ever imagined.

This is a comics series about something we live with every day but seem to rarely acknowledge until it's off-kilter or broken: our bodies. And how those bodies are connected to minds, to spirits, to dreams – to ultimately form a person who is both durable and fragile, both hard and malleable, both air and earth – and water, fire, and gold.

A person through whom qi flows.







**Amanda L. Andrei**



**Amanda L. Andrei**

**OCA 2007 Summer Intern**

Amanda L. Andrei is a Filipina Romanian American playwright originally from Washington D.C. and currently based in Los Angeles. Say hello at [www.amandalandrei.com](http://www.amandalandrei.com)

**Nadia Mujalli**



**Nadia Mujalli**  
**Collaborator**

Nadia Mujalli is a Filipino Jordanian American illustrator living in Massachusetts. Her work can be found at [nadiacomics.com](http://nadiacomics.com).

teo octavia  
teo octavia  
teo oc  
teo oc  
teo oc

teo octavia



**Description of Work**

This piece was inspired by the various Southeast Asian cooking projects that I like to engage in. The fish sauce, coconut milk, ABC sweet soy sauce, and sambal oelek are staple ingredients in my dishes and I wanted to share them with others who might relate. These ingredients help me feel connected to my cultural heritage as an Indonesian-American person in the diaspora. You can view other examples of my work at [https://bit.ly/SEAArtPrints!](https://bit.ly/SEAArtPrints)

**About the Artist**

teo octavia is an artist, creative storyteller, and community healer. they identify as a plant parent, octavia butler enthusiast, lover of all things fluffy & squishable (e.g. dogs & plushies), and long-time admirer of food (especially foods that are vegetarian friendly, spicy, southeast asian, and/or from QT/POC/family-owned restaurants). teo loves thinking, dreaming, and talking about ancestry & lineage, ethnic studies, music, poetry & writing, and community-based film & art-making. rooted in personal hxstory and social movement legacies, teo believes in the power of grassroots organizing, coalition-building, and building cultural power through art and visual communications to uplift the voices of queer and trans people of color, communities impacted by systems of incarceration and deportation, low-income & working-class communities, and youth of color fighting to build liberatory futures grounded in healing. teo holds a B.A. in Asian American Studies, Sociology, and Public Policy from Pomona College.

# “I am a Queer Vietnamese American, But Not Always in that Order”

By: Viet Tran

This piece was originally published on the [Human Rights Campaign \(HRC\) Blog](#).





The diversity of our nation is what makes us stronger and more connected, and immigrants are a part of the beautiful fabric of this country. Throughout history, immigrants have enriched the foundation and culture of the U.S. with our resilient narratives, colorful traditions and innovative contributions. This Immigrant Heritage Month, let's celebrate immigrants, their journey and stories.

As a queer Vietnamese immigrant and the child of refugees, during [Pride Month](#) and [Immigrant Heritage Month](#) I recognize that I am a queer Vietnamese American, but not always necessarily in that order.

The Vietnamese diaspora carries a heavy history marked by war-torn stories, unspoken trauma and unfamiliar transitions in new homes and customs across the globe. My own story starts with my parents.

After the fall of Saigon in 1975, my father was incarcerated in so-called "[re-education camps](#)." My mother, the only daughter out of seven children, worked to support her family while also pursuing education. She eventually became one of Saigon's most respected educators and teachers.

It was in the early 1990s when my parents sought asylum to the U.S. However, after enduring years of austere conditions and trauma in the incarceration camps, my father would not make the trip abroad with my mother and me.

They named me “Tran Hoai Viet,” after my father, but my name also translated to “Eternally Vietnam” -- a powerful reminder to always remember the country we left.



Though I was born abroad, I grew up in the U.S. and, like many other immigrants and first-generation folks, I struggle to navigate and reconcile my Vietnamese roots and my American upbringing.

When I first came out as gay, I was afraid of the ways it would further complicate my multiple identities and two distinct cultures and traditions.

To me, being a queer Vietnamese immigrant means that my coming out experience is a lifelong and ongoing process and oftentimes a two-front battle. In 2008, I came out to my friends in English. In 2018, I came out to my mom -- yet this second time was entirely in Vietnamese.

It was important to me to come out to my immigrant mother in a language that she understood best.

Heavy cultural expectations and language barriers made my coming out process even more challenging as someone who was navigating at the intersections of being queer, Vietnamese, American and an immigrant.

[Many LGBTQ API immigrants will often share similar experiences and challenges.](#) Many of us are at the cusp of two hemispheres, two generations, two tongues and, in many cases, two lives. The process to reconcile our multiple identities and experiences sometimes extends a lifetime.

As I honor Immigrant Heritage Month and my own story, I recognize that there is still a need for more representation and visibility across the spectrum. This Immigrant Heritage Month and Pride Month, I encourage you to explore your own heritage and history, honor the contributions of your communities and share your story to take on the challenges that we still face today.

For more information about the unique experiences of LGBTQ API youth in the U.S., [click here](#). To read more about navigating the intersectional experience of coming out as LGBTQ for API people, [click here](#).

**Viet H. Tran** is currently a Press Secretary at the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), where they are responsible for monitoring, researching, and responding to news on LGBTQ-related policies, including federal and state legislation, Supreme Court cases, judicial nominees, immigration-related policies.

Viet was previously the Communications Manager at the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), where their work focuses on supporting policy and practice change within child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

They are a former Ambassador for the White House Initiative on Asian American and Pacific Islanders (WHIAAPI) under the Obama administration, representing the regions of WV, VA, DE, PA, MD, and DC. They have also led a visibility campaign with the ICS Center in Vietnam, advocating for transgender rights recognition in the country. Viet also previously held positions at the Victory Fund & Institute, Global Rights, the Office of Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren (D-CA 19), and the National Education Association (NEA). They previously served on the Board of Directors for the Conference on Asian Pacific American Leadership (CAPAL), working to empower young Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students by increasing access to leadership and public service opportunities.

