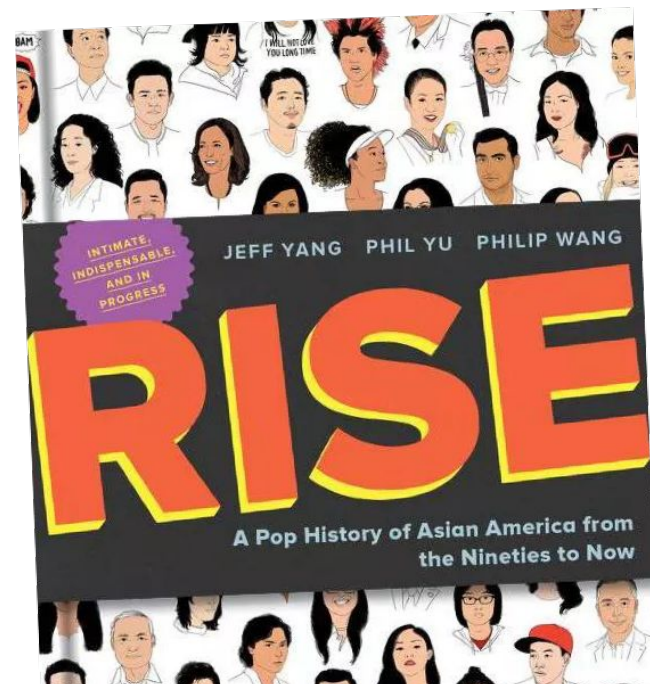


**Asian America is both the storytellers we are, and the collective story we tell.**

***As a journalist, author and documentarian, I've been focused on making sure that Asian American stories are preserved, remembered and celebrated as an integral part of the fabric of our culture.***



**Rise: A Pop History of Asian America, From the '90s to Now**  
*was written in the pandemic*  
*and published in 2022.*



*In its 496 pages*  
*we explore....*

# The Ascent of AAPI

## Oriental

The word "oriental" has been used as a collective term to refer to things and people from the "East" since the Roman empire, though at the time it referred to territories that ended in what is now Syria. As Europeans traveled farther east, the boundaries of the "Orient" were pushed outward as well, shifting from the Middle East to the countries of East, South, and Southeast Asia. The murky boundaries of the term and its roots in a long history of conquest, colonialism, exploitation, and abuse led to its falling out of use as a classification for people (though it's still used for objects, such as rugs and perfumes). In 2016, New York representative Grace Meng successfully led the passage of H.R. 4238, a bill that finally struck the terms "Oriental" and "Negro" from federal lawbooks, replacing them with Asian American and African American.

## Asian American

When first coined in 1968, Asian American was hyphenated, both as a noun and as an adjective. The hyphen eventually became seen as a symbol of subordinated identity, as nativists began using the term "hyphenated American" as an anti-immigrant insult. As a result, Black and Asian groups began pressuring to end the use of hyphens, noting that removing it turned "African American" and "Asian American" into phrases where both words stand alone. But it wasn't until 2019 that the Associated Press, a major arbiter of journalistic style, finally stopped hyphenating.

## Asian Pacific American

In the 1980s, the term "Asian Pacific American" (APA) began to be used as an inclusive term for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islander Americans. However, the term has been criticized for obscuring the very different histories and challenges faced by the two groups, and for concerns that Pacific Islanders were frequently included in name (and acronym) only.

## Asian/Pacific Islander American (A/PIA)

In the 1990s, "Asian/Pacific Islander American" (A/PIA)\* grew in usage. The slash was intended to preserve Asian and Pacific Islanders as distinct groups, but it eventually gave way to APA, where the P was just a

## Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI)

By the 2000s, Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) became the most commonly used term, reflecting how, in the 2000 U.S. Census, "Asian" and "Pacific Islander" were once again divided into two separate racial categories. The "and" was intended to make the distinct and equal statuses of both Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in this grouping clearer than the use of the slash, which was often dropped.

*The evolution of our identity*

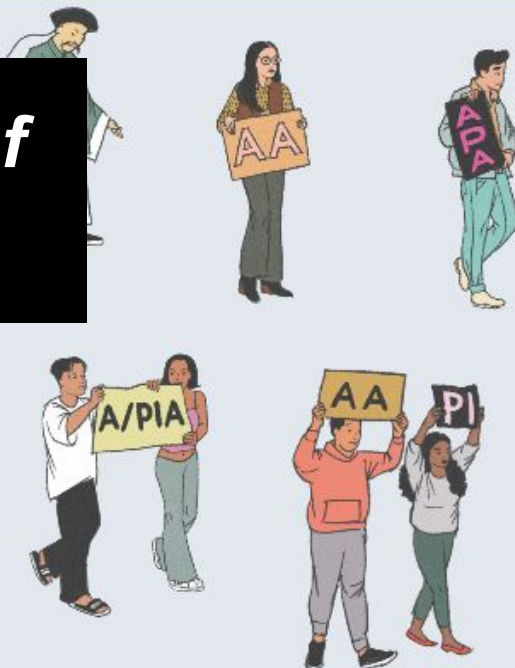
**WHO ARE WE GENERALLY TALKING ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT ASIAN AMERICANS TODAY?** The U.S. Census Bureau officially tracks and reports on the following 21 Asian American ethnic groups:

Bangladeshi  
Bhutanese  
Burmese  
Cambodian  
Chinese  
Filipino

Hmong  
Indian  
Indonesian  
Japanese  
Korean  
Lao

Malaysian  
Mongolian  
Nepali  
Okinawan  
Pakistani  
Sri Lankan

Taiwanese  
Thai  
Vietnamese



WHEN INCLUSION CAN TURN INTO ERASURE:

## THE PACIFIC ISLANDER STORY ISN'T THE ASIAN AMERICAN STORY

BY JES VU AND JEFF YANG

IT'S ALMOST A reflexive thing these days for people to use the term "Asian American and Pacific Islander"—or AAPI, for short—to refer to an expansive definition of our community, which includes not just those of Asian descent, but people hailing from the island nations of Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia. It's done with good intentions, as an attempt to create coalitions and build bridges between cultures that have undoubtedly intersected, cross-pollinated, and influenced one another over centuries. But for many Pacific Islanders, the notion of a hybrid "Asian/Pacific Islander" community overlooks the very different histories of the two groups. In many cases colonization, exploitation, and displacement of Pacific Islanders have resulted in equally different present statuses. We brought together a group of voices—**DIONNE FONOTI** of the National University of Samoa, filmmaker and professor at Oregon State University's **PATRICIA FIFITA**, and **KEITH CAMACHO** of the University of Oregon's Studies Department—to discuss the complicated and even problematic nature of the reflexive inclusion of Pacific Islanders into the "AAPI" coalition.

