



IN TUNE: Boston String Academy students and teachers last week in Allston.

Photo by Adam Smith

## A 'Model Minority' ... and ... Yet, Still a Threat?

By Adam Smith

If there's a key takeaway from the newly released STAATUS Index on the nation's attitudes toward Asian Americans, native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islander Americans, it's that several longtime misconceptions have gotten worse.

Released in time for Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, the comprehensive report shows Americans' stereotypes and prejudices toward Asian Americans have persisted, in many cases, alongside ignorance.

One glaring example stood out: A staggering 40% of Americans suspect to some degree that Asian Americans

*Continues on Page 3*

OPINION: FREE SPEECH IN FOCUS

## 'Starts With the Keffiyehs, and Ends With the Pride Flags'

By Adam Smith

"It starts with the keffiyehs, and ends with the pride flags," said Dr. Akiva Leibowitz during an interview with *Sampan* last week. A Brookline resident who has seen firsthand how even his neighbors could attack free speech, the parent was talking about the crackdowns of freedom of expression at every level of society over the past year and a half.

Leibowitz, a critical care anesthesiologist, was just weeks earlier vying for a seat in the crowded race for

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# On a High Note

## Boston String Academy Tunes Into Youth Talent

By Esther Wang

When sisters Marielisa and Mariesther Alvarez grew up in Venezuela, they were part of El Sistema, the National System for

Youth Orchestras and Choirs. But when they came to Boston, they soon discovered a similar program was lacking.

"When we came to Boston to do our studies at the Boston Conservatory,

we realized that even though it is a culturally rich city, there was the need for a program where creating musical excellence was a communal effort — a program that would accept any

*Continues on Page 6*



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Guest Opinion

Let’s Rename Phillips Square After Beloved City Activist Tunney Lee

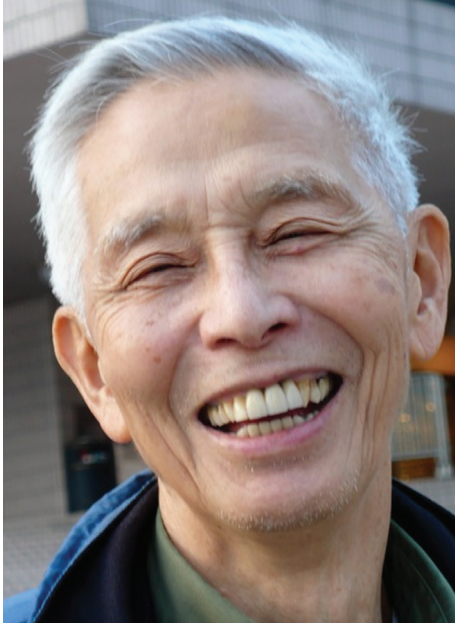
By Lydia Lowe

As the Boston Transportation Department continues to engage community members in plans to improve Phillips Square in Chinatown, a new idea has caught on with neighborhood residents, community leaders, and advocates.

At a hands-on design workshop last month, residents and community workers of all ages gathered around tables with maps and pictures to develop a vision for that section of Harrison Avenue with tables and chairs between Essex Street and Oxford Place. Five different groups reported on their ideas, and a common theme emerged: Beginning at Essex Street and continuing down Harrison Avenue, the area could bring visibility to Chinatown’s history, incorporating a life-sized bronze statue of a garment worker and bits of Chinatown’s stories throughout. Greenery, cooling features, and space for sitting were other shared ideas. When we shared artist Wen-ti Tsen’s idea that the area be renamed as Tunney Lee Square, the room broke into thunderous applause.

Tunney Lee, who was born in 1938, came to the U.S. from China at the age of 7 and grew up around the corner on Oxford Place. He had a long and influential career as an architect and urban planner, who led the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning, and at one point served as the chief of planning and design for the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

Lee mentored multiple generations of urban planners and community activists, working tirelessly to save working class neighborhoods and communities, from the 1950s until his passing in 2020. As a young professor and architect, he spent countless hours involved in the multiracial community organizing effort documented in the book *People Before Highways*. He mentored urban planners across the globe, establishing the Department of Architecture, now the School of Architecture, at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. But his heart was never far from Chinatown, which he credited for his interest in neighborhoods and his concern not only for a community’s buildings but for the



TUNNEY LEE

quality of the inhabitants’ lives.