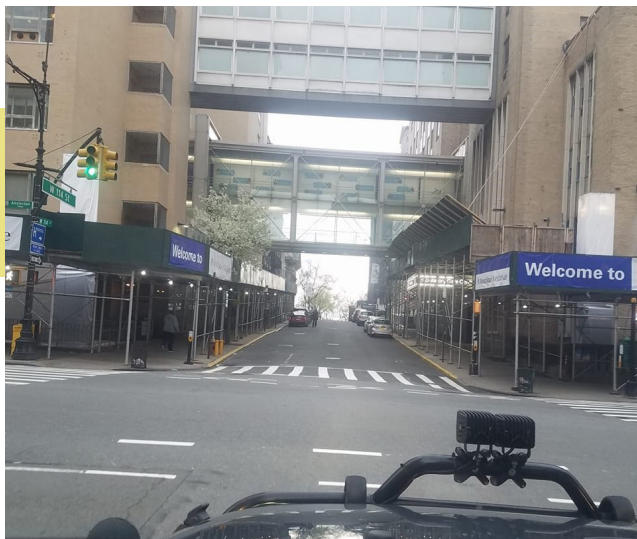


# About Viet Tran



# The Question You Will Be Asked After the Pandemic

BY JASON LEE, SRNA, CCRN,  
CNRN, TCRN



I am an ICU nurse in Manhattan. I have seen my share of trauma, critical illness, and sorrow. But what is happening in my hospital and hospitals across America is on a scale of tragedy not even the most seasoned clinician has experienced.

My hospital looks like any hospital in America. Serene on the outside. Typical day. Any day of the year. The only thing that is different this time there is a war going on inside.

But it is not a hot and loud firefight, like the Second Battle of Fallujah. It is not that kind of war. But both were costly and deadly. Outsiders may not feel or see the viciousness inside the four walls of this battlefield, but we do have the walking dead and wounded amongst us: us, the health care workers. Working today. Dead tomorrow. Working tomorrow sick in two weeks. And who knows what residual effects the virus, and subsequent autoimmune response and inflammation will have on our health in the future even if we do recover or are asymptomatic like World Trade Center Syndrome.

This is a war by proxy where we, the so-called “heroes” vs. coronavirus, are the superpowers, and our patients are the victims, in the middle, being ravaged like the wars in Vietnam, Korea, and Lebanon. Have you ever seen a life slip away as their spouse witnesses it all by live stream, wailing in torturous sorrow and agony via iPad?

I would never wish that on anyone. There will never be closure or peace for them. Just PTSD. And an endless hole.

**There are no heroes or villains in this dogfight, just winners and losers. If there are heroes, that means we are all powerless and defenseless, and we have no role to play in this fight. It means it is OK to be a bystander and that the government and the people have no agency or role to play in minimizing the impact of the virus. It lets the government and us as a community off the hook. We could have been better prepared as a country.**

But that's in the past. We have to move forward intentionally. In the aftermath of 9/11, we were asked, "Where were you when it happened?" In the future, people will ask after the curve flatlines, "What did you do?" Did you go out and protest demanding the end of social distancing? Or did you do something else? You will be asked. We will all be made to account, and our ledgers opened.

**This piece was originally published on [KevinMD.com](http://KevinMD.com).**

# Jason Lee



**Jason Lee** is a former OCA intern and former treasurer of OCA Philadelphia Chapter. Before becoming a nurse he worked in refugee resettlement, policy and community organizing for immigrant rights at the national level and in Los Angeles and Philadelphia.

For Jason every day being a nurse represents, "that tension between who you are and who you are becoming for your patients and colleagues. The acknowledgment of that tension is a sign that one is situationally aware and willing to meet those clinical challenges through the learning process. In the ICU, our patients' medical exigencies require it of us." He is currently pursuing doctoral studies as a nurse anesthetologist at the University of Pennsylvania.

# Kent's Recs



**Kent Tong**  
OCA Senior Program Associate

## Bio

Kent Tong is the Senior Program Associate at OCA National. A proud Vietnamese American, he is originally from the Greater New Orleans area and currently based in Washington, D.C. In his free time he loves watching movies in theatres (alone!) and occasionally writing movie reviews on his blog.

*The following is a list of recommended film and television series, all of which are created by, directed by, written by, starring, and/or feature Asians, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders.*

## FILMS

### **AQUAMAN (2018)**

*Directed by James Wan*

*Written by David Leslie Johnson-McGoldrick & Will Beall*

*Starring Jason Momoa, Amber Heard, Willem Dafoe, Patrick Wilson, Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, Nicole Kidman*



*Warner Bros. Pictures*

When the marketing material for 'Aquaman' started rolling out I was not impressed. The film looked cheesy (or is it fishy?), the special effects unfinished, and the tone was all over the place. I knew I wanted to like it, because I love DC superheros, but judging by DC's hit and miss films in its cinematic universe, I thought it was likely 'Aquaman' would be another critical failure. As it turns out, 'Aquaman' is cheesy and its tone is all over the place, but I still loved it! Instead of the dark and gritty films that have plagued all of the DC films the past several years, we got a bright, shiny, and - dare I say - heroic one. From the costume design to the underwater worlds, everything seemed like it was in the spirit of the comics. Seriously, I loved the design of Black Manta's armor. Sure, Ocean Master's mask is hilarious, but it's exactly what it looks like in the comics. And seeing Jason Momoa in the iconic Aquaman costume, and looking badass while doing so, was the icing on the cake. The action sequences are some of the best in any DC superhero film, mostly because we can actually follow them and they're choreographed well. Director James Wan ('Saw', 'The Conjuring', 'Furious 7') went above and beyond with Aquaman's feature film debut and I have to thank him for that. I can't wait to see what comes next. Heh.