### Don't Worry, Be AAPI?

**PATRICIA:** The Asian American ethnic category really evolved out of organizing in the 1960s seeking appropriate representations of unique histories, experiences, and identities in culture, politics, and academic curricula. But after that, for reasons of "inclusion," government entities like the U.S. Census decided to put Pacific Islanders under that umbrella.

**DIONNE:** The government lumps people together and has been doing it forever. You can draw links to how the government lumped together all Native Americans, and how even in tenuous ways this links to issues Native American tribes face today in getting recognition. These were the sorts of games the govern-

ment has played in history.

**KEITH:** But those go beyond sports, and cultural classifications which conflate Asians and Pacific Islanders.

**CONRAD:** By the time you get the Internet, "AAPI" is just flying around in the atmosphere as an acronym, despite it being coined without discussion by those of us impacted by it.

### Indigenous Versus Immigrant

**PATRICIA:** When I see announcements of, for example, Asian Pacific American Heritage Month—I feel like I have to prepare myself, because I know there isn't going to be an

appropriate inclusion of "PI" in these "AAPI" month celebrations. We're just going to be further marginalized. There are so many different instances where this plays out. It's political. And it's economic. When there's money involved, a need for resources, apportionment, whatever, these classifications matter.

**CONRAD:** If you go to an "Asian American and Pacific Islander" event, you're not going to see Samoans, you're not going to see Tongans, you're not going to see Māori. We're half of the acronym, but not even close to half the representation. The Indigenous story is

the immigrant story. That's the story that "we're a nation" is saying "f\*ck the

land in Hawaii, but we're not going to do that comes at the expense of the people. We can support the difference between

tistically, where we as Pacific Islanders are falls more in line with other Indigenous communities. If we were to be grouped with anyone, it would make sense to be grouped with them.

### Occupied Territories

**CONRAD:** I think what's often missing is the role of colonialism in Pacific Islander histories. While Asians are fighting for representation, you have to realize that part of the Indigenous struggle is fighting for our land. So that's why I don't identify as "Asian Pacific American" or feel connected to the idea of "AAPI." That language seems to apply only toward "positive" things like Jason Momoa and his accomplishments, or Disney's *Moana*. But there's no "AAPI" support when you're talking about the occupation of Mauna Kea or other Indigenous-specific issues or even how AAPI resources are distributed, because the fact is they'll likely go toward East Asians.

**KEITH:** It's not just about America, either. You have to think about the old and ongoing colonial cartography of the Asia-Pacific region. For example, West Papuans reside in Indonesia and are technically Indonesian nationals, but culturally and linguistically, West Papuans are closer to Indigenous Papuans and Pacific Island peoples. But the map just says they're "Indonesian."

### Pop Culture

**DIONNE:** If you're looking at popular media, say, something like cinema, there's no connection between Pacific Islanders and Asians. Our trajectories have been very independent of each other. You might see some weird

The challenges of representation

**PATRICIA:** It's also the case that there are stark differences between different Asian ethnic groups and different Pacific Islander groups. We don't all have the same identities, we don't all have the same language or forms of expression. When you push all of us together, you create layers and layers of confusion. And that has real consequences for how people look at health outcomes, educational attainment, and income. On that level alone, there needs to be a disaggregation, so the differences in groups can be tracked.

**CONRAD:** The fact is if you look at things sta-

# Asian American Atlas

Asian America is a community, a shared history of people, ideas, celebration, and struggle. It's also a place. It occupies meaningful physical space, from the shores where the first migrants stepped foot before it was called "America," to the Detroit street where an act of hate ignited a cry for justice, to the Manhattan sports arena that gave birth to basketball's greatest underdog story. This map highlights sites of significance—some that you can actually still visit—that declare we're here, we've been here, and this is where we're "really" from.

# *The places we call home*

**1 Morro Bay, California**  
The first Filipinos—or “Luzon Indios,” as they were known back then—on a Spanish galleon set foot on what is now the United States near Morro Bay, California, on October 18, 1587. That’s 33 years before Pilgrims from England arrived at Plymouth Rock.

**2 St. Malo, Louisiana**  
Sometime in the 1760s, Filipino sailors—then called “Manilamen”—disembarked from Spanish trade ships to establish a small fishing village, believed to be the first recorded Asian settlement in America. The site is commemorated with a historical marker in Saint Bernard.

***The experiences  
that define us***

## Life During Covid

**NORMALLY, OUR HOMES** have been a place of comfort, but for as much of 2020, home has been... everything. Sealed by the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us have had to spend day and night within our four walls, trying to make the most of the time we have, doing our best to stay connected to the world outside. But for many, the time spent at home has not been unaccompanied by stress, getting used to a degree of extreme claustrophobia, with some of our loved ones and extreme distance with others.

Outside, the world beyond our front door has transformed into a hostile place that resembles America, but feels more like the Twilight Zone. Streets are empty, and the sidewalks are empty. The buildings are empty. The buildings are empty, down shut, lights out. Who? Yes N95 is scarce and you can walk down the street, the few people you see trigger loneliness, but also fear. Are they wearing a mask? Are they coughing? Are they looking at you with contempt? You just want to go to buy some groceries for the week, and you are afraid to go to the store. You are afraid to go to the store. You are afraid, and one of the store walls will be full of signs of a hastily abandoned store.

GO BACK HOME from a vandal attack several nights before. You pick up the pace, as a white person with a mask pulled down under her chin whispers "CHINA VIRUS!" in your direction.