“(Chinatown) was a classic urban village, one in which people knew each other and trusted each other, and it was small,” Lee said. “It has certainly affected, always, my views of community, of neighborhoods, it extends all the way to my professional life, my interest in neighborhoods has always been there.”

Lee was an avid community historian who launched multiple projects to document and share Chinatown’s history, including the Chinatown Atlas, which explores the community’s history and preserves glimpses of its historic streetscapes. Lee’s partners have continued the project and are currently preparing to publish a book of that name. In a brainstorm with community artists and activists, Lee became excited about the idea of using QR codes to mark important sites and share Chinatown stories. The Immigrant History Trail grew from those discussions, and the project will add new markers this summer.

Earlier this month, the petition campaign was announced and officially launched at the annual banquet of the Chinese Historical Society of New England. The petition begins, “We, the undersigned abutters, Chinatown residents, and community stakeholders, hereby petition the Public Improvement Commission of the City of Boston to rename the Phillips Square public right-of-way along Harrison Avenue after longtime Chinatown res-

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ident, community historian and urban planner Tunney Lee so that in the future it should be known as Tunney Lee Square.”

Longtime community leader Helen Chin Schlichte noted, “Tunney was a long-time friend, colleague, mentor, and much more. In a very quiet way, Tunney was a pioneer in community service and a constant champion for the community. And he warned more than once, ‘despite the stormy political waters one must tackle occasionally.’”

Even now, the late Tunney Lee is a force for bringing the Chinatown community together, as community residents and leaders across the political spectrum have expressed support for this renaming. Petitions to the City of Boston’s Public Improvement Commission can be signed online at <https://bit.ly/43jT5Y4>.

Lydia Lowe is the executive director of the Chinatown Community Land Trust.



File photo by Virginia Sun

**EMPTY BAMBOO GIRL 竹升女**

by Lillian Lee

**Panel 1:** Girl: "I WISH THERE WAS NO SCHOOL TODAY." Mom: "AND, MOMMY, YOU CAN SPEND ALL DAY ON SOCIAL MEDIA." Girl: "THEN I CAN SPEND ALL DAY WATCHING VIDEOS." Mom: "HUH?! I DO NOT —"

**Panel 2:** Girl: "AND WHAT ABOUT ME?"

**Panel 3:** Girl: "DADDY, YOU CAN SPEND ALL DAY ON THE TOILET." Dad: "WHAT THE...?!"

@emptybamboogirl emptybamboogirl.com 5-22-25



# Stereotypes Still Plague Lives of Many Asians, Finds Survey

Continued From Page 1

are more loyal to their country of origin than to the United States of America. That rate skyrocketed from 21% just five years ago.

But that’s not the only concerning statistic. The research also found that Americans in general are likely to view Asian Americans as less friendly to “non-Asians” than to other groups. People also singled out Chinese Americans specifically — with more than a quarter of Americans suspicious that the minority group posed some type of risk to society — including as threats to national security, job security, and cultural norms. Around 40% of Americans also supported legislation that would prevent foreign nationals from specific countries, including China, from buying property in the U.S., even if they are long-term residents.

The survey also found that knowledge of the societal and economic contributions of various Asian Americans was also severely limited among Americans in general.

When asked, for example, to name a famous Asian American, many people could not name one, and those who did, gave names like Bruce Lee, who died a half century ago, or action star Jackie Chan, who is not even Asian American.

