

APAMC

Asian Pacific American Media Coalition

ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN MEDIA COALITION ISSUES REPORT CARDS TO THE TV NETWORKS ON THEIR PROGRESS TOWARD FULL INCLUSION OF ASIAN AMERICANS; ABC reaches historic highs, while FOX gets an "Incomplete"

Los Angeles--The Asian Pacific American Media Coalition (APAMC) issued its periodic Report Cards for the past 2016-17 season, grading the four major TV networks on their progress toward diversity and inclusion of Asian Americans on the air and behind the scenes. The Report Cards revealed some bright spots but also plenty of areas in which the networks need to improve for Asian Americans to achieve equal opportunities to be fully included in this area of the entertainment industry.

Since APAMC began meeting with the networks in 1999 to advocate for greater diversity and inclusion of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs), there have been gradual increases in the number of Asian Americans represented in the categories of Actors (regular and recurring roles in prime time), Unscripted (host/judges and contestants), Writers/Producers, Directors, and Program Development.

This improvement has been due in part to the diversity pipeline programs that the networks implemented to fulfill the terms of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) that each network signed with members of a national, Multi-Ethnic Media Coalition (MEMC) comprised of the NAACP, the National Latino Media Council, American Indians in Film/TV, and the APAMC. Accordingly, APAMC also grades each network's Commitment to the Diversity Initiatives, as reflected in the effectiveness of their pipeline programs and their partnerships with the MEMC. The letter grades for each network for various categories are based on data provided to the APAMC by the networks themselves as part of their MOU agreements with the MEMC; the final "overall" grade is compiled by averaging the category grades using a standard 4-point scale for each network.

In the 2016-17 season, ABC scored the highest grades of any network in the categories of Actors, Writers/Producers, Directors, and Commitment to the Diversity Initiatives. This resulted in ABC receiving an Overall Grade of B, matching the highest ever awarded to a network since the APAMC began assessing the networks' progress some 16 years ago. (NBC also received an Overall Grade of B for the 2010-11 season.) ABC also set a new high for Actors, with a total of 21 regular and 23 recurring AAPI actors in prime time series last season. This includes three series--FRESH OFF THE BOAT, QUANTICO and DR. KEN--featuring Asian Americans as the stars (first name in the credits).

In contrast, CBS had 16 Asian American regulars and 22 recurring for a grade of B- in the Actors category, and only 15 Asian American Writers or Producers (not including freelancers) for a grade of C in that category. NBC had only 11 Asian American regulars and 24 recurring for a grade of C+ in the Actors category, and a total of 18 Asian American Writers or Producers for a grade of C+ in that category. Because both CBS and NBC have a significant number of programs featuring AAPI actors, writers and/or producers in Development (receiving a grade of

B+ and B-, respectively, in that category), it is hoped that their numbers will improve in the coming seasons.

By APAMC's count, FOX had only 6 Asian American regulars in 2016-17. This is FOX's lowest number for Actors since 2008. FOX's numbers in all categories were incomplete because, unlike the other networks and contrary to the terms of the MOU it signed in 2000, FOX has not yet provided the MEMC with data measuring their progress toward diversity goals. As a result, FOX gets a solid "Incomplete" grade across the board. (In 2012, FOX also received "Incomplete" grades for failing to provide diversity data to the Coalition.) FOX has new staff responsible for its diversity initiatives and has promised APAMC that the network will act expeditiously to come into compliance with its obligations under its MOU.

Overall, other than FOX, the networks have improved their numbers in the past few years in most of the categories the Coalition measures--yet, there have been several missed opportunities for inclusion. For example, in CBS' HAWAII FIVE-O, a series set in a state in which monoracial or multi-racial AAPIs are the majority of the population and dominate the power structure of society, the Asian American characters are too often limited to secondary or incidental status. One likely reason for this is that there was only 1 Asian American writer and 1 Asian American director on the series in 2016-17. Moreover, despite once being featured as half of the four leads of the series, Daniel Dae Kim and Grace Park were released at the end of last season. Other missed opportunities include no Asian American regulars in series set in heavily AAPI Los Angeles (NCIS: LOS ANGELES) and only one in the medical drama CODE BLACK. And last season, CBS introduced 6 new shows, each starring a white male.

In 2016-17, NBC commendably had three shows that included 2 Asian American regulars each: THE GOOD PLACE, SUPERSTORE and POWERLESS. One of the Asian Americans on SUPERSTORE was featured in a moving episode about his status as a DACA immigrant. And POWERLESS star Vanessa Hudgens proudly revealed that her character was half-Filipino; sadly, that series was cancelled. NBC also continues to struggle with including AAPIs on its many Dick Wolf-led series--Brian Tee in CHICAGO MED is the only Asian American regular out of dozens of roles available on the 6 Wolf-led shows and 3 Asian American writers on his shows lost their jobs this past season. A number of AAPI celebrities made one-time appearances in NBC reality shows last season but only 1 (Apolo Anton Ohno) was part of the main cast, as co-host of SPARTAN 2. And another year went by with no Asian American cast members on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE, depriving the writers of rich comedy material from such newsworthy events as Asian political leaders meeting with President Trump and Dr. David Dao being dragged off an airplane.