It's not being in close proximity to Asian. And we won't forget it anytime soon.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cook: cutting left by foot once in pile</li> <li>Basket full of cloth masks</li> <li>Beats "new" masks and N95s</li> <li>Box of latex gloves</li> <li>By the door, many pairs of shoes and slippers</li> <li>Women washing hands in scalding hot water with antiseptic soap</li> <li>Hand sanitizer</li> <li>Itch-wipe wipes</li> <li>Driving side with laptop, papers, files, cell chargers on trayboard</li> <li>Hand sanitizer</li> <li>Children's books, toys on floor</li> <li>Younger son watching <i>Chirpy TV</i> with grandma while older playing <i>Minecraft</i> on Switch</li> <li>Grandma is sewing a mask</li> <li>Children's books, toys on floor</li> <li>Hand sanitizer</li> <li>Clear sign on door "Welcome" to a lecture but clearly paying more attention to a second screen and playing a <i>Minecraft</i> game on laptop</li> <li>Children's books, toys on floor</li> <li>Top many toothbrushes and many bottles of different products due to geriatrics moving into new home</li> <li>Man in blue uniform on couch with relative's new, obviously sick, forehead and neck scanner</li> <li>Hand sanitizer and a small box containing a walking chair showing COVID-19 contagions.</li> <li>Top many mobile devices charged into power outlets</li> <li>Hand sanitizer</li> <li>Children's books, toys on floor</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hand sanitizer</li> <li>Kitchen</li> <li>Decorative walling of white Tibetan-style</li> <li>Grandpa brought through a refrigerator that's been completely packed, but has pork, corned beef, and beef in a stove</li> <li>Top caps and bowls of many meats, with varying levels of (old) lard</li> <li>Big sign on the stove steaming</li> <li>Plates of meats in priority for wife serving her mother, including chicken, beef, pork, lamb, and fish, seaweeds, cooks</li> <li>Plates of rice, the counter giant, onion, squash, eggplant, etc.</li> <li>A box of fruit, apples, bananas, canned fish, steamed dumplings</li> <li>Garlic packages of toilet paper in plastic bags</li> <li>Hand sanitizer</li> <li>Stair through window, backyard garden behind</li> <li>Hand sanitizer</li> <li>Mostly empty chairs</li> <li>A few businesses with signs indicating they've shut down</li> <li>Decorated masks on the ground</li> <li>A sign pointing to a local testing station</li> <li>An Asian medical person in scrubs walking by with a mask</li> <li>Unexcited white parents carrying Asian doctor for a... something</li> <li>Box passed by the maid, someone inside was coughing</li> <li>Jugglers singing "could be lost apart from one another"</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

# STUFF ASIANS LIKE

Jeff Yang  
and  
Shing Yin Khor

If you tried to define what it means to be Asian American, you'd probably begin with the things that make us different from those around us: the way we look, the food we eat, the cultural legacies we have from our ancestors. But spread out as they are across a vast spectrum of heritages and traditions, these are often things that also make Asians different from one another. When we think about the things we share in common, the reality is that many of them come from our mutual experience of exposure to Western culture, rooted in colonialism and the experiences of growing up in communities shaped by immigration. So here's a list of things shared with us when we asked our friends and networks for examples of non-Asian stuff that Asians like:



And the things  
we love



## NOT PICTURED:

Apple picking  
Bargains  
Bleached, brown, or ombre hair  
British last names as first names  
Buffets and salad bars  
Cartoon mascots  
Classical music  
Condensed milk  
Gruises  
Enormous suitcases

Exclusive public schools  
Extra credit  
Fighting for the check  
German cars  
Hawaii  
Hip-hop  
Ivy League schools  
Las Vegas, especially on holidays  
Logos  
Made in America anything

Matchmaking  
Multilevel Marketing  
New-agey women's names  
Photo booths  
Preppy style  
Ronald Reagan  
Small white dogs  
Synth pop and techno  
Taco Bell  
Taking pictures of food

Thanksgiving  
The UGs in general  
Throwing up peace signs  
Vancouver

# Why Vincent Chin Still Matters

BY PAULA YOO, ILLUSTRATED BY LOUIE CHIN

AS A 24-YEAR-OLD IN THE SUMMER OF 1993, FRESHLY GRADUATED FROM COLUMBIA JOURNALISM SCHOOL, I GOT AN OFFER FOR MY FIRST FULL-TIME REPORTING JOB, FROM THE DETROIT NEWS.



I WAS EXCITED TO MOVE TO DETROIT, NOT REALIZING HOW ALONE I'D FEEL IN A CITY THAT, AT THE TIME, WAS LESS THAN ONE PERCENT ASIAN.



YOUR ENGLISH IS SO GOOD!

WHAT IS SHE?

SHE'S AN ORIENTAL. DON'T POINT.

AS YOU MIGHT GUESS, I WAS ALSO ONE OF THE VERY FEW ASIAN AMERICANS AT MY PAPER, WHICH MEANT THAT I FELT PRESSURE TO WORK HARDER TO PROVE I WASN'T A "TOKEN."



I USED MY LUNCH HOURS TO RESEARCH OUR ARCHIVES FOR STORIES ABOUT PEOPLE WHO LOOKED LIKE ME, MOSTLY COMING UP EMPTY...

THE WEEK BEFORE HIS WEDDING, HE WAS OUT FOR A BACHELOR CELEBRATION & AN ALTERCATION WITH RONALD EBENS AND HIS STEPSON MICHAEL NITZ AT A CLUB. WITNESSES TESTIFIED THEY HEARD RACIST SLURS FROM THEIR DIRECTION, INCLUDING "IT'S BECAUSE OF YOU LITTLE M\*\*\*\*\*F\*\*\*\*\* THAT WE'RE O



THE MEN CHASED CHIN DOWN THE STREET, AND EBENS BEAT HIM WITH A BASEBALL BAT, ACCORDING TO ONE WITNESS. CHIN'S LAST WORDS AS HE SANK INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS, NEVER TO AWAKEN, WERE "IT'S NOT FAIR."

CHIN'S KILLING HAPPENED AT THE HEIGHT OF ANTI-JAPANESE SENTIMENT IN THE AMERICAN AUTO INDUSTRY, WHEN MANY FORD, GM, AND CHRYSLER AUTOWORKERS TOOK THEIR ANGER OVER MASS LAYOFFS OUT ON THE ASIAN COMPETITION.



ONE GROUP OF DETROITERS GOT ON THE NEWS FOR HOLDING A FUNDRAISER WHERE PEOPLE COULD TAKE A SLEDGEHAMMER TO A TOYOTA FOR A DOLLAR A SWING.

MEANWHILE, CHIN LAY IN A COMA FOR FOUR DAYS. HE DIED JUNE 23, 1982. ON JUNE 25, THE DAY AFTER HIS WEDDING SHOULD HAVE TAKEN PLACE, HIS FIANCÉE AND FAMILY ATTENDED HIS FUNERAL INSTEAD.