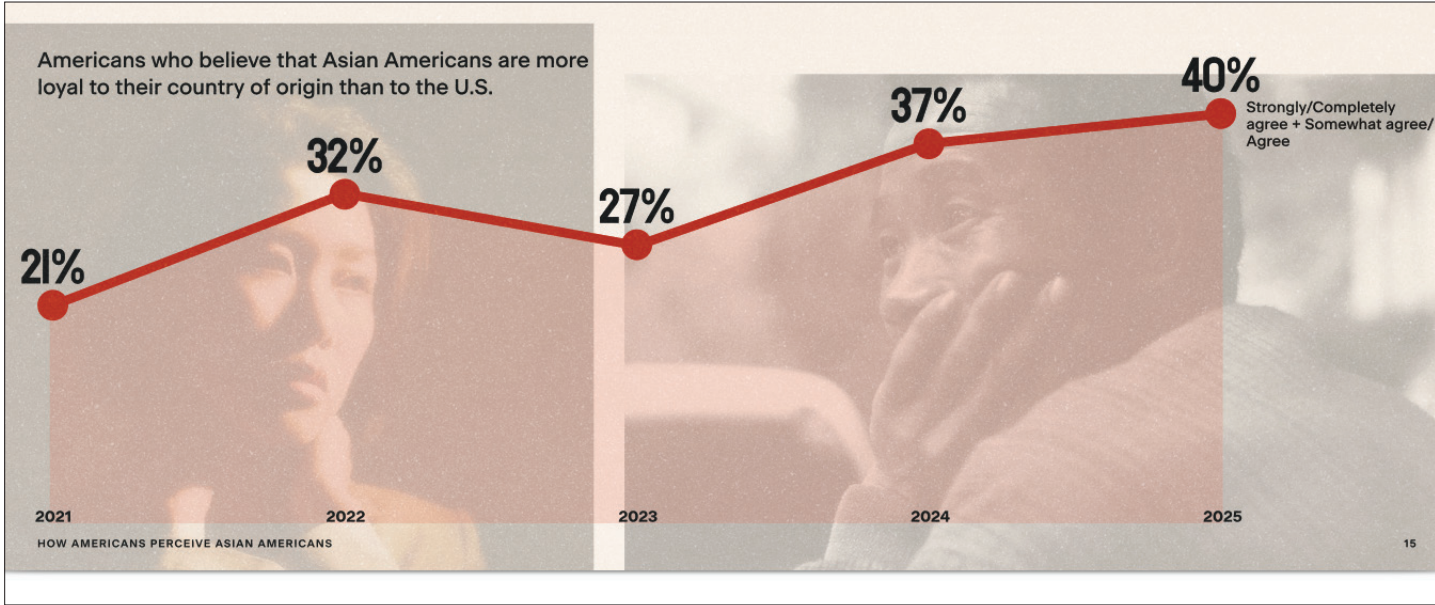
Notably absent from the list of first responses were high-profile chief executives like Taiwanese American Jensen Huang, who runs the computer chip giant Nvidia, or Lisa Su, who heads semiconductor company Advanced Micro Devices, or even Indian American Satya Nadella, who is at the top of Microsoft. Also absent were people like John Yang of PBS Newshour or famed longtime journalist Connie Chung, or investment guru Thomas Lee.

Also, despite naming old stars of martial arts movies as famous Asian Americans, the respondents failed to name historic figures such as American citizen Fred Korematsu, who fought his incarceration during World War II.

For perspective on the findings of the 2025 STAATUS report, *Sampan* spoke by video chat with Sruthi Chandrasekaran, the director of data and research, at The Asian American Foundation, who produced the survey. The following has been edited for clarity and length.

**Sampan:** The first thing that just stood out here was finding that 40% of Americans, in some way or another, believe that Asian Americans are more loyal to their countries of origin than the U.S. Could you talk about that?

*Chandrasekaran:* Great question. I agree that it’s a stat that did stand out to us quite a bit. And I think it speaks to a stereotype that we’re all very familiar with, the perpetual foreigner, where the



*Asian American community is always othered and seen as an outsider. And that stat speaks to how our community is being seen as a foreigner.*

*We also have some findings around how we continue to be described as “exotic,” as a “foreigner.” ... But I think the other stat that’s really interesting is the one about alien land laws, and the support for alien land laws. And so while I think of something like the loyalty stat is being symptomatic of a bigger problem, which is that when people start believing in these kinds of stereotypes, then they start othering us, and that has implications for the community ... real implications for the everyday lives of Asian Americans. And so I think that can be quite startling to see that kind of increase over the years, and to think about, “What does this mean for our community?”*

**Sampan:** Another question found that around 27% of Americans think that Chinese Americans are a threat to U.S. society. Could you talk about your views on what that means?

*Chandrasekaran:* I think, again, it’s very startling to see that more than a quarter of Americans see Chinese Americans as a threat, and especially around national security, but also around some other areas. And I think it speaks to the stereotype around the “yellow peril,” we’re seeing, especially East Asians as a threat to Western society. And you can see that it also kind of resonates with that other finding that only 44% of Americans really strongly agree that it was a wrong of the United States to detain Japanese Americans during World War II. And I think, again, that’s sort of like seeing Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, as as a threat. ... I think it really speaks to the continuance of that stereotype in our everyday fabric of society....