As we look to the future, we continue to advocate for roles in which AAPIs are the stars or at least leading characters in shows, as opposed to sidekick roles or appearances as just one of many in an ensemble of characters. As the recent study by Dr. Nancy Wang Yuen, et al. revealed, when we are included, AAPIs are generally relegated to supporting and marginalized portrayals on television. See <<http://www.aapisontv.com/>>. The Coalition continues to challenge all four networks to feature Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders as the stars of our own series so that more viewers can learn through storylines that Asian Americans are regular people with relatable lives, loves, hopes, fears, and dreams as other Americans. Until that happens on a regular basis, AAPIs will continue to be perceived as perpetual foreigners and hindered in our ability to become full participants in American life.

Observations of the 2017-18 Season: Some highlights and many missed opportunities.

ABC: We were disappointed that ABC cancelled DR. KEN with the loss of 5 Asian American regulars who routinely were depicted as characters with relatable lives, struggles, and romantic relationships. Despite this loss, this season, ABC will feature a new record high of 24 AAPI regulars. As much as ABC is setting the pace in the Actors category, highlighted by the pioneering comedy FRESH OFF THE BOAT, there are some glaring omissions. The new series THE GOOD DOCTOR, executive produced by Daniel Dae Kim and adapted from a South Korean drama, has only one Asian American regular (Tamlyn Tomita playing a hospital administrator). This is despite the fact that the show is set in San Jose (32% API population) and 1 of every 6 doctors is Asian American. Shonda Rhimes' shows rarely feature Asian Americans and the new series FOR THE PEOPLE is no exception: 8 regulars, lawyers in New York City (15% API), but no AAPI cast members. DECEPTION, co-created by illusionist David Kwong, stars a white male as an illusionist--another lost opportunity for an Asian American lead.

CBS: To try to address the loss of 3 Asian American regulars during the past two seasons of HAWAII FIVE-O, the producers and CBS elevated three AAPI recurring actors (Taylor Wily, Dennis Chun and Kimee Balmilero) to regulars for 2017-18 but they barely get any screen time. Three other AAPI actors (Meghan Rath, Beulah Koale and Ian Anthony Dale) also have been added as regulars but it remains to be seen whether they will emerge with true leading roles in the series in the new season. The APAMC hopes that CBS will take advantage of the commendable fact that with Samoan actors Beulah Koale and Taylor Wily in the cast, the show has the opportunity to tell stories about Pacific Islanders who are otherwise unrepresented in mainstream entertainment. CBS' new series ME, MYSELF AND I set in Los Angeles has no AAPI regulars, and WISDOM OF THE CROWD has only one, even though Asian Americans are the dominant racial group in the show's Silicon Valley setting. On the other hand, the Coalition is glad that CBS cancelled TWO BROKE GIRLS and its stereotypical Han character, and AAPIs are well represented in the latest group selected for the CBS Writers' Mentoring Program. Also, although the Report Cards generally evaluate only the broadcast network, we applaud CBS' casting of Michelle Yeoh as a Captain in the new STAR TREK series that premiered on the network before moving to CBS' new digital platform.

NBC: NBC will feature 3 Asian American regulars on the mid-season series CHAMPIONS executive produced by Mindy Kaling--an alumna of one of NBC's diversity pipeline programs--who got her start on THE OFFICE before creating and starring in THE MINDY PROJECT, produced by Universal Television. The Coalition is also looking forward to the Spring premiere of the new series RISE featuring MOANA's Auil'i Cravahlo as a high school drama student. The number of AAPIs in Unscripted shows (especially THE VOICE, THE WALL and AMERICA'S GOT TALENT), as Writers/Producers and as Directors all could use a boost in the new season. On the bright side, NBC has partnered with Asian American theatre organization EAST WEST PLAYERS in a sketch comedy workshop to create a bigger pool of AAPI talent suitable for consideration at SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE and late night shows. And there are a number of potentially groundbreaking new shows in development for possible pick up at the network, including a Sunil Nayar drama about a Sikh female law student and a drama by showrunner Albert Kim (SLEEPY HOLLOW, NIKITA) based on a South Korean/Korean American family inspired by the real life scandals engulfing Korean conglomerates such as the Samsung Group.

FOX: Although John Cho and Li Jun Li joined the cast of THE EXORCIST, most of the series that included AAPI regulars from last season were cancelled (SLEEPY HOLLOW, BONES, NEW GIRL). Based on our own research, it does not appear that new scripted series featuring Asian Americans took their place, although Hannah Simone in KICKING AND SCREAMING and

Kal Penn in SUPERHUMAN hosted unscripted series this season. Although FOX has now committed to provide APAMC with data on both last season and this season, at this point we do not know how many AAPIs were given recurring roles in scripted series or are contestants/participants in unscripted shows this season; nor do we have information on the number of Asian American writers/producers or directors there were last season or are likely to be employed this season. We look forward to Fox getting back on track in working with the Coalition to discuss their data and how we can advance our mutual diversity goals.