*You can stream 'Aquaman' on HBO Max or purchase it digitally or physically from most retailers.*



# FILMS

## **BURNING (2018)**

Directed by Lee Chang-dong

Written by Oh Jung-mi & Lee Chang-dong

Starring Yoo Ah-in, Steven Yeun, Jeon Jong-seo



Well Go USA Entertainment

## **CRAZY RICH ASIANS (2018)**

Directed by Jon M. Chu

Written by Peter Chiarelli & Adele Lim

Starring Constance Wu, Henry Golding, Gemma Chan, Lisa Lu, Awkwafina, Ken Jeong, Michelle Yeoh



Warner Bros. Pictures

## **THE FAREWELL (2019)**

Written/Directed by Lulu Wang

Starring Awkwafina, Tzi Ma, Zhao Shu-zhen



A24

Like the title itself, Lee Chang-dong's masterful psychological mystery drama is a slow-burn and may not be for everyone, but the lead up to its shocking finale is well worth the wait. Adapted from the Haruki Murakami short story "Barn Burning," the film stars Yoo Ah-in as Jongsu, an aspiring writer who reunites with his childhood classmate Haemi (newcomer Jeon Jong-seo). The two bond quickly and Jongsu soon falls for her. Jongsu agrees to take care of Haemi's cat while she's away in Africa, but when she returns with a new, rich, and handsome play-boy named Ben (Steven Yeun), the film shifts gears. What follows is a mesmerizing, sometimes creepy and off-putting, exploration of class, privilege, sex, and the human condition that will linger in your mind long after the film has ended.

You can stream 'Burning' on Netflix.

There's nothing particularly groundbreaking about the film adaptation of Kevin Kwan's hit novel. Plot-wise, it's your standard romcom, but what's particularly notable is how well the film hits all its marks. The production design is a standout, especially its jaw-dropping wedding of the century. Seriously, every time I watch that scene it feels like time just stops. The acting is great, featuring a strong lead performance from Constance Wu, memorable work by rising stars Henry Golding, Awkwafina, and Gemma Chan, and Michelle Yeoh's career-best (she seriously should have been nominated for a Best Supporting Actress Oscar). The amount of love and dedication provided here by director Jon M. Chu ('Step Up 2: The Streets'), screenwriters Peter Chiarelli ('The Proposal') and Adele Lim (Disney's upcoming 'Raya and the Last Dragon'), and composer Brian Tyler are evident throughout the film's many highlights. And I can't forget the unforgettable third-act mahjong scene (which wasn't even in the original novel) and Mandarin cover of Coldplay's iconic "Yellow." This whole film felt like lightning in a bottle and I'm not quite sure the upcoming sequels can capture the same magical feeling 'Crazy Rich Asians' offered us, but I'm all for them trying.

You can purchase 'Crazy Rich Asians' digitally or physically from most retailers.

Based on an actual lie from writer-director Lulu Wang's life, 'The Farewell' depicts a Chinese-American family's plan to spend one last time with their terminally-ill Nai Nai. The only thing is, Nai Nai doesn't know she's dying. What follows is an emotional, yet also humorous, family reunion featuring culturally-specific moments that transcend their cultural boundaries to universal appeal. The film is instantly relatable for any children of immigrants, having to balance cultural traditions with modern perspectives and depicts the different ways we cope with death. Wang has crafted a beautiful film that will have you dying of laughter one moment and bursting in tears the next. Alex Weston's score is just as beautiful; the repeating melody from the first track "The Lie" is unforgettable, and "Family" as the perfect conclusion. Awkwafina ('Crazy Rich Asians') gives her best performance so far as the lead character Billi, but it's Zhao Shu-zhen who steals the spotlight as the strict and demanding, yet warm and loving Nai Nai (there was even Oscar buzz for Zhao).

You can stream 'The Farewell' on Amazon Prime Video or purchase it digitally or physically from most retailers.

## HUSTLERS (2019)

*Written/Directed by Lorene Scafaria*

*Starring Constance Wu, Jennifer Lopez, Julia Stiles, Keke Palmer, Lili Reinhart, Lizzo, Cardi B*

Writer-director Lorene Scafaria's crime drama was a welcome surprise from 2019, based on a true story. The film depicts strippers at the turn of the 2008 financial crisis, drugging and scamming thousands of dollars from their Wall Street clients. Like any great crime film, we root for the criminals, which is hard not to do considering the level of talent involved. Jennifer Lopez gives us an Oscar-worthy performance as Ramona, the veteran stripper who initiates the idea to scam the rich guys. Constance Wu continues to showcase her talent as a dramatic actor after starring in last summer's hit film 'Crazy Rich Asians'. Keke Palmer and Lili Reinhart round out the rest of the cast, providing most of the comic-relief. 'Hustlers' could have easily been a fun, but hollow caper in the vein of 'Ocean's 8', but it features emotional depth and empathy for these women who are simply just trying to survive.



