

The Asian Reporter

Volume 25 Number 4
February 16, 2015
ISSN: 1094-9453

The Asian Reporter is published on the first and third Monday each month.

Please send all correspondence to: The Asian Reporter
922 N Killingsworth Street, Portland, OR 97217
Phone: (503) 283-4440, Fax: (503) 283-4445

News Department e-mail: news@asianreporter.com
Advertising Department e-mail: ads@asianreporter.com
General e-mail: info@asianreporter.com
Website: www.asianreporter.com

Please send reader feedback, Asian-related press releases, and community interest ideas/stories to the addresses listed above. Please include a contact phone number.

Advertising information available upon request.

Publisher Jaime Lim
Contributing Editors

Ronault L.S. Catalani (Polo), Jeff Wenger
Correspondents

Ian Blazina, Josephine Bridges, Pamela Ellgen, Maileen Hamto, Edward J. Han, A.P. Kryza, Marie Lo, Simeon Mamaril, Julie Stegeman, Toni Tabora-Roberts, Allison Voigts
Illustrator Jonathan Hill
News Service Associated Press/Newsfinder

Copyright 2015. Opinions expressed in this newspaper are those of the authors and not necessarily those of this publication.

Member

Associated Press / Newsfinder
Asian American Journalists Association
Better Business Bureau
Pacific Northwest Minority Publishers (PNMP)
Philippine American Chamber of Commerce of Oregon

Correspondence:

The Asian Reporter welcomes reader response and participation. Please send all correspondence to:
Mail: 922 N Killingsworth Street, Portland, OR 97217-2220
Phone: (503) 283-4440 ** Fax: (503) 283-4445
News Department e-mail: news@asianreporter.com
General e-mail: info@asianreporter.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES (U.S. rates only)

Individual subscription (sent bulk rate):		
<input type="checkbox"/> Half year: \$14	<input type="checkbox"/> Full year: \$24	<input type="checkbox"/> Two years: \$40
Individual subscription (sent first class mail):		
<input type="checkbox"/> Half year: \$24	<input type="checkbox"/> Full year: \$40	<input type="checkbox"/> Two years: \$72
Office subscription (5 copies to one address):		
<input type="checkbox"/> Half year: \$40	<input type="checkbox"/> Full year: \$75	<input type="checkbox"/> Two years: \$145
Institutional subscription (25 copies to one address):		
<input type="checkbox"/> Half year: \$100	<input type="checkbox"/> Full year: \$180	<input type="checkbox"/> Two years: \$280

NEW SUBSCRIBER / ADDRESS CORRECTION INFORMATION FORM:

Subscriber's name: _____
 Company name: _____
 Address: _____
 City, State, ZIP: _____
 Phone: _____
 Fax: _____
 E-mail: _____

Mail with payment or Fax with credit card information to:
 The Asian Reporter, Attn: Subscription Dept.,
 922 N Killingsworth Street, Portland, OR 97217-2220
 Phone: (503) 283-4440 * Fax: (503) 283-4445

For VISA, Mastercard, or American Express payment only:

Name (as it appears on the card): _____
 Type of card (circle): VISA Mastercard American Express
 Card number: _____ Security code: _____
 Expiration date: _____ Address of card: _____

The last four issues of *The Asian Reporter* are available for pick up free at our office 24 hours a day at 922 N Killingsworth Street, Portland, Oregon.

Back issues of *The Asian Reporter* may be ordered by mail at the following rates: First copy: \$1.50
 Additional copies ordered at the same time: \$1.00 each
 Send orders to: Asian Reporter Back Issues,
 922 N. Killingsworth St., Portland, OR 97217-2220

The Asian Reporter welcomes reader response and participation. If you have a comment on a story we have printed, or have an Asian-related personal or community focus idea, please contact us. Please include a contact name, address, and phone number on all correspondence. Thank you.



MY TURN

■ Dmae Roberts



The all-American sitcom

When Margaret Cho's television show "All-American Girl" debuted on September 14, 1994, it marked the first time television audiences saw an entire Asian family every week in the same laugh-track tradition of "Seinfeld," "Rosanne," and "Ellen" — other sitcoms airing then. Yet Cho's show faced a barrage of criticism from both reviewers and Asian Americans.

While the family depicted didn't resemble mine, I enjoyed "All-American Girl." Cho was delightful. She and actors B.D. Wong and Amy Hill carried themselves with grace and wit while tossing off quick barbs. Many Asian Americans decried the use of Korean dialects, which seemed much lighter than many immigrant accents I had heard — including that of my Taiwanese mom.

It was a groundbreaking show that unfortunately lasted only one season. Over the years, I've spoken with Cho about her experiences working on "All-American Girl." Faced with low ratings, the producers focused on Cho's appearance. She was already quite thin when the show started, but she was pressured into a crash diet that seriously affected her health. By the end of the first season, the network made so many changes that the show was unrecognizable — and Cho's character ended up in an apartment with her grandmother and two young white male housemates.

Twenty years later, it's still a heartbreaking moment for Cho and Asian-American television history. Enter "Fresh Off the Boat," a new sitcom that premiered on February 4, 2015. Ironically set in the mid-1990s when "All-American Girl" aired, "Fresh Off the Boat" is inspired by a memoir of the same title by Eddie Huang, a Taiwanese-American food personality and restaurateur. Both the book and television show center on hip-hop-loving 11-year-old Huang after his family relocates from Washington, D.C. to an Orlando, Florida suburb so his father can open a western-themed steakhouse.

Months before the February premiere of "Fresh Off the Boat," debates erupted within Asian-American communities about using the term "fresh

off the boat" (FOB) — which has long been a derogatory term for a recent Asian immigrant — as a title. Huang's irreverent moniker was an effort to take back ownership of a slur to remove its power much like playwright David Henry Hwang did in the 1980s with his play *FOB*. The title irks many Asian Americans and confuses non-Asians about how to respond to it. Huang himself has criticized network

producers for sanding down the cultural truth of his book.

Television hasn't always portrayed Asians favorably, but in the last few years there has been an increase in good roles for Asian-American actors in hit shows such as "Parks and Recreation," "Walking Dead," "The Good Wife," "Community," "The Mindy Project," "Elementary," and "Hawaii Five-O." But there has not been a sitcom based solely on the stories of an Asian-American family. "Fresh Off the Boat" represents a milestone after "All-American Girl" — perhaps a successful one this time.

When pushing the boundaries of mainstream programming, a television show will be viewed and critiqued under a microscope. And it can't represent *all* Asian Americans. No show could. Some reviewers have found fault in the

portrayal of the parents in "Fresh Off the Boat," who speak with first-generation accents. I found the dialects quite subtle and they did not sound Taiwanese to me. My mom certainly had a thicker Taiwanese accent and didn't speak as grammatically correct English as the parents (played by Constance Wu and Randall Park) on the show.

Then there's the "teachable moment" in the first episode's use of the word "chink." It's a milestone for network television when Asian-American parents can call out the administration of a school for not punishing a student who uses the term against their son. Still, it's a painful moment for many Asian Americans. On premiere night, the Twitterverse erupted with tweets from Asian Americans about how cathartic the show was and how it brought up memories of the first time they

Continued on page 7