## We visualize our history

BOTH MEN PLEADED GUILTY TO MANSLAUGHTER. AT THEIR HEARING IN MARCH 1983, JUDGE CHARLES KAUFMAN ANNOUNCED THAT HE BELIEVED BOTH MEN WERE NOT "THE KIND OF PEOPLE YOU SEND TO PRISON" IN LIEU OF JAIL. HE GAVE THEM A FINE OF \$3,000 EACH AND THREE YEARS PROBATION.



YOU DON'T MAKE THE PUNISHMENT FIT THE CRIME. YOU MAKE THE PUNISHMENT FIT THE CRIMINAL.

THIS SHOCKINGLY LENIENT SENTENCE DEVASTATED CHIN'S MOTHER, LILY.



IT'S NOT FAIR!

IT ENRAGED TROIT'S ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY.

A GROUP OF ACTIVISTS LED BY HELEN ZIA, ROLAND HUANG, JAMES SHIMOURA, AND KIN YEE FORMED AMERICAN CITIZENS FOR JUSTICE TO BRING ATTENTION TO THE CRIME, GARNERING SUPPORT FROM ASIAN AMERICANS ACROSS THE COUNTRY, AND EVEN FROM LEADERS OF OTHER DIVERSE COMMUNITIES...



...SUCH AS REVEREND JESSE JACKSON, A CANDIDATE AT THE TIME FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION.

TO THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF CHIN. EBENS WAS 25 YEARS.

IN 2020, CHIN'S NAME RESURFACED IN THE NEWS, AS PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP USED RACIST LANGUAGE TO DESCRIBE COVID-19.



BETWEEN MARCH AND AUGUST 2020, MORE THAN 2,500 ASIAN AMERICANS REPORTED BEING ATTACKED BY PEOPLE BLAMING THEM FOR THE PANDEMIC, MOST WERENT OF CHINESE ORIGIN.

BUT EBENS DIDN'T SPEND A DAY IN JAIL; HIS CONVICTION WAS OVERTURNED IN 1986 DUE TO A LEGAL TECHNICALITY. CHIN WOULD NEVER RECEIVE THE JUSTICE HE DESERVED.



CHIN'S DEATH WAS A TRAGEDY, BUT IT GALVANIZED THE ASIAN AMERICAN MOVEMENT, AND SERVES AS A CONSTANT REMINDER THAT WE CAN'T BE COMPLACENT IN THE FACE OF INJUSTICE, WHETHER IT OCCURS TO US OR TO OTHERS.

AND AS FOR ME, MY YEARS OF LUNCHTIME RESEARCH FINALLY LED ME TO WRITE A NONFICTION BOOK FOR TEENS ABOUT CHIN AND HIS ROLE IN ASIAN AMERICAN HISTORY. AS DIFFICULT A STORY AS IT IS TO HEAR, IT'S ONE THAT WE NEED TO LEARN EARLY.

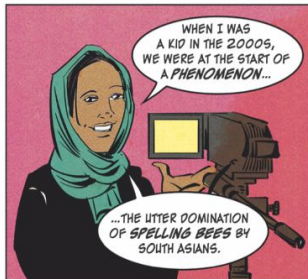


BECAUSE FOR SOME OF US, LIKE VINCENT CHIN, THEIR TWENTIES ARE TOO LATE.

Adapted from A WHISPER TO A RALLYING CRY: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial That Galvanized the Asian American Movement, published by Norton Young Readers (W. W. Norton & Co.) in April 2021.

## "Dis-Spelled"

BY HIBAH ANSARI, ILLUSTRATED BY KRISHNA SADASIVAM



MY FAMILY WOULD WATCH ON TV, BECAUSE IT WAS THE ONLY TIME YOU'D SEE OUR PEOPLE ON ESPN, AND OUR HOME TEAM, THE BROWNS, WOULD ALWAYS BE IN THE WINNER CIRCLE.



BUT IT PUT A LOT OF PRESSURE ON THE REST OF US KIDS. ESPECIALLY THOSE OF US WHO WASHED OUT OF THE SPELLING BEE WORLD EARLY.

SO I FIGURED I'D DO WELL, AND I DID! I GOT TO THE FINAL ROUND, WHERE IT WAS DOWN TO ME AND ONE OTHER KID.



IN 1999, NUPUR LALA WON THE SCRIPPS NATIONAL SPELLING BEE BY CORRECTLY SPELLING "LOGORRHEA."



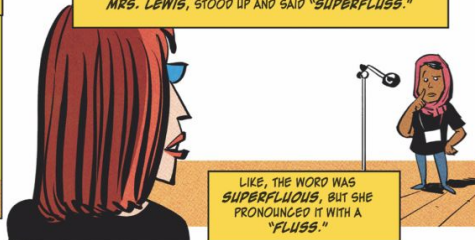
FROM THAT POINT ON, 17 OUT OF THE NEXT 20 NATIONAL BEES WOULD BE WON BY SOUTH ASIANS.

FOR ME, THAT HAPPENED SPELLING BEE AT OUR WITH THE NATIONAL BROADCAST OVER OUR BUT EVERYONE IN MY EL



AND BEING A NERDY KID IN GENERAL, I WAS ALWAYS REALLY SERIOUS ABOUT SPELLING.

BUT WHEN IT WAS MY TURN TO GET A WORD, THE JUDGE, MRS. LEWIS, STOOD UP AND SAID "SUPERFLUSS."



LIKE, THE WORD WAS SUPERFLUOUS, BUT SHE PRONOUNCED IT WITH A "FLUSS."

I'D NEVER HEARD THE WORD BEFORE, SO I JUST SPelled IT LIKE IT SOUNDED.



SUPERFLUSS. SUPERFLUSS.

AND OF COURSE, I WAS WRONG. IN FRONT OF MY WHOLE SCHOOL -- ME, THE BROWN KID, I GOT THE WORD WRONG.



AT FIRST I WAS JUST LIKE, THE SYSTEM IS FLAWED IF TWO OF THE ONLY BROWN KIDS THAT HAVE GONE THROUGH THE DISTRICT LOSE THE BEE ON THE SAME WORD.



BUT THEN I WONDERED: DID MRS. LEWIS HAVE A VENDETTA AGAINST US ANSARI KIDS? OR...MAYBE IT WAS A WEIRD TEST OR SOMETHING?



