

Diversity study: TV looks more like U.S. and viewers approve

By Lynn Elber
AP Television Writer

LOS ANGELES — Television fare that reflects the nation’s increasing racial and ethnic diversity is finding favor with industry gatekeepers and viewers, according to a study of the 2019-2020 TV season released in late October.

Despite the pandemic that stymied Hollywood production, there were varying measures of growth in the hiring of people of color — and women — in on- and off-camera jobs, researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), said in the report.

In return, audience enthusiasm for shows, such as creator-star Issa Rae’s “Insecure” and the miniseries “Watchmen” with Emmy-winning actor Regina King, proved that inclusion pays business as well as social dividends, said Darnell Hunt, dean of the school’s social sciences division.

The report’s biggest takeaway is “the mounting evidence for how important diversity is to today’s audience,” Hunt said in an interview. He co-wrote the annual report with Ana-Christina Ramon, a UCLA social sciences research director.

Across streaming, cable, and broadcast platforms, viewership among adults age 18 to 49 peaked in many cases when a show had a “majority-minority cast,” Hunt said.

That conforms to the changing United States. In 2010, four years before UCLA issued its first report on Hollywood’s diversity record, whites represented 63.7% of the population. In 2020, that Census figure was just under 58%, the lowest on record.



TV REPRESENTATION. Television fare that reflects the nation’s increasing racial and ethnic diversity is finding favor with industry gatekeepers and viewers, according to a study of the 2019-2020 TV season released in late October. Despite the pandemic that stymied Hollywood production, there were varying measures of growth in the hiring of people of color — and women — in on- and off-camera jobs, researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), said in the report. Pictured is a cast photo for the show “Awkwafina Is Nora From Queens.” (Photo courtesy of Comedy Central)

creators as something really quite peripheral. ... and not appealing to the quote-unquote mainstream,” she said.

Hunt also cites “unimaginative” executive-suite decisions that reduce diversity to a choice between Black or white hires which he said underscores the need for other ethnic groups to fill decision-making roles.

The study examined a total of 461 scripted shows across all platforms to determine the employment inroads made by women and people of color as actors, writers, directors, and series creators.

Generally, there was an increase in racial diversity in nearly all the job categories, with representation among women improving in roughly half of them.

Compared to the previous UCLA report, more people of color were credited writers across all of TV, with the percentage on broadcast episodes increasing from 23.4% to 26.4%; on cable, from 25.8% to 28.6%; on streaming, from 22.8% to 24.2%.

According to the study, “most of these gains can be attributed to women of color” — for instance, Robin Thede and her HBO series “A Black Lady Sketch Show.” In contrast, men of color increased among broadcast credited writers but “treaded water in cable and digital.”

“People basically want to see the TV shows that look like America, that have characters they can relate to and have experiences that resonate with them,” Hunt said.

That builds on and reinforces previous findings for TV, he said. It also reflects the counterpart UCLA film study released earlier this year.

For all households including whites, for example, median ratings were highest for scripted broadcast shows in which people of color were between 31% and 40% of the credited writers, the study found.

For white, Latino, and Asian-American homes, median ratings peaked for scripted cable shows whose casts were from 41% to 50% people of color, while Black household ratings were highest for shows with “majority-minority casts,” the report said.

People of color fell short of parity in lead acting roles on all platforms. But for the

first time in the report’s history, overall cast diversity on scripted broadcast TV was slightly higher than in the general U.S. population (just under 43% ethnic and racial groups).

While actors of color also came close to “proportionate representation” in cable and streaming, most of the gains could be attributed to the increasing share of Black and multiracial roles, researchers found.

Asian Americans — the country’s fastest-growing group — and Latinos remain underrepresented, while Native Americans are “virtually invisible,” the report said.

As study co-author Ramon sees it, the problem lies partly with the industry’s white monolith of network and studio executives who tend to view those ethnicities “very niche.”

“I think they oftentimes think of stories from Latinx creators and Asian-American

Japanese, southern cultures blend in northeast Mississippi

Continued from page 8

Since she started as an instructor in 2011, she’s seen the program grow from a few to over 26 participants and move from a classroom on UM’s main campus to their own designated space.

Sullivan is a passionate proponent in her role. To ensure students maintain their cultural and educational connections, the supplementary school teaches three subjects according to Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology guidelines.

“For students, this is a very short time in their life, living in North Mississippi,” Sullivan said. “I want them to feel they’re not isolated, to have confidence as a Japanese (person).”

The school follows the Japanese school system calendar, hosting classes on Saturday at 9:00am to around 3:00pm from April to March. Students are taught in Japanese, follow punctual scheduling, and practice Japanese customs.

With 16 families, the program is close-knit. Instead of separate classrooms, each grade is taught in the same building. Because they cover first to ninth grades, each of the program’s four tutors teaches at least two grades. The parents are hands-on, often helping as needed.

“I think they need community,” Sullivan said. “We don’t have a wide Japanese society, but they definitely want to connect with other Japanese people in the area.”

The cultures blend

Richardson, BancorpSouth’s Japanese liaison, has been saying goodbye for 13 years. She’s watched numerous families return to Japan. Over the years, the faces change, but the pattern remains the same.

“Japanese people are here to learn. It’s not just that they are here visiting, they are actually living here,” Richardson said. “They know how to appreciate their experiences.”

They bring with them their food, language, clothing, and culture. Sometimes, they bring Japanese costumes for special occasions. With limited Asian grocery options, they learn how to make Japanese food with American ingredients.

Southern and Japanese cultures blend out of necessity.

“They adjust, and instead of this ingredient, how about I use what’s available here, and then they just experiment,”

Richardson said. “Food is (a) core culture of Japan, but by coming here, they learn how to make what they like using what’s available.”

For Kikuchi, her role as a Japanese liaison is all about easing the transition from Japan to Mississippi. She’s helped create the North Mississippi Cherry Blossom Festival in Tupelo and promotes Japanese culture as a board member for the Gumtree Museum of Art and North Mississippi Symphony Orchestra and involvement with the Tupelo Suzuki Association.

She was honored by the Government of Japan for her efforts in helping bridge southern and Japanese cultures.

Even after years of living in the U.S., Kikuchi remembers what it was like to be a newcomer in this country, far from her home and culture, and how much comfort and help she needed to make that transition.

Now, she wants to repay that kindness by helping others with their own journeys from Japan to Mississippi.

“Hopefully I can share my part back to the community, not only for Japanese families but also for (the) American community,” Kikuchi said. “It’s scary if you don’t speak the language, and I think if we can overcome the difference between the culture and the language, we can make a great friendship.”



WE’RE OPEN, SAFE AND HERE TO TAKE CARE OF YOU



Get to know our specialty doctors at locations across the Portland metro area.

OregonClinic.com
(503) 935-8000

SPECIALTY MEDICINE, EXCEPTIONAL CARE

Wondering when our next issue is published? Sign up for e-alerts at <news@asianreporter.com>!