*STX Entertainment*

*You can purchase 'Hustlers' digitally or physically from most retailers.*

## JUST MERCY (2019)

*Directed by Destin Daniel Cretton*

*Written by Destin Daniel Cretton & Andrew Lanham*

*Starring Michael B. Jordan, Jamie Foxx, Rob Morgan, Tim Blake Nelson, Rafe Spall, Brie Larson*



*Warner Bros. Pictures*

'Just Mercy' is based on defense attorney Bryan Stevenson's memoir of the same name, detailing his challenging experience fighting for the innocence of Walter McMillian, a Black man framed and put on death row for the murder of a young white woman in Alabama. Director and co-writer Destin Daniel Cretton, director of the Indie darling 'Short Term 12' and Marvel's upcoming 'Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings', does an admirable job bringing this story to the big screen, even if he doesn't exactly break any new ground in doing so. 'Just Mercy' is the standard legal drama we're accustomed to, and it follows the same predictable narrative path, but it doesn't mean it's not still impactful. What makes the film stand out is its talented cast, including Michael B. Jordan ('Fruitvale Station', 'Creed') portraying Stevenson, Jamie Foxx ('Django Unchained') portraying McMillian, and Cretton-regular Brie Larson ('Captain Marvel') as a local activist.

Jordan and Foxx's respective characters are an interesting pairing, with Stevenson being a man who was not born nor raised

in the South, who hasn't faced the same violent racism as someone like McMillian knows all too well. We see Stevenson climbing an uphill battle, working to convince the Alabama courts to recognize McMillian's conviction was based on faulty evidence, while at the same time trying to convince McMillian himself - someone who's lost all hope and knows how "the real world" operates - that the fight is worth it. Despite these A-list leads, the standout role here is Rob Morgan as fellow death row inmate Hebert Richardson ('The Last Black Man in San Francisco'). Richardson was a real Vietnam War veteran convicted of accidentally killing a neighbor by setting off a homemade bomb, a result of his PTSD. Morgan is heartbreaking in his portrayal of Richardson, a man who accepts his guilt but who is also an example of the country's systemic failure to protect its own people.

*You can purchase 'Just Mercy' digitally or physically from most retailers.*



# FILMS

## MINDING THE GAP (2018)

Directed by Bing Liu

Starring Keire Johnson, Zack Mulligan, Bing Liu



Hulu

When I first heard about 'Minding the Gap' I had zero interest in seeing it. I thought it was simply a documentary about skateboarders and, unfortunately, I just don't have interest in any sport. However, after seeing it receive rave reviews and even an Oscar nomination, I decided to give it a chance - and I'm glad I did! This is the directorial debut of Bing Liu (who is also one of the film's subjects), which documents Liu and his two friends' lives from adolescence to young adulthood. What starts off as a story of friends who meet through skateboarding quickly turns into something more, something darker. The film explores these three's experiences with racism, toxic masculinity, domestic violence, and lower-middle class life in the American Midwest with brutal honesty.

*You can stream 'Minding the Gap' on Hulu.*

When 'Moana' was released in 2016 it was unfortunately outshined by Disney's other new offering 'Zootopia' (both deserve recognition and are instant Disney classics).

Everything about the film worked, from the spot-on casting of Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson as the demigod Maui to newcomer Auli'i Cravalho as Disney's first Polynesian princess; the catchy songs and memorable score by Lin-Manuel Miranda ('Hamilton'), Opetaia Foa'i (Te Vaka), and Mark Mancina ('Tarzan');

the clear vision of directors Ron Clements and John Musker ('Aladdin', 'Hercules'); and the film's subversive plot featuring no love interest and an antagonist that's not so much a villain, but rather mother nature scorned. 'Moana' is a worthwhile addition to Disney's new renaissance.

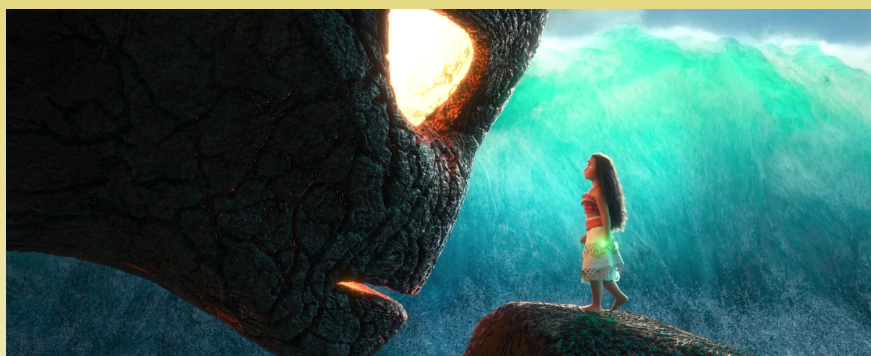
*You can stream 'Moana' on Disney+.*

## MOANA(2016)

Directed by Ron Clements & John Musker

Written by Jared Bush

Starring Auli'i Cravalho, Dwayne Johnson, Rachel House, Temuera Morrison, Jemaine Clement, Nicole Scherzinger, Alan Tudyk



Disney

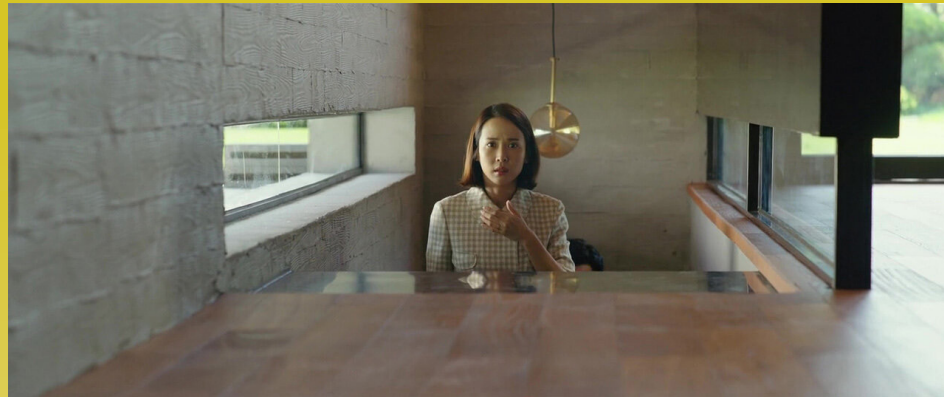


## PARASITE (2019)

Directed by Bong Joon-ho

Written by Bong Joon-ho & Han Jin-won

Starring Song Kang-ho, Lee Sun-kyun, Choi Yeo-jeong, Choi Woo-shik, Park So-dam, Lee Jung-eun, Jang Hye-jin