AND MY OLDEST BROTHER SAID, REALLY? I HAD HER AS A JUDGE TOO WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE, AND I LOST ON THE SAME WORD -- BECAUSE OF HOW SHE PRONOUNCED IT.

# Bring our present to life

## BY JEFF YANG

***Explore images  
that shaped us***

BEFORE —

RISER



ROSALIND ZHAO



LAUREN TOM

## The Joy Luck Club Remembered

BY PHIL YU

WHEN **CRAZY RICH ASIANS** was released to wide release in 2018, it seemed as though journalists were all legally obligated to note that it was the first major Hollywood studio film with an Asian lead in a full quarter-century—that is, since 1993's *The Joy Luck Club*. The fact not only serves to highlight the infrequency of representing Asian Americans in feature films, it also speaks to *The Joy Luck Club*'s long status as arguably the most influential Asian American film of the last three decades.



TAMILYN TOMITA



MING NA WEN

*And celebrate  
our narratives*

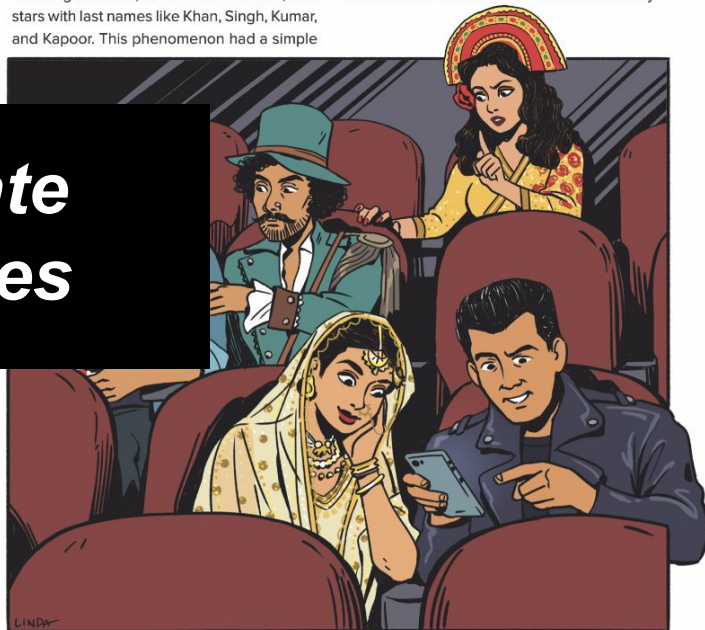
## Bollywood Saved Us

How Indian Cinema Blurred Boundaries,  
Bridged Generations, and Brought Together a Diaspora

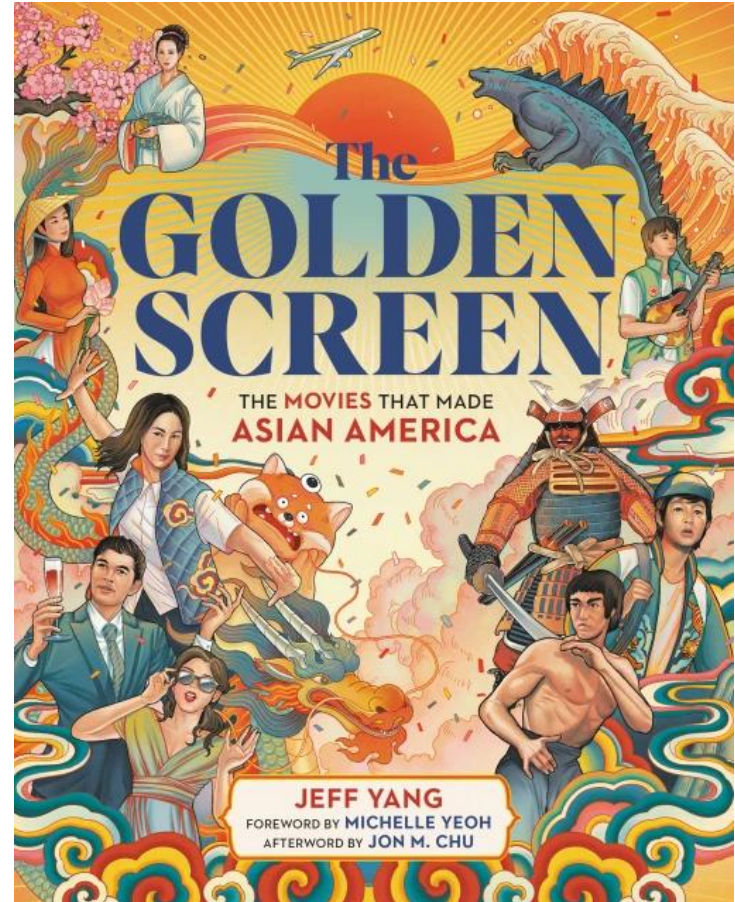
BY JEFF YANG, ILLUSTRATED BY LINDA CHUNG

**BACK IN THE** Nineties and 2000s, movie industry pundits noticed an odd pattern. Every couple of weeks, a movie might pop into the top ranks of weekend box-office earners and then disappear—and the films would have non-English titles, unfamiliar directors, and stars with last names like Khan, Singh, Kumar, and Kapoor. This phenomenon had a simple

explanation: There was a circuit of small theater venues in cities with large South Asian populations that would host single-weekend showings of recent Bollywood releases, to completely packed houses—drawing audiences from dozens of miles around. Hotly



***Last year, I wrote another book, focusing on how cinema has shaped our Asian American reality — The Golden Screen: The Movies That Made Asian America***





***Why cinema?  
Because it's  
immersive,  
interactive, larger  
than life — and  
because it was for  
so many of us the  
first time we saw  
our own reflections  
on screen***

**S**ure, I can write about how the original *Godzilla* brilliantly wove political themes related to the atomic bomb into a familiar sci-fi monster genre. But if I'm being honest, what made the film significant to me was simply seeing the most badass kaiju ever shooting fire out of its mouth and destroying everything in its path. We'd had "giant monster" movies before—*King Kong* set a high bar for that in 1933—but *Godzilla* took things to another level. Not just because of its social commentary, not just because of the innovative creature design that suggested something both prehistorically primal and futuristically sleek, but because it was a cool monster flick that featured people who looked like me. In a time when it was almost impossible to find interesting Asian heroes, villains, or monsters, *Godzilla* was all three.