**Sampan:** Since you mentioned Japanese incarceration ... do you think that part of that view of Americans has to do with a lack of education around the Japanese

incarceration and a lack of education around constitutional rights? Or do you think it’s largely this kind of view that, ‘Well, they’re different. They’re not real Americans,’ or, you know, ‘They’re somehow not loyal to the country because of their parents’ or whatnot. Did you have any thoughts on that?

*Chandrasekaran:* ... When asked to name a historical event that has had an impact on Asian Americans, about 53% were unable to come up with one. When they do come up with something, I think one of the top answers is around Japanese American incarceration. So I would say awareness is pretty limited.... So, I think definitely the lack of awareness is a big issue.

*But I think what’s also promising is that people in general seem supportive of education – be it about the history and the contributions of Asian Americans or teaching about racism and structural discrimination in schools, people seem to be supportive of that. In general, in schools and in communities, I think there is support for more education. So I think it speaks to that lack of knowledge, like you pointed out.*

**Sampan:** I wanted to also talk about this strange kind of — maybe it’s a contradiction, or maybe it’s just two different groups of people answering — but you still seem to have this pretty persistent view around this long-standing kind of model minority myth. How does that jibe with these other views of some Asian Americans being a threat to national security, or that they shouldn’t buy property, or that the internment camps were justified and this sort of thing. How can you have that, and still have this persistent stereotype that Asian Americans supposedly have these attributes that are seen as is stereotypically better?

*Chandrasekaran:* ... You’re absolutely right. I think there are ... opposing forces at work.... On the one hand we are seen as, you know, sort of like the

*model minority – seen as smart, hard working, nice, keeping our heads down, getting the work done, reliable, and respectful, rather than assertive, or like leaders or authoritative, but more like good at math.... So those kinds of things, and ... you juxtapose that with like that, you know, the threat factor, (the misperception that we’re) disease carriers, foreigners, outsiders; I think we’ve seen sort of like this juxtaposition of these stereotypes over generations, right? These are not new stereotypes. We’ve had these around for several years, decades I would say. I think we continue to live in that sort of like meld of all of these different stereotypes....*

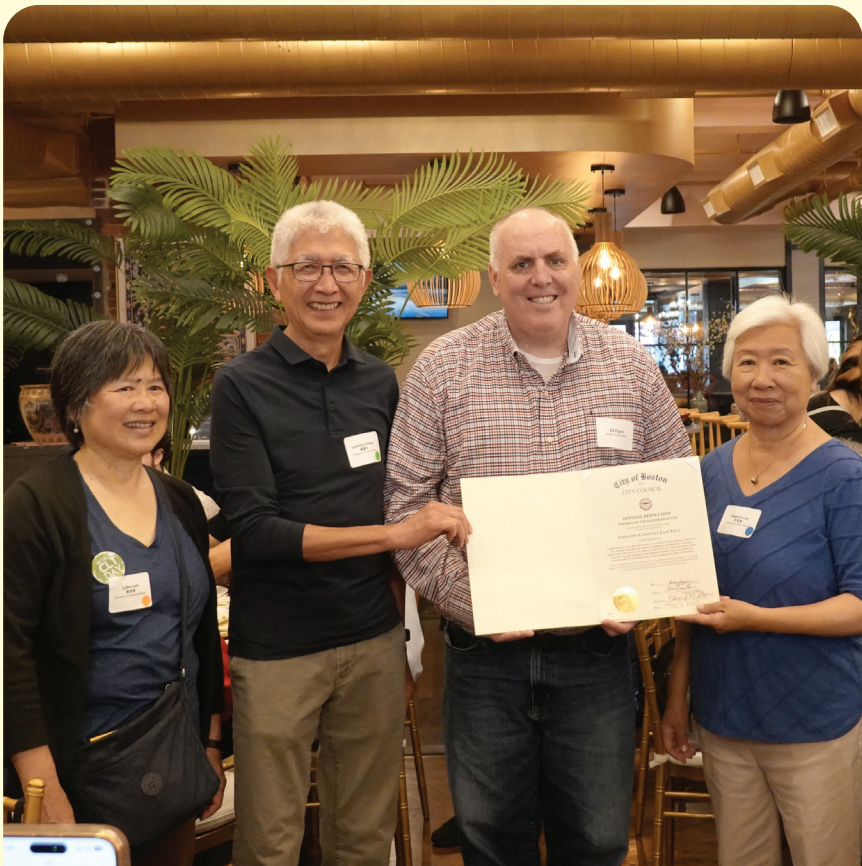
*So what implications does it have for our everyday lives? The report talks about the lack of, you know, belonging, lack of acceptance ... that we feel unsafe in many everyday spaces. ... You just need to look back a few years with like Covid, for instance, where we had all of these stereotypes coexisting, and it only took a few sparks to rise to the level of the kind of violent hate that we saw against the Asian American community....*

**Sampan:** A question asked about, Who do you think of when you think of a famous Asian American person? I was surprised that there wasn’t any presence from people who are prominent CEOs.... What, if anything, about that question and answer surprised you...?