Neon

2019's breakout hit made history, not only as the first South Korean film to win an Oscar - but the Oscar - for Best Picture. It was a stunning surprise, considering its more Oscar-friendly competition like '1917' and 'The Irishman', but a well-deserved one nonetheless. I had no idea what I was in for as I was seated in the theater waiting for 'Parasite' to start. I kept reading praise after praise online about a little film called 'Parasite', and since it won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival (its highest prize), my mind was made up - I had to see it! I avoided

all trailers, reviews, and online discussions as I heard it's best to view this film without knowing anything. With the risk of sounding too hyperbolic, 'Parasite' is probably the most perfect film I've ever seen. The level of ingenuity and craft on display here by writer-director Bong Joon-ho ('Memories of Murder', 'Snowpiercer', 'Okja') is just unimaginable. What starts off as a black comedy switches gears at the halfway mark to become something entirely different. It's a comedy, tragedy, thriller, and satire all in one. It takes a heartbreaking and gut-wrenching look at income inequality in late-stage capitalism. Not unlike 2019's earlier offering 'Us' (from writer-director Jordan Peele) before it, 'Parasite' offers biting commentary on the relationship between the haves and have-nots. And it somehow does all of this in a crowd-pleasing fashion. This is the type of film best viewed without knowing anything about it in order to experience its surprises at maximum effect. 'Parasite' is not only the best film of the decade, it's one of the best films of all time. "I'm deadly serious."

You can stream 'Parasite' on Hulu.

An original thriller from a first-time Asian-American director (Aneesh Chaganty) that stars an Asian-American lead (John Cho)... Is this real life? What makes 'Searching' stand out is that it doesn't rely on Cho's "Asian-ness" to make it unique. Never is his character's race or ethnicity addressed. Instead, the film relies on its thrilling mystery we try to solve alongside Cho's character, as well as its unique filming technique. Like the horror film 'Unfriended', 'Searching' is depicted almost entirely on a screen, whether it be a computer or phone. The story involves Cho's character searching for his missing daughter, and we see all of the action - the calls, video chats, evidence - on screen. Chaganty does an excellent job of keeping up the suspense while being limited by the filming technique's boundaries. And while some may feel the final reveal is a little unbelievable, I still appreciated it and believe the film warrants multiple viewings to catch all the clues.

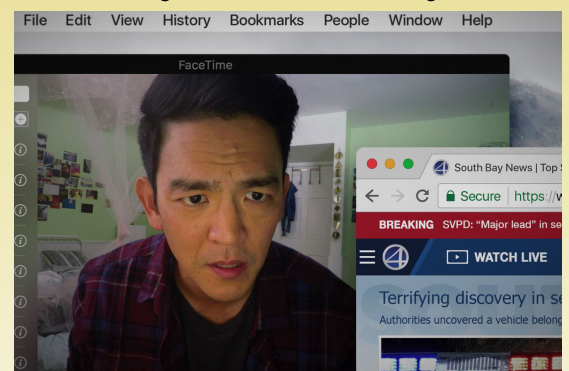
You can purchase 'Searching' digitally or physically from most retailers.

## SEARCHING (2018)

Directed by Aneesh Chaganty

Written by Aneesh Chaganty & Sev Ohanian

Starring John Cho, Debra Messing, Michelle La



Screen Gems

# TV SERIES

## COMMUNITY (2009-2015)

Created by Dan Harmon

Starring Joel McHale, Gillian Jacobs, Danny Pudi, Yvette Nicole Brown, Alison Brie, Donald Glover, Ken Jeong,



Sony Pictures Television

But alas, it got cancelled after Yahoo! Screen bombed. Years went by and the show's heavily-prophesied movie (from the show's fan-chosen rallying cry "Six Seasons and a Movie") seemed less likely. But thanks to its recent debut on Netflix, and the show's new-found popularity, a movie may very well be back on the table.

You can stream 'Community' on Netflix and Hulu, or purchase it digitally or physically from most retailers.

'Fresh Off the Boat', based on chef and food personality Eddie Huang's memoir of the same name, follows a Taiwanese-American family as they adjust to their new life in Orlando after moving there from D.C. I was very hesitant about this show because the original trailer for it was super cringe-worthy. The shortened first season had some growing pains, like most sitcoms do, but it turned out to be a decent and enjoyable show. The second season was when it hit its stride, thanks to a slight adjustment when Constance Wu's breakout character became the lead instead of Hudson Yang's Eddie (this was due to Eddie Huang's departure from the show). Since this shift, the show has been consistently enjoyable. Don't get me wrong, 'Fresh Off the Boat' doesn't reinvent the wheel, and if it weren't for the fact that it's one of the only shows on network television to feature an Asian American family, it probably wouldn't have received that much attention. But that's okay because Asian Americans deserve to have their own good-but-not-great family sitcom, damnit!

You can watch 'Fresh Off the Boat' on ABC or stream it on Hulu.