—PHILIP W. CHUNG ON *GODZILLA*

against *Godzilla* and is delivered by ship. On the ocean floor, Serizawa unleashes the machine and then cuts off his own relief line, ensuring both he and *Godzilla* will die in the one and only test of his invention. The threat of the monster lizard is over—but, Yamane warns, if humanity continues to use nuclear weapons, the future may see another *Godzilla* rise.

Over the course of the film, the radioactive reptile is unquestionably used as a metaphor for the atomic bomb, lending a sharp poignance and immediate relevance to what would otherwise be hokey science fiction (less than a decade after the US dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki). But the version that crashed into US theaters in 1956, *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!*, was different. The American version featured twenty-one minutes of entirely new footage, used to clumsily insert actor Raymond Burr, playing reporter Steve Martin, into various scenes to serve as a narrator and proxy POV for white Western audiences. It also removed all mention of radioactivity, the atomic bomb, and nuclear energy from the narrative, putting the onus for the rise of *Godzilla* on nature rather than people, and purposely omitting any suggestion that the US was in any way to blame.

*King of the Monsters* earned \$2 million at the US box office in its 1956 release, making it the first Japanese film to be a commercial hit in the United States, and opened the door to toys, video games, animated TV series, and multiple Hollywood remakes.

*Godzilla* is here to stay, even if his real message, about the dangers of unfettered technology and the need to unite in peace with other humans around the world, has been shunted to the side.

## Breakfast at Tiffany's

1961, NOT RATED, 115 MINUTES, PARADE

DIR

STARRING

Peppard, Paul  
Balsam, José  
Dorothy Whit-  
Alan Reed, N

WR

BASED ON THE NOVELLA BY  
TRUMAN CAPOTE

# From false and twisted



Mickey Rooney

A handful of classic films can produce polarizing reactions and leave audiences torn between their cinematic importance and the reality of outright offensive depictions and content: *Gone with the Wind* (1939) is one, beloved but harshly criticized for its rose-tinted depiction of slavery and cartoonishly

drawn Black characters. *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is another—a huge box office success that scored five Academy Award nominations, winning two.

*Breakfast* is frequently cited as an all-time favorite film, in large part due to the indelible performance of the great Audrey Hepburn as

orical Society presented a film series called "Capote on Screen." I to help introduce each of the four films in the series. But I was also jld kick off the first night, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. I obviously couldn't Yunioshi, one of the most offensive depictions of an Asian American of racist depictions of Asian Americans. Was I supposed to scold white movie? Should I have said, "I really wish these Yunioshi scenes weren't in ght in historical context about Yellow Peril, and reminded the audience nt had occurred just a decade and a half before *Breakfast at Tiffany's* about the history of yellowface and blackface. I tried my best to frame the film as something to be learned from, as well as a historic artifact that reflected our changing awareness and values as Americans. I said, "I think we know better now, or at least, many of us want to do better, and I think we can."

—KRISTEN MEINZER ON *BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S*

drunk while explaining that the reason she behaves as she does is that her boyfriend has left her, and Gyeon-woo has no choice but to bring her back to the same hotel again. But now that the ice has broken between them, the girl pops up regularly, pulling pranks on him (like dragging him out of his college while announcing that she's pregnant with his child), beating him when she's in a frustrated mood, and teasing him when she's feeling playful.

But every time you think you've pinned down their relationship, *My Sassy Girl* pulls you in a new direction, like its female lead does to Gyeon-wan. There are long gaps when the two don't interact at all, and any number of accidental, absurdly coincidental reunions. The twist ending of the film seems both confounding and entirely reasonable given the bizarre physics of the romantic world in which these two live. But it's an enormous credit to the two stars who occupy so much of the movie's screen time that you're never bored, and always willing to suspend disbelief, just to see what will happen next.

The sheer power of Jun Ji-hyun and Cha Tae-hyun's stardom can be seen in the fact that, despite never being released in the US, *My Sassy Girl*'s popularity throughout Asia led to it being remade in Hollywood with an all-white cast, led by Elisha Cuthbert as "the girl." Without its Korean leads, the remake fell painfully short of the original, both critically and commercially, totally missing both the whimsy and the heartfelt sincerity that made the original such a delight.

## Saving Face

2004, R, 91 MINUTES, SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT, USA

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Alice Wu

STARRING: Michelle Krusiec, Lynn Chen, Joan Chen, Jin Wang, Guang Lan Koh, Jessica Hecht, Ato Essandoh, Wang Luoyong, David Shih, Brian Yang, Nathaniel Geng, Mao Zhao

It's not going too far out on a limb to say that, for decades, *Saving Face* was the closest thing to a perfect romantic comedy that Asian American cinema had to offer—a heartfelt, nuanced, clever, and funny take at looking for love in all the wrong places and finding it right in front of you. But *Saving Face* was also the most sharply drawn comedy of Chinatown intergenerational manners since 1989's *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, and the most satisfying queer Asian American relationship story since 1993's *The Wedding Banquet*, all of which can be said to go see it.

Dr. Wilhelmina friends as Wil, is a

to complex and nuanced

I saw *Saving Face* right when it came out, before I graduated high school. It was a special it was, and after almost twenty years, I continue to rewatch it because the stakes of striking out from your own tight-knit immigrant community and finding the intense joy of finding out who around you will continue to love you as you truly are. The title still tickles me, as there's no direct Chinese translation because typically in Chinese we only speak of not wanting to "lose face" or hoping to be "given face" by others. Basically, the title is even more Chinese American than most people realize, and it's just perfect for a bona fide Chinese American classic.

—FRANKIE HUANG ON *SAVING FACE*



Michelle Krusiec and Lynn Chen

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Hwei-lang  
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The presence of her pregnant mother makes it even more complicated for Wil to pursue her relationship with Vivian, but they manage to make it work, with Wil attending one of Vivian's dance performances and learning afterward that the two were friends as young children—and that Vivian had kissed Wil after she defended her from bullies. The two revisit that moment in the present, kissing each other after returning to Vivian's apartment. But as they date, Wil remains unwilling to kiss Vivian in front of others, especially her mother. (Wil later learns that her mother knows she's a lesbian but has refused to accept it, hoping it's just a phase.)

Meanwhile, Wil has pushed Hwei-lang to go on dates of her own, and Hwei-lang considers accepting a marriage proposal from Stimson Cho (Geng), a

of a shock, she comes home to find her grandfather in a rage, threatening to turn her mother out onto the street after Hwei-lang reveals that she's pregnant and refuses to reveal the name of the father. With nowhere else to go, Hwei-lang moves in with Wil.

importantly, it provides her with a unique way of earning money to buy her squad 4\**Town* concert tickets, by turning herself into a pay-per-fur sideshow for her fellow students.