*Chandrasekaran:* I think for us, what is striking is that, you know, it’s been five years since we launched STAATUS, and this is a very popular question for us. We ask this every year, and we have noticed every year that the majority are not able to name a person, and when they do name someone, it’s Jackie Chan, who is not Asian American. It’s Bruce Lee, who died over 50 years ago. Despite, the elections and everything happening last year, you know, the former vice president Kamala Harris only came in at third place.... So, I think it does speak to the invisibility of Asian Americans. We did not see any – like you said – CEOs make their way into the top percentages....



IN THE NEWS:  
Building ‘Trust’ in Community



The Chinatown Community Land Trust celebrated its 10th anniversary on May 17 at China Pearl in Chinatown. The event coincided with World CLT Day. About 100 people, including Chinatown residents and partners from other Community Land Trusts, attended the event. Also present were Boston City Councilor Ed Flynn, above, center, who gave a proclamation. Above left are Lydia Lowe, the group’s director, and other members, Lawrence Cheng, and at right, Suzanne Lee. For more about the Chinatown Community Land Trust, go to chinatownclt.org. Courtesy Photo.

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Opinion: Free Speech in Focus

Leibowitz: We Must Fight for Freedom of Speech ' Whether Agree With It or Not

*Continued From Page 1*

Brookline’s school committee. Despite taking a loss this time around, Leibowitz remains an advocate of free speech and letting teachers do their job, and his concerns about the future of educational freedoms are stronger than ever.

Indeed Leibowitz is well aware of the Trump Administration’s tsunami of orders and policies meant to crack down on schools and universities, international students, gender rights, and diversity initiatives. But he’s also well aware of the persistent and powerful political undercurrent in his town and neighboring areas like Newton — long believed to be some of the most liberal centers in the nation — that threatens to cast some minority voices out to sea, and, quite literally, drown them out.

In those towns and beyond, for example, a small group of parents and other community members have quietly tried to suppress or vilify or both the speech of students, recent graduates, and even school teachers — some of whom have been aggressively doxed online — over their empathy for Palestinians and even for benign statements about the Middle East. When the school district’s outgoing superintendent penned a letter to the district over the Oct. 7, 2023 attacks in Israel, town leaders and politicians publicly criticized that draft. Earlier this school year, a high school diversity event was attacked by parents who claimed without evidence it would be anti-Semitic. In Newton, a photo exhibit exploring the Nakba of 1948 with images that could hardly be called provocative was overwhelmed with protesters who denounced the entire event as hateful to Jewish people. Those were just a few examples.

“It’s reached absurd levels,” said Leibowitz, who is from Israel and is himself Jewish. He told of a recent exhibit at an elementary school in Newton to celebrate Arab American Heritage Month that was also shutdown merely because it included a reference to the Palestinian dialect of Arabic.

Leibowitz fears much of the canceling of pro-Palestinian voices will now worsen with the new presidential administration.

He warned, “The elementary schools are next.”

Trump signed an executive order purporting to combat antisemitism in January that in part called for an inventory and an analysis of “anti-Semitic” complaints in classrooms as early as kindergarten.

But the doctor also worries that the smothering of voices of Palestinian Americans, and other Arab Americans, will soon extend to any opinions that are not aligned with Pres. Trump’s agenda or of others in power. This could include the voices of minority groups and gay and transgender people, he said.

“These are tough topics. You don’t have to agree with them,” he said, “but you have to let educators do their job.”

Saying that he would readily “fight for the freedom of speech” that even he doesn’t agree with, Leibowitz said his views have been shaped in part by his work on a collaborative Israeli-Palestinian school called Hagar, before coming to the U.S. A key reason he ran for the school committee seat is because teachers and schools can’t effectively operate in a state of fear — whether it’s the kind of fear pushed during the Congressional hearings last year over universities’ and colleges’ handling of student protests; the fear overcoming international students — like Rümeyşa Öztürk — or immigrants like — Mahmoud Khalil — of getting detained



STANDING FOR FREE SPEECH: Akiva Leibowitz stands outside a school in Brookline. Photo by Adam Smith

for exercising free speech; or the fear of getting doxed or shutdown for presenting what would normally be considered an objective, informational exhibit.