Anyone who knows me knows how much 'Community' means to me. It's a show that dares to be as ambitious as it is different. This is a show that started off as a typical sitcom following a mid-thirties man who goes to a community college after being disbarred for falsifying his law degree and forms a study group that quickly become his close friends. This simple premise evolves into something totally different (and special) late in its first season, when the show started dedicating itself to more ambitious genres, styles, and forms of storytelling. You never know what you're going to get each week from this show. One week it can feature a chicken fingers plot in the style of any Scorsese mob film, or an action-film-style paintball war, or an a claymation episode. It doesn't obey conventional TV rules. This is a show for the oddballs and outcasts, as well as for those who love film and TV. 'Community' is a passionate and smart series, and it doesn't cater to lowest common denominator humor. Being a fan of the show while it was still on the air was an emotional rollercoaster. It seemed like every year the show was on the brink of cancellation (due to low viewership ratings, despite high critical acclaim), and after Season 5, this was the case. Thankfully, Yahoo! (as random as that sounds) swooped in and gave the show a sixth season as part of the launch of its new streaming platform Yahoo! Screen.

## FRESH OFF THE BOAT (2015-2020)

Created by Nahnatchka Khan

Based on "Fresh Off the Boat" by Eddie Huang

Starring Constance Wu, Randall Park, Hudson Yang, Forrest Wheeler, Ian Chen, Lucille Soong, Chelsey Crisp,



20th Television

# TV SERIES

## HOMECOMING (2018-)

*Created by Eli Horowitz & Micah Bloomberg*

*Based on the podcast of the same name by Gimlet Media*

*Starring (season 1) Julia Roberts, Bobby Cannavale, Stephen James, Shea Whigham; (season 2) Janelle Monae, Hong Chau, Stephen James, Chris Cooper, Joan Cusack*



*Amazon Studios*

at you, J.J. Abrams!). Also, I had no idea until the first episode that each episode would be 20-30 minutes. I'm so used to dramas and thrillers having hour-long episodes that it's actually quite refreshing to have shorter episodes. The amount of time dedicated to each episode feels just right.

*You can stream 'Homecoming' on Amazon Prime Video.*

This psychological thriller is based on the fictional podcast 'Homecoming' by Gimlet Media (I'd never heard of a fictional podcast before - so cool!). It's a handsomely made series all around, from the directing (season 1 was directed by Sam Esmail of 'Mr. Robot' fame), editing, sound, and overall style. And each season is led by a stellar cast (season 1 features great performances from Julia Roberts and Stephen James, whereas season 2 features standout performances from Janelle Monae and Hong Chau). The series revolves around the Homecoming Transitional Support Center, a live-in facility that claims to be in service of transitioning U.S. soldiers back into civilian life. But as the show progresses we soon realize there's more to Homecoming than we think. What I appreciate about the show is how each season is its own self-contained story with a clear beginning, middle, and end. It's not quite an anthology series, as season two is definitely a follow-up to the events of the first season, but it's just so nice to see storylines not be dragged out for the sake of being mysterious (I'm looking

## MASTER OF NONE (2015-2017)

*Created by Aziz Ansari & Alan Yang*

*Starring Aziz Ansari, Noel Wells, Eric Wareheim, Kelvin Yu, Lena Waithe, Alessandra Mastronardi*



*Netflix*

I am not a big fan of Aziz Ansari's standup comedy so I wasn't expecting much from his new Netflix show, but it turned out to be fantastic. The show apparently features story elements taken from his standup comedy as well as his new book "Modern Romance." What's great about this show is its lead is Asian (portrayed by Ansari), his group of friends are diverse, and each episode plays as if they're standalone short films, each dedicated to a single theme. The second episode "Parents" is my favorite because I can relate to it so much as an offspring of immigrant parents. "Indians on TV" tackles representation of minorities on television. "Ladies and Gentlemen" deals with the differences in how women are treated in comparison to men. The show actually deals with important issues, while at the same time being hilarious and clever.

*You can stream 'Master of None' on Netflix.*



# TV SERIES

## MARVEL'S AGENTS OF S.H.I.E.L.D (2013-)

Created by Joss Whedon, Jed Whedon, Maurissa Tanchaeroen  
Starring Clark Gregg, Chloe Bennet, Ming-Na Wen, Brett Dalton, Iain De Caestecker, Elizabeth Henstridge, Nick Blood, Adrianne Palicki, Henry Simmons, Luke Mitchell, John Hannah, Natalia Cordova-Buckley, Jeff Ward Rash



Walt Disney Television

And my pick for the best new series of 2020 goes to... Seriously, I don't remember the last time I've seen a show like this that was instantly likable and truly great from beginning to end, especially in its first season. This coming-of-age story follows 15-year-old Devi Vishwakumar (Maitreyi Ramakrishnan) as she navigates her life as an Indian-American teenager. We witness Devi dealing with typical teenage tropes like finding a boyfriend, fighting with rivals, increasing her popularity, etc. The show has an instantly likable cast, but its lasting appeal is how well it balances its comedy with, surprisingly, trauma. I look forward to its second season, which will hopefully expand on the more serious aspects of the show. Also, the show has a killer soundtrack!

You can stream 'Never Have I Ever' on Netflix.

## NEXT IN FASHION (2020)

Hosted by Tan France & Alexa Chung



Netflix

through the show, the remaining pairs start competing as individuals. The thing that makes the show stand out, besides its unconventional pairing system, is something the show may not have much control over: the chemistry between the contestants, and just their overall likable personalities. The show doesn't have drama or bad blood you may see in other reality tv competitions. Even when the show tries to force drama (like splitting the teams up to make them compete against their former partners), the superficial drama never appears. The designers still love and support one another, even if that means they risk losing. It's the type of wholesome appeal Netflix has mastered in its reality TV department (including 'Queer Eye' and 'The Circle').