Of course, she can't risk going panda at the concert, so she agrees to undergo a special ritual that Ming and her other female relatives have all undergone, which seals their Red Panda spirits in a special talisman. But right before the ritual begins, Mei's father, Jin (Lee), shows her the video she took of herself in panda form, dancing with her friends, and tells her she shouldn't be ashamed of her panda. He also shares that Ming had the biggest, most ornery panda ever, one the ritual could barely even control. Mei ultimately decides to keep her panda and flees the ritual to the Skydome to join her friends. Ming is so enraged about Mei leaving that her talisman bursts, releasing her panda form . . . an out-of-control monster the size of a skyscraper. Ming and Mei battle at the Skydome until the other women in their family arrive and try to restrain Mei in their panda forms. When Mei accidentally knocks Ming unconscious, the women quickly perform the ritual to seal Ming's panda, as well as their own, with the help of 4Town's spontaneous singing. Mei decides once more to stick with her panda self, and Ming ultimately accepts Mei's decision. Fortunately, Mei's panda form proves just as popular with patrons of the small family-operated temple as it was with her classmates, ensuring a constant flow of donations, which are needed to pay off the destruction from the panda rampage.

*Turning Red* is nonstop fun, and a breakthrough film for Disney Pixar—a feature set in the present day, in the real world, featuring a cast of characters that is nearly all Asian, across a distinctive and diverse spectrum: Mei's friend group, which includes a Chinese American, a Korean American, and an Indian American; her bully, Tyler; even three of the five 4\**Town* boys—Tae Young (Grayson Villanueva) and both Aaron T. (Tophér Ngo) and Aaron Z. (Josh Levi)—appear to be of Asian or multiracial Asian heritage. Few movies have done a better job of demonstrating how empowering it can be to see a world where being Asian isn't odd or exotic, but just . . . normal.

# Everything Everywhere All at Once

2022, R, 139 MINUTES, A24, USA

**DIRECTORS/WRITERS:** Daniel Kwan,  
Daniel Scheinert

**STARRING:** Michelle Yeoh, Stephanie Hsu, Ke Huy Quan, Jenny Slate, Harry Shum Jr., James Hong, Jamie Lee Curtis, Tallie Medel

The sophomore feature effort of the Daniels (the directorial duo of Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert) is almost as impossible to describe as it is to resist. It draws from the same surreal black humor as their debut, 2016's *Swiss Army Man*, about a suicidal man's unusual friendship with a slightly reanimated corpse, but it's more of a spiritual successor to the Daniels' breakout 2013 comedy, *Key & Peele*. "It's like, 'What.' In the way that you're reacting to the world, you might say that the floors of his apartment are built around the absurdity (though the sequence in which he's fueled by the use of the device), but it does feel like the protagonist breaking through barriers, intersecting with strange new worlds."

Evelyn Wang (Yeoh) is an immigrant Chinese American woman trying to simultaneously manage a failing laundromat and hold together a fragmented



Michelle Yeoh

***to bold, fresh  
and breathtaking***

ot about my parents' regrets. As kids, my sister and I would listen  
 they lived before we were born: the cities they moved to and  
 ey could have had, the trips they wished they took. In our two-story  
 the versions of themselves they dreamt about were a faraway  
 on "what could have been" were echoes of generational trauma  
 migration stories were also filled with "what ifs." I catch myself  
 same lines: about the cities I should've stayed in, the jobs I should  
 nities I won't ever get back. But I don't want to live in regrets hid-  
 vation generations after me to do that either. We all make choices in  
 spend our time with, what to do to fill the hours in the day. Through  
 stand the significance of choosing to be deeply and wholly present in  
 love and the people who love me, even when it isn't always easy.

—TRACI LEE ON EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE



***Reimagining  
films that didn't  
center us***



**“When we bond, we flow together.”**

A Talk with **Daniel Kwan** and **Diane Paragas**

For decades, nearly every studio movie featuring an Asian main character featured a cross-cultural couple or transnational team-up, in part because this was Hollywood's go-to way of minimizing risk by maximizing potential audiences. But in the process, these films have created indelible pairings and exposed unexpected truths about how people of different backgrounds can find unlikely common ground. In this Q&A, filmmakers Daniel Kwan (with Daniel Scheinert, codirector of *Everything Everywhere All at Once*) and Diane Paragas (*Yellow Rose*) share their thoughts on what it's like to tell stories that cut across racial and ethnic boundaries.

It feels like the game has changed for Asian Americans, in terms of the kinds of stories we're "allowed" to tell on-screen.

**DANIEL KWAN:** We are obviously standing on the shoulders of giants who blew open doors—the most recent one being *Crazy Rich Asians*, which not only inspired Ke Huy Quan to come back to acting, but which also made our film viable in the marketplace. *Crazy Rich Asians* blew open the door for us. Our movie, *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, just kind of snuck in afterward to represent the Weird Asians. It was suddenly possible for us to put stranger, alternative layers of what an Asian can be on-screen.

**DIANE PARAGAS:** I started pitching the story for *Yellow Rose* a decade and a half ago, telling people I wanted to create this story about an undocumented Asian woman immigrant who dreams of singing country-western music. And people just looked at me blankly and said, "What are you talking about?" Everyone tells you to "write what you know," and I did, and then everyone said no. So, I put it aside for a long time and focused on directing more commercial projects. But then I saw Mira Nair talking at the Toronto International Film Festival, and she was saying how when she stopped making films about South Asians, those movies just stopped getting made. That made me feel an obligation to go back and do this film. This time I went to the Filipino community and ended up financing the entire film 100 percent through Filipino money. It was such a different experience.

Feeling free to be yourself—even the weirdest version of yourself—is such a liberating thing.

**DANIEL:** Filmmaking saved my life. For the longest time, I felt like Evelyn—that this is the worst version of me. I was the worst Boy Scout. I was the worst soccer player on my team, which was the worst soccer team in town. It was my mom who told me I should go into filmmaking. She saw I was a really good storyteller and eventually she told me, "Maybe you should make movies." Later I found out a friend of a friend of hers, who was a Christian soothsayer, had come up to her and said, "You are going to become a very famous filmmaker." I was like, "I'm not going to spread the word that I'm a Christian, but it's not too late! My name is Daniel." **Sp**

**DIANE:** Well, for me, I was never really afraid to be "white." I was always getting attention! Sony Pictures was the first studio we'd made. That was the only thing changing. I started to get attached to different all-white casts. But on my own thumb, you know? It's just me and eight other people in this room, and I'm like, "So here's what I want to see as an Asian woman."

