



**The National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium
Press Release**

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Good morning. The Asian Pacific American Media Coalition commends ABC, NBC, CBS and FOX for their continuing commitment to trying to open up opportunities at their networks for minorities. Clearly progress has been made for African Americans in front of the camera, although little progress has been made in executive opportunities. Progress in front of the camera, while slow, has also begun to be made for Latinos, although little progress has been made in writing and directing opportunities. Sadly, Asian Pacific Americans and Native Americans are still largely invisible in most network programming, particularly in the scripted prime time shows.

The new fall shows were stunning in the near total absence of Asian Pacific Americans in any roles of significance. With the exception of NBC, the major networks have made almost no progress since last year in providing greater opportunities for Asian Pacific American actors. In some cases, the numbers are actually getting worse. To the extent Asian Pacific American actors are cast, it is largely guest and recurring roles with few if any lines and not much investment in character development.

CBS

For the second year, CBS has the lowest grade of the networks because of the limited improvement from last year. In the area of APAs on screen, the situation has continued to further deteriorate. But CBS has begun climbing out of the basement due to a recent increase in commitment that raises their overall grade to D+, up from a D- last year.

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APAs Onscreen

The new fall shows on CBS are completely devoid of significant characters played by an Asian Pacific American. *Joan of Arcadia* takes place in a high school set in Arcadia, California. Two out of three students at the real high school are Asian Pacific American as is almost half of the population of the town. Yet the show features not even one.

Last season CBS shows had only one Asian Pacific American regular and those in recurring roles had few if any lines in the scripted shows. Julie Chen hosted the CBS summer reality show, *Big Brother 4*, which also featured two Asian Pacific American participants but their success has not translated into regular prime time. This year there is only Archie Kao on *C.S.I.*, a very small recurring role. With even fewer roles for Asian Pacific American actors than even in 2001, CBS earns an F for primetime actors, down from a D last year.

Commitment to Diversity

In response to issues raised by the coalition about a lack of an effective plan to increase opportunities for writers and directors, and the lack of significant progress made in its initiative, CBS took an important step this year in its commitment to diversity; it created the CBS Diversity Institute. The Institute houses its minority talent showcases, and adds a writers mentoring program and a directing initiative.

The coalition applauds the effort, but the details of these new programs and information about actual resources devoted to the Institute are not yet clear so the CBS grade for Commitment to Diversity Initiatives rises from D- to C+. As the details become worked out and level of commitment becomes more evident, it is hoped that the grade will go higher.

ABC

ABC received an overall grade of C- from the APA Media Coalition, having produced little success from their efforts to include APAs. Entertainment categories are dismal, but the overall grade is propped up by a high grade in procurement and by the network's investment in its initiatives.

APAs Onscreen

ABC tied for last place with CBS in this category by not casting a single leading role for an Asian Pacific American in any of the seven new shows currently in their fall line-up. There is only one Asian Pacific American with a significant role in ABC's new fall line up, Christina Chang as Deputy Assistant Attorney Sandra Chang in *L.A. Dragnet*. The cancellation last season of *MD's*, eliminated ABC's only other regular role, Dr. Aggie Yang. ABC's on-air APA talent last season was otherwise largely due to reality shows -- the *Bachelor* and *Bachelorette*. The number of Asian Pacific Americans in regular roles has fallen for the third year.

Moreover, to the extent Asian Pacific Americans are seen on ABC, it is generally on *Threat Matrix* or *Alias* as stereotypically one dimensional evil foreigners who beat and torture white women. The stereotypical guest shots and deteriorating numbers earned ABC a failing grade of F in this category.

Writers/Producers/Directors/Development

The number of writer/producers for primetime shows remained unchanged, and Directors and Program Development continue to lag. However, ABC launched a serious directors initiative this year which we hope will create better results this Season.

Commitment to Diversity

ABC's grade in "Commitment to Diversity Initiatives" remains high but the results for Asian Pacific Americans are falling far short. The problem might be in the fact that the networks that have had more success in promoting diversity from inside the network have more fully empowered one or more individuals with the day to day responsibility and necessary authority and resources to effectively work with the creative decision makers who control the degree to which change is possible. ABC has invested in excellent outreach and pipeline programs which will hopefully bear fruit in the future, but the pilot process is producing limited success in creating shows with diverse casts. To the extent ABC is helping to build the talent pipeline, it isn't hiring that talent. We believe ABC needs a Vice President of Diversity based in Hollywood with greater authority to work in the pilot development stage and with existing shows.

The new fall shows are proof that ABC needs to put more emphasis on casting APAs in the pilot development stage and it needs to give someone the authority and resources to make it happen.

FOX

FOX received an overall grade of B-, the same as last year, because of the lack of improvement for APAs in many of the categories. There are no APAs in a leading role in any of FOX's current shows.

APAs Onscreen

FOX failed to increase the number of APA actors in regular and recurring roles from last year and the numbers for their new fall shows actually fell. Therefore its B- from last year fell to a C-. When the new shows for FOX's fall line-up were released in May, FOX, like ABC and CBS, had not cast an APA in a significant role in any of its new shows. Since then, FOX has added an APA regular to the show *O.C. (Orange County)*. There is one APA delivery boy in *Luis*, one of the new shows, but he is relegated to speaking Spanish with a heavy Chinese accent. Despite the potential for breaking stereotypes, this is a flat and marginal, one-dimensional character.