The show also features guest judges every episode, and it's a pretty solid group. The most memorable is Kerby Jean-Raymond, founder of Pyer Moss. Without spoiling too much, let's just say he has a strong (yet welcomed) voice, which leads to some tension with the other judges. The episode I'm referencing is Episode 4, in which the designers had to create streetwear. What comes next is a heated discussion regarding cultural appropriation. It's a much-needed discussion for the show, considering many of the designers and judges, like France and Chung, view fashion through a predominantly Eurocentric lens.

The international element of the show is another unique aspect. The designers are from all over the world: Pakistan, Puerto Rico, China, England, South Korea, Mexico, India, Scotland, Italy, Canada, and the United States. This allows us to see a variety of works and different styles. Combine this with the fact that they're all professional designers, it means we almost always see amazing designs from them.

You can stream 'Next In Fashion' on Netflix.

'Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.' debuted just a year after the premiere of the groundbreaking and historic 'Avengers', and the show garnered a lot of interest due to the fact it was set in the same universe as the Marvel Studios films like 'Iron Man' and 'Thor', so there were high expectations for the show. And when the show finally did premiere it did so with... a thud. It was a huge disappointment, a total bore, and simply a mess. But then a miracle happened: halfway through the first season, when the events of 'Captain America: The Winter Soldier' (yes, that event) collided with the plot of the show, everything changed. The stories became more engaging, the stakes were high, and we started caring about the characters. It's a terrific addition to the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

You can watch 'Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.' on ABC or stream it on Netflix.

## NEVER HAVE I EVER (2020)

Created by Mindy Kaling & Lang Fisher

Starring Maitreyi Ramakrishnan, Poorna Jagannathan, Richa Moorjani, Jaren Lewison, Darren Barnet, Ramona Young, Lee Rodriguez, Niecy Nash, Sendhil Ramamurthy, Eddie Liu, John McEnroe



Netflix

This new fashion competition show, co-hosted by 'Queer Eye's Tan France and fashion model Alexa Chung, both of whom also serve as judges, features 18 professional fashion designers from all over the world - emphasis on "professional." Unlike 'Project Runway', the designers in 'Next in Fashion' have designed for A-list stars, including Beyonce and Ariana Grande. All but one of the designers have their own labels. They're all competing for \$250,000 and the chance to retail their collections on Net-a-Porter, a luxury fashion retailer.

At first, 'Next In Fashion' may be a little off-putting. I didn't like its over-produced style and editing, nor their decision to pair up its 18 contestants with one another, basically creating 9 competing teams. But I was quickly won over, mostly thanks to the personalities on screen. Yes, having competitors be paired off for most of the show was an odd thing to see, but it admittedly results in some stunning designs that probably wouldn't have happened if it weren't for these designers pushing each other to their creative limits as partners. This only raises the emotional stakes once, halfway

# TV SERIES

## PATRIOT ACT WITH HASAN MINHAJ

(2018-)

Created by Hasan Minhaj & Prashanth Venkataramanujam

I'm a big fan of news satire shows like 'Last Week Tonight with John Oliver', 'Full Frontal with Samantha Bee', and 'The Daily Show with Trevor Noah' that do deep dives into major issues in the country, so I was already excited when Hasan Minhaj (who, at the time, was mostly known for his work on 'The Daily Show') announced he was getting his own show. This is a show that demands to be seen each week, with important episodes covering topics like affirmative action, immigration enforcement, student loans, the opioid crisis, and America's policing system.

You can stream 'Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj' on Netflix.



Netflix

## Sense8 (2015-2018)

Created by The Wachowskis & J. Michael Straczynski  
Starring Aml Ameen, Doona Bae, Jamie Clayton,  
Tina Desai, Tuppence Middleton, Toby Onwumere,  
Max Riemelt, Miguel Angel Silvestre, Brian J. Smith,  
Freema Agyeman, Terrence Mann, Anupam Kher,  
Naveen Andrews, Daryl Hannah



Netflix

The Wachowski sisters haven't had much luck in the theatrical departments since their 'Matrix' trilogy. Their knack for ambitious storytelling haven't been well-suited for two-hour storytelling, so the serial format of television seemed perfect for them. Thankfully, it all worked out in 'Sense8', also co-created by Michael Straczynski ('Babylon 5'), which follows eight strangers whose minds mysteriously become connected. They're dubbed "sensates." The eight main characters (our sensates) include a Kenyan bus driver in Nairobi; the daughter of a powerful businessman in Seoul; a trans hacktivist in San Francisco; a pharmacist in Mumbai; a DJ from Iceland; a safe-cracker in Berlin; a Mexican actor in Mexico City; and a cop in Chicago. Because these characters are from different walks of life, we get to experience each of their worlds. And because they live in different countries, we get to see the physical beauty of the world.

Like many TV thrillers, there's a mysterious conspiracy element to the show, but that's not really the most interesting part of the show. What makes 'Sense8' special is that it's about the universal human

experience. The best parts of 'Sense8' are when the characters are experiencing moments of pure bliss. The show is really good at producing montages that just simply make you feel happy. I'm sure the creators of the show know these montages are great because they happen several times throughout the series.

Unfortunately, Netflix surprisingly canceled the series after just two seasons, despite a rabid fan base. It makes sense considering the high costs of producing such a globe-trotting show that doesn't have a strong enough viewership base. Thankfully, however, Netflix heard the cries and allowed the creators to craft a two-hour series finale to allow the characters to have a proper sendoff.

You can stream 'Sense8' on Netflix.



