

Reimagining the Arts, Theatre, and Hollywood

Session Description: In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, AAPI performers, artists, film makers, and organizations faced several challenges - both strengths in adaptation to new platforms as well as pressures in the financial realm due to limited funding for the arts, the need for narrative change, and the lack of diversity in Hollywood. This session explores new approaches to funding the arts, successes in expanding community access to performances on digital platforms, mobilizing community action and resource distribution, and addressing anti-AAPI hate and racial representation through the arts and film industry. Clips will be screened from the May 19th Project, which works to build upon the powerful mobilizing narrative of Stop AAPI Hate and moves the narrative to the next stage by focusing on solidarity—which is about seeing each other, standing together, and acting together—and solutions for the way forward.

Moderator: Dan Mayeda

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Please visit <https://www.aasc.ucla.edu/aapipolicy/default.aspx> to view the researchers' policy briefs.

Dan Mayeda (D)

Michael Tran (M)

Sean Metzger (S)

Janine Rogers (J)

Renee Tajima-Pena (R)

M: Arts, media is what gets him up every day. What is the Hollywood diversity report? Report is published twice a year. Race /gender diversity and the bottom line in Hollywood. Report shows trends over 11 years. Every year they look at top 200 grossing English-language films. Something new was that in the fall, they looked at TV shows. They used to look at non scripted (~700 shows). Always look at key employment factors (actors (leaders/case), directors, writers, show creators). Report also summarized what TV shows are being watched and generating revenue.

Michael presented a narrow slice of the report. They have been doing this for 10 years, every year there is a consistent finding – lack of diversity is an ongoing problem. The report also shows that diversity sells on the big screen. TV shows and films that are doing bestselling are ones that match the proportion. 20-40% minority makes the most money

Findings that are more current includes: a chart over 11 years of lead actor by race / film; in 2011 when they first started out only 1/10 with a person of color leading; Proportionate is where “we made it.” Main progress is happening in front of the screen (where audience can see it). Quickest change that’s happening is in places we can see. There’s much less progress happening behind the screen (e.g. producers). Complacent because if the audience sees us (AAPI) in front of the screen they stop caring. Pie chart of leads by race/ethnicity, digital scripted shows, 2020-2021 season (n=186) revealed mixed progress where PIs, Latinx and Asians are still underrepresented, while Black, multiracial and MENA are overrepresented

The most visible minorities are the ones being selected for the roles. Michael introduced the term of “invisible minorities.” The minority share = ticket buyers. Minority makes up more than half are ones buying tickets for the films. People of color are supporting the movie industry. The real target audience is people of color. AAPI folks will show up to watch movies if they are about them.

Michael thanked the audience.

Renee: Acknowledged that instructions were to present research and policy recommendations but will be resisting the instructions as found in the title slide. When talking about narrative change, it’s useful to think about the larger landscape. Primarily speaking about Asian Americans because it’s the most familiar cohort. Systemic racism, really think about systems of oppression are kept alive by an ecosystem (law/policing/cultural imaging and stories we tell about ourselves). Resistance has an ecosystem, powered by people working for social justice. See role as a film maker being part of that ecosystem of resistance. Don’t see film as creating change, my films are really part of that ecosystem because its people organizing creating change. A film may cause emotions; a film is a performative act– it’s people organizing. Like to use analogy of Rosa Parks, a very intentional act organized, many Rosa Parks deployed to take the civil disobedience, a lot behind that story, an act of performance and resistance, we sit on the shoulders of these movements; it’s movement building. Not just limiting marching on the street. Not only talked about racism but also resistance. Looked at moments of resistance and also racism.

Since the 100 years they’ve been making film; -” model minority”. During the narrative change, we were in the middle of the cold war. Asian Americans are seen as picking up boot straps and working hard and not fighting back. A wedge between the black movement for equality. Narrative change that we’ve empowered. The Vincent Chin case a narrative change. Asian Americans recognized as protected class. There are two stories: black and brown criminality; Asian American model minority victim. The May 19th project: push out 14 videos that gave this counter narrative of AAPI.

Narrative winning - the only way to achieve it is to build collective power.

Janine: Research is on Asian American theatre companies across California. Assessed on how programming has changed over COVID. Hosted digital tech workshops.

Methodology: Interviewed representatives from 19 theatre companies, reached out to 6 more that were unavailable. Read out names for the theatre companies. Provided an overview of theatres.

Qualitative interview; asked questions about how program has shifted in the COVID era, how they used tech in their production, and what kind of support the theatre companies needed moving forward.