In the returning shows there is one Asian Pacific American continuing in a regular role in *Malcolm in the Middle* and one in *24*, and a voice in *King of the Hill*.

Writers/Producers/Directors/Development

There was no real improvement in the number of APA writers in primetime, after having made significant strides the year before in both categories. Some progress was made in directors and in development this year.

Commitment to Diversity

The network's commitment to diversity has not produced advancement this year for Asian Pacific Americans, as it had in earlier years. FOX needs to do an assessment of its programs and identify what is no longer working. Despite the lack of progress for APAs, FOX showed its commitment in other ways this year resulting in their grade for Commitment to Diversity holding steady at B+.

NBC

NBC received an overall grade of B-, up from C- last year. This jump was due to several factors. NBC added a significant number of APA directors, improved in every category directly dealing with talent in front of and behind the camera, and was the only network to cast two APAs in leading or regular roles in its new fall programming.

APAs Onscreen

NBC's new shows, *Coupling* and *Miss Match*, both have Asian Pacific American women in significant roles. Jodi Long plays Claire in *Miss Match* and Lindsay Price plays Jane on *Coupling*. The two roles, plus the additional casting of APA's in returning shows almost doubles NBC's total of lead/regular APA's on screen, from four regular roles last year to seven regular in the '03-'04 season.

Many of these roles are rich, complicated characters, who are integral to the stories in which they appear. In addition to the growing cast of Asian Pacific Americans led by Ming Na and Parminder Nagra on *ER*, NBC has B.D. Wong as Dr. George Huang on *Law & Order SVU*, Ravi Kapoor as Bug on *Crossing Jordan*, and Anthony Ruivivar as Carlos Nieto in *Third Watch*.

As a result of its success in providing opportunities for Asian Pacific Americans to play significant quality roles, NBC's grade for on screen actors improved from a C- to B.

Writers/Producers/Directors/Development

Similar improvement was also seen in NBC's number of Asian Pacific American writer/producers. NBC's writer initiatives have been among the most successful of the networks. The network more than doubled the number of APA writer/producers from the previous year.

Last year NBC had no Asian Pacific American directors. This year NBC made only marginal improvement and continues to lag in its commitment to finding quality development deals with APAs. This lag in development makes it less likely that an NBC show will be created with an Asian Pacific American in the leading role.

Commitment to Diversity

NBC's commitment to diversity initiatives shows in its outreach programs targeting comediennees and the expansion of its writing program, resulting in a grade of B-, up from a C last year.

CONCLUSION

After four years of working with the networks to open up opportunities for minorities, I have some observations about the persistent barriers in the industry.

First, there appears to be an unacknowledged belief that white audiences will generally watch only programs starring a white lead. That mindset continues to drive programming. Minority

actors and writers are still relegated to themed shows and supporting roles – if they get opportunities at all.

But the *Bill Cosby Show* 20 years ago, the current *George Lopez Show* and recent experience with reality programming are proof that the American audience is more sophisticated than it gets credit for being. This summer, Asian Pacific American talent won two NBC summer programs: *Fame* and *Last Comic Standing*. Both formats included audience voting on the winners. That Harleem Lee and Dat Phan were the people's choice highlights the underutilized talent in the Asian Pacific American community and demonstrates the public's acceptance of Asian Americans in entertainment television.

The second more entrenched barrier deals with show runners and writers. The limited opportunities for minority writers and the few characters that are from minority groups are directly related to the lack of diversity on the writing teams. NBC's relative success with inclusion of minorities in nonstereotypical roles in their shows may be related to their success in increasing the number of opportunities for minority writers on their shows.

Writers draw from their own experiences and all too many appear to have come from communities that lack diversity. The point was made graphically by Jon Stewart of the *Daily Show* which received the Emmy this year for outstanding writing. Flanked by his phalanx of all white male colleagues, he could not resist a light-hearted salute to diversity. For people of color, it's no laughing matter.

It seems to be difficult for some writers to conceive of characters who happen to be minority without resorting to unconsciously held stereotypes, leading to badly written characters. So they take the safer course and simply exclude them.

There are many people at the major networks who are well intentioned and sincere in their commitment to diversity. But success requires more than good intentions. It means challenging powerful show runners and investing in programs that help writers and producers go beyond their preconceived notions about minority communities. Fully integrating network prime time takes people on the inside who have the resources, responsibility and authority to promote diversity on all levels of the network, from the executive suites to back lot casting calls.

The networks have laid a foundation for progress but we are far from where we need to be. That is why we have begun calling on corporate sponsors to step up and join the effort. Many of the major advertisers in the primetime entertainment slots have a strong public commitment to diversity themselves which is reflected in their own television commercials.

We want Corporate America to invest their dollars in shows that project their values. Programming that includes all types of people from conception, to writing, to casting is not merely good TV, it is good business.