# TV SERIES

## SINGLE BY 30 (2016)

Created by Wong Fu Productions

Starring Harry Shum Jr., Kina Grannis, Eric Ochoa,  
Hillary Anne Matthews, Manon Matthews, Ana Akana



YouTube

Not to be confused with the Wong Fu short of the same name, 'Single By 30' is Wong Fu Productions' first television series, offered by YouTube's paid streaming service YouTube Premium. Like the short, the series follows two friends who made a promise as teenagers to marry each other if they were both - and you guessed it - single by 30. It's a funny, cute, and tear-jerker of a series that I truly recommend as one of Wong Fu's best works. I remember binging it all in one sitting with my friends (all guys) and we all cried. And you know what the best part is? Starting this past April, the entire eight-episode series became free for everyone to view on YouTube!

## TERRACE HOUSE (2012-)

The Netflix-produced Japanese reality television show 'Terrace House' is one of my unexpected addictions. Its premise of six young and attractive strangers living together in a house may remind you of 'The Real World', but thankfully that's where the similarities end. Unlike American reality shows, catfights, sex, and drama are not the focus of the show. The cast is entirely Japanese, and for the most part everyone is incredibly polite to one another. When disagreements do happen, they talk about it as adults. The show feels more real, unlike many American reality shows that often feel scripted.



Netflix

It's fascinating to observe the nuances of another culture as well as to see the beauty that is Japan. Housemates don't overstay their welcome. When a housemate decides it's time to leave - whether it's because they've accomplished what they sought out to do, or some other reason - they actually leave the show and are replaced with a new member of the same gender. This creates a different dynamic for the house, which keeps the show from getting stale.

There's a panel of Japanese comedians and celebrities who give commentary in every episode. They watch what we watch and give their thoughts on what's happening, they theorize what certain actions may mean, etc. I thought this aspect of the show was weird at first, but it quickly became entertaining to watch. And the commentators are pretty funny, too!

The show airs weekly in Japan, even while the current season is still being filmed! This creates some interesting scenarios like when the housemates meet or interact with friends, family, or strangers who are watching the current season. Since the show airs weekly, and because there's over 30 to 40 episodes (with each episode equating to approximately one week in the house), things progress naturally. Relationships, tensions, and the rare drama that happens occurs slowly and realistically.

You can stream Terrace House on Netflix.

**"This show not only evoked thought, conversation, but exposed history that had been forgotten — all while we were able to entertain." - Regina King**

As a fan of the original comics, I was skeptical when it was announced a Watchmen television series was in the works. I thought the original story was finite, so what more was there to say? Yet when the TV series aired late last year, I was pleasantly surprised. The new story transcends the original and delves into more timely themes surrounding race in America - a theme the original comics barely touched upon. Showrunner Damon Lindelof was inspired by "The Case for Reparations" by Ta-Nehisi Coates, which led to the series literally starting off with the Tulsa Massacre. After the first episode aired, the Tulsa Massacre was trending on Twitter and Google searches skyrocketed. Many Black Americans knew this history, meanwhile White Americans thought it was fictional and made up for the show. The show covers the history of policing, the impossibility of reforming a corrupt system from within, systemic racism, Black trauma, reparations, appropriation, and more. One of its central themes is the prevalence of white supremacy in our institutions. It's a brilliant piece of art that both fans of the original comics and newcomers can appreciate. It's one of the best, most perfect shows I've ever seen.

You can watch 'Watchmen' on HBO or purchase it on home video.

## WATCHMEN (2019)

Created by Damon Lindelof

Starring Regina King, Don Johnson, Tim Blake Nelson, Yahya  
Abdul-Mateen II, Louis Gossett Jr., Jeremy Irons,  
Jean Smart, Hong Chau



HBO



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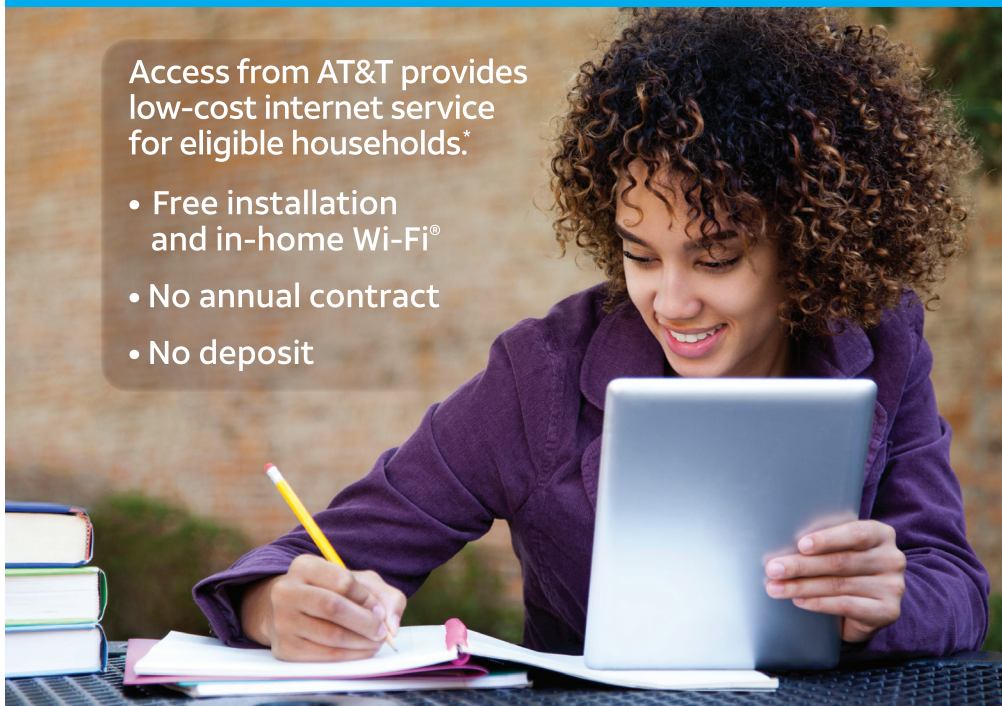


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