Findings included: Significance challenge: a lot of companies cancelled tours and lost lots of money, lack of training in technology, cost of transition, people were used to receiving online programming for free but they needed to charge, desire for live interaction, challenging to not have instant feedback loop between performers and audience.

Affordances: expanding community, addressing AAPI hate, moving beyond staged productions, addressing shifting communities.

18 companies were interested in continuing online programming regardless of what transpired with COVID. 9 were interested in doing a hybrid model. 4 were interested in more support with tech integrated productions.

Companies have found that tech has expanded communities (also internationally). Work with people that couldn't necessarily show up in CA. People abroad could be collaborated with. Mobilize to address Asian hate. Immediate address challenges that arose.

Recommendations included: more state funding should be made available to these companies, collaborative grants, funds for archiving.

Discussion period

M: did your study reach any conclusions about the theatre/performing arts organizations make to the economy or community cohesion for the AAPI community?

S: theatre is a shared act of knowledge collaboration. It's a way of many actors got their feet on the ground.

R: since he brought philanthropy, have been deeply involved in narrative change. Need to convince their board to give to AAPI orgs. The model minority image is a real powerful drug. PBS being more of the educational broadcast. People in suits are asking what does Asian Americans have to do with racism and Renee countered with "did you watch the episode?"

D: if it makes any difference on who the story tellers are? Is it good enough that Asian Americans are being told and it doesn't matter who's it being told by?

M: thank you for that question. I think its critically important. What we hold on is asking who's in the room, and how it's being told. Provide numbers about hiring practices, but what it gets us is getting our foot in the door. Telling stories that we don't identify with. People can get in the position of power.

D: Reports are great and gratitude expressed. How are you currently presenting Asian representation and Asian Americans acting? Do you distinguish them and the narrative around that?

M: haven't made the distinction itself. Every distinguished made multiples chart by 15. It will be something that's looked at in the future. Expanding team? Unique experiences Asian Americans have we can straddle the line of media made (can participate in oversees).

D: have you looked at decision makers who finance film? Financing studio representatives in AAPI?

J: advocating for their own resources for their project

R: Asian American exec said that you need to a white VP. lots of people aren't surprised, operating in their own system. Containment and controlled.

M: people usually ask us when we're going to be satisfied in change. Nothing will change until we're part owners in the industry. White vs nonwhite- upwards of 90% white male, let alone white women. Why don't we look at execs again? There's no turnaround and no change again. Once we're part-owners and make calls, that's when we get real change.

D: I think there's a little bit of change, but certainly needs more.

D: may 19th project- clearly one of the goals. do you have any recommendations about what policy makers can create conditions?

R: need to talk about what we believe in. what do we stand for. There's a lot about narrative change and we need to talk about what unites us. There's no agreement on hard convos about what's best for our community (e.g. gun violence). I belong to ADOC which have grown to 2k documentary film makers.

Student journalist: resistance, how would you describe narrative change, winning, and resistance, and how do I apply that to journalist?

R: sent out to produce video packages. Documentaries are close to journalist- need ethical standards and standards. Doc film makers don't even fact chat. We need cross pollination. You see organizing that's been happening across journalists, film makers. Everything has come from organizing together.

D: journalists recognize newspapers. Wave of the future are videos. Stuff that drives traffic is the little short docs that explain the story (LA TIMES).

D: your study looked at Asian American theatre during the pandemic. Traditionally relied on a live audience. Were there good things that came out of the pandemic?

S: ecosystem for producing films- transnational production don't follow American traditions?

J: a lot of theatre companies that works well are ones that incorporated their platforms. Developing works that plays that took over zoom. Experimenting with different platforms.

D: east west players (oldest theatre of color in the country)- main source of revenue was cut off - live theatre. Shifted online, suddenly our audience base grew (east coast, internally) because national exposure gave us financial assistance (bezos)

Audience speaker 1: what are you actually encouraged/ movement in Hollywood that could be transformative?

M: can't speak to it fully yet. This coming film report will be looking at theatrical film and streaming platforms differently. What we've seen in TV streaming, diversity numbers were way worse. Streaming has been the place where you put your prestige projects. Confluence watch streaming and diverse people.

R: future's really interesting. We have this racial reckoning, backlash through the racial reckoning. We can't stop history. We're going to populate those spaces. When we start to populate those spaces are we going to change that when we're in those places. I always look at the credits, i do notice that general they tend to have a more diverse cast.

D: any final words?

S: center was great in tapping into state AAPI caucus

M: reports available on social sciences

R: may 19 - kcet, watch it free