Being Asian American has historically been an obstacle for creatives—in the sense that it's put us in a box, or forced us to choose between our identity or our art.

## “Immigrant parents know how to adapt.”

A Talk with **Nisha Ganatra** and **Kal Penn**

It's often said that the family is the basic unit of Asian community—the indivisible atom of our cultures. Is that why families are at the center of so many of our cinematic works, or is it simply that storytelling is such an effective form of therapy for creators seeking to unpack, reflect on, and resolve their inherited traumas and childhood domestic dramas? In this Q&A, filmmaker Nisha Ganatra (*Late Night, Chutney Popcorn*) and actor Kal Penn (*The Namesake, Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*) share their thoughts about the complications, contradictions, and limitations of Asian American family stories, the ways that they bridge generations and cultures, and how—like families themselves—they ultimately push creators to leave the nest and foray beyond.

**What is it about family stories that make them so alluring for Asian American filmmakers?**

maybe immigrant family stories are the more palatable or profitable narratives right now.

**Is there a particular challenge in telling stories about something as intimate as family?**

**NISHA GANATRATRA:** My first film, *Chutney Popcorn*, which I've been told some people call the "first Indian American narrative feature," was about a lesbian woman who offers to be a surrogate for her sister who can't have a baby, and the chaos and comedy that ensues from that. It's both an Indian American family comedy and a gay romantic comedy, which makes it part of a small but wonderful subgenre. I'm thinking of some amazing movies like *Monsoon Wedding* and *Band Baan Baan Banquet*. My theory is that we're going to tell these family stories about being LGBTQ, because, as an immigrant, I wanted our immigrant parents to see why not just skip ahead and publicly talk about it and deal with it and move on; what do we

...is just give off a feeling  
...perspective, it might  
...that happen at the studio  
...now if we've seen more  
...because they fit into  
...that others don't. We  
...have so much talent within this community, and it's  
...not like we're a one-note group of people with just  
...one particular type of story. But one of the things  
...we always push up against is this notion of Asian  
...Americans being perpetual foreigners, right? So

**NISHAI:** Well, yes, because you're mining from your personal experience, and you never know when you'll accidentally hit a nerve. When I was writing *Chutney Popcorn*, I interrogated my aunt about what pregnancy felt like and how it changed her world, because I had no idea what it was like. I was constantly interviewing them about it, and fortunately, they didn't raise an eyebrow. I didn't tell them about the gay stuff. As a result, my dad first found out I was gay when he attended the film's premiere at the Los Angeles Independent Film Festival. I never had the chance to warn him, and I was sitting there in my seat thinking, "Wait . . . is this how I'm coming out to my father?" To his credit, he was totally cool with it. His biggest criticism was that there was no dad in the film. "My story's not in there at all," he complained. So, my next film, *Cosmopolitan*, was inspired by him and his story, and his response after he saw it was, "I guess the lesson is to be careful what you wish for."

**KAL:** I need to begin with a bit of a tangent. I know you talked to [John] Cho—I'm not sure if he told you how I ended up being in *The Namesake*, but it happened like this: He and I are both avid readers, and I think this was when we were making the second *Harold and Kumar*. Out of the blue he asked me,

***Speaking to  
iconic artists  
and creators***

**F**a Mulan saved China with a lucky cricket, a dragon spirit, and a hard-ass training regimen from a hunky warrior, but along the way she dealt with imposter syndrome and parental pressure and trying to balance professional and personal fulfillment. That's a distinctly Asian American deal, and frankly, a distinctly "me" deal. So when her dad tells her at the end, "The greatest gift and honor is having you for a daughter," it's such an emotional release that I cry just thinking about it. Generational therapy for the price of a movie ticket: Thank you, Disney. You brought catharsis to us all.

—CYNTHIA WANG ON *MULAN*

**D**ecades before any marvelous Asians suited up for cinematic universes, we actually had our very own superhero: Bruce Lee, a one-man revolution who single-handedly and shirtlessly changed the game for martial arts, Asian masculinity, and international underdogs on the silver screen. The first time I saw Bruce Lee—as a kid—I felt an aggressive collision of emotions: absolute awe that such a person could exist; annoyance that no one had yet bothered to tell me about him; and disappointment to learn that he was, in fact, no longer alive. Released just weeks after his sudden death in 1973, *Enter the Dragon* inadvertently became both Bruce's magnum opus and swan song. The plot? Who cares. Okay, the plot: There's an island. Bruce kicks everyone's ass. And looks unbelievably cool while doing it. The end. In the history of action flicks, there are only two eras: Before and After Bruce.

—PHIL YU ON *ENTER THE DRAGON*

***While keeping  
the focus  
squarely on the  
audience***

**I**'m a sucker for slow-burn romances, intelligent conversations, and trenchant social commentary. As someone who has probably seen every film and TV adaptation of Jane Austen's novels, I was delighted by *Fire Island*. It was refreshing to see a friendship between two queer Asian men front and center. Adaptations can be fraught, but *Fire Island* kept to the spirit of Austen while imbuing it with a ton of Asian hotness, desire, joy, and love. And Margaret Cho!!

—ALICE WONG ON *FIRE ISLAND*

**I**t was our third date—I, a Bangladeshi Angeleno obsessed with rom-coms, and he, a Black Muslim convert obsessed with kung fu. We had met organizing a Muslim poetry night and we were tentatively feeling each other out in an awkward cultural exchange. Would I enjoy the bean pie he made for me? Would he enjoy this Muslim punk band I was into? For this date, we decided *Mississippi Masala* was the perfect movie-watching compromise—romance, politics, economic struggles, coming-of-age trope. I was the Sarita to his Denzel. At the time, movies would always have the Desi girls fall for the white boy as a rebellion to parents, or Desi girls would fall for the Desi boy version of Holden Caulfield. It's silly to say that watching *Mississippi Masala* like that together on that date night helped us imagine a possibility where we could exist, but it kind of did.

—TAZ AHMED ON *MISSISSIPPI MASALA*