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MY TURN

■ **Dmae Roberts**



Summer quarantine viewing

For the last several months during quarantine, I've been binge-watching television shows and films. I tend to watch science fiction and fantasy, but I also enjoy romantic comedies and some reality television. Always though, I'm in search of programs featuring people of color. It can be especially difficult to locate content centered on Asian American/Pacific Islanders (AAPI) though. Since the finale of "Fresh Off the Boat," there really hasn't been anything on mainstream networks to replace it. The CW's "Katy Keene" and "Nancy Drew," and "Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D." (in its final season) on ABC, feature Asian-American actresses prominently. But it is streaming services like Netflix and Hulu that tend to offer more AAPI stories and productions.



Pictured is Devi (played by Maitreyi Ramakrishnan) in "Never Have I Ever." (Photo courtesy of Netflix)

On Netflix, the *Half of It*, a film written and directed by Alice Wu (best known for *Saving Face*), is a 2020 coming-of-age comedy/drama. The two best performances are small-town girl Ellie Chu (Leah Lewis), who lives with her widowed father (Collin Chou), a station master and signalman for a railway. Ellie takes a job as a letter-writer for someone who wants to woo a girl she secretly loves. The film, which is definitely inspired by the story of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, also features an LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, non-binary, transgender, queer, and intersex) twist.

Along the same vein is "Never Have I Ever," a comedy-drama on Netflix created by Mindy Kaling ("The Office" and "The Mindy Project"), who often received criticism from the Asian-American community because she didn't feature enough Asians on her show. But the new show, loosely based on Kaling's life, is about how an Indian-American high school student, Devi (Maitreyi Ramakrishnan), deals with the death of her father and explores her crush on the handsomest and most popular boy in the class — who also happens to be Asian American. Devi has two friends, one Black and one Asian American. Drama student Eleanor is played by Ramona Young, who is in another show I like — "Legends of Tomorrow" — on the CW. Families with teens especially should know that the show has scenes with alcohol and mild talk about sex, but it's funny and endearing.

Adults might consider viewing "Hollywood," a drama on Netflix that reimagines the film industry during post-World War II America. It is definitely NOT a family show because of nudity and sexual content, but the retelling of history does justice to

the LGBTQI+ community and people of color. Told in a light, upbeat tone, the show takes on hard-hitting issues such as discrimination, racist stereotyping, harassment, and homophobia.

The most compelling storyline in "Hollywood" centers on Anna May Wong (Michelle Krusiec), the first Asian-American star at that time. The oft-told story of Wong losing out on the role of the Chinese lead in Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* gets a cathartic rewrite in the show. Though Wong still loses out to a white actress (historically correct) in the series, she is chosen later to be in another film, *Meg*, about a Black woman (Laura Harrier) named Meg, created by a Black writer (Jeremy Pope) with a biracial Filipino-American writer (Darren Criss). "Hollywood" is a revisionist fantasy, but it gives viewers the stories we wish had happened earlier.

On Hulu, I recommend *Parasite*, the hit 2019 South Korean film by Bong Joon-ho. If you haven't seen it, now is the time. I don't consider this a family film even though it's about a family. Parents should decide if their teen is able to handle the curse words, sexual situations, and some violence. The film, which is centered on the Kim family and is largely a parable on greed, class, and discrimination, won a multitude of awards. Stuck in a small basement apartment, the Kims soon on their way into the home of a wealthy family. The edgy comedy becomes a thriller midway through the film and transforms into a tragic commentary on class division.

Also on Hulu, foodies should explore "Taste the Nation with Padma Lakshmi." The "Top Chef" host takes on traditional food documentaries by mixing commentary on race, history, and cultural appropriation with stories of chefs and their recipes that cut close to their hearts. There is something subtly subversive about her visit to El Paso, Texas, and talking about border crossings and the demonization of undocumented workers while musing on the origins of the burrito. Or, while visiting San Francisco's Chinatown with comic, actress, and author Ali Wong, Padma muses on why Americans think Chop Suey is Chinese when it's not. One episode examines Pad Thai in Las Vegas and the struggle military wives went through to introduce Thai food on the Vegas Strip. (Las Vegas is home to one of the largest group of Thai immigrants following the Vietnam War.) "Zen and the Art of Poke" looks at Japanese culture, history, and Hawaii's largest ethnic majority in Honolulu.

Let me know your recommendations. Happy viewing!