“This is a great example,” he said of what happened recently in Newton, “of the dangers harbored in gross handling of such issues by authorities, elected officials, political activists (and) advocacy groups. Let the educators teach. They have a voice.”

Despite losing his bid for the school committee seat, he said, he feels that parents and others can advocate for free speech and their schools by “demanding a seat at the table,” and showing up to school meetings and speaking out.

After all, he said, suppression of speech often happens in small steps, over time. He added: Just because someone enjoys a freedom or privilege today doesn’t mean that very right or privilege won’t come under attack tomorrow.

Instead of waiting until once enjoyed rights disappear, Leibowitz urged, “it’s easier to stop this up front.”

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## Performing Arts

# Music

*Continued From Page 1*

children no matter their backgrounds or musical abilities.”

They found no such program that would come into communities to engage children and families, creating a sense of “respect and belonging,” said Marielisa Alvarez.

So, they started their own program: the Boston String Academy.

Since its founding in 2012, the group’s Youth Ensemble of Boston-area high schoolers has performed in many venues, including twice in the prestigious Carnegie Hall in New York. They also performed at the Shalin Liu Performance Center in Rockport on May 18 for the fourth time.

In the years since its founding, the BSA has expanded in scope, recognition, and success. Today, the program teaches 150 students, from young children to teenagers, in the Petite, Prejunior, Junior, and Youth Ensembles, and has locations in both Allston and Chinatown. Most of the students start out young, and progressively move up through the different ensembles as they grow older. All of BSA’s students go on to pursue higher education at institutions such as Harvard University, Boston Conservatory, MIT, New England Conservatory and Georgetown University. “It takes lots of effort to get there, daily work, persistence, resilience, not only from students and teachers but also from the families,” Mariesther Alvarez said.

But through BSA, students “develop values like discipline, commitment, team work, also finding a balance between the intellectual, emotional, and motor skills which will help them become better human beings and will

**BOW AND BRIDGE:** At right, Sisters Mariesther Alvarez (left) and Marielisa Alvarez (right) founders of the Boston String Academy, outside Saint Anthony Parish in Allston. Left, below, and next page, are students and teachers of BSA. Photos by Adam Smith/ [errorc1301.com](http://errorc1301.com)





## Performing Arts

# to Our Ears

*How Twins from Venezuela pulled some strings to form Boston String Academy*

help them succeed in anything they decide to do in life.”

BSA has received awards from major organizations, including the 2019 Commonwealth Awards given by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, El Planeta’s “One Hundred Powerful People of the Massachusetts Hispanic community” list and the Harvard-Allston Partnership. BSA has also participated in various music festivals and competitions, both in the U.S. and internationally.

It is through one such competition — the Progressive Musicians Auditions at Weill Recital Hall — that the Youth Ensemble was able to perform at Carnegie Hall in April 2024. Months later, they were invited back once again to perform at the annual “No Child Left Behind” concert in celebration of the 79th United Nations General Assembly and President H.E. Philemon Yang. Their performance was commended by Marco A. Suazo, Head of Office of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research for the New York Office and President of the International Academy for Arts and Cultural Studies, as “breathtaking...Each piece contributed to an atmosphere of cultural richness and artistic excellence that perfectly aligned with the evening’s theme of global unity and cultural dialogue.”

Bonnie Mai, a member of the Youth Ensemble, described it as a “very surreal moment because we were gonna perform at Carnegie.”

The audience was “from all over,” she remembered, adding that it felt like a privilege “to still be in high school and able to have this moment.”

Jennifer Gamez, another member of the Youth Ensemble, agreed: “It was a big deal, playing in Carnegie Hall... When we were there, the entire concert had elements from around the world...It was a really cool experience.”

“Practice was more intense,” Bonnie said, but the teachers at BSA “also made sure we enjoyed this moment. Onstage, they made sure we had fun.”

“Rehearsals were a bit intense,” Noah Liu, a cellist in the ensemble, said. “But it all really paid off. As far as I remembered, (we were) one of the youngest groups there. (The Youth Ensemble) went together, took a bus.”

“It was fun spending time with people who also play,” he continued. He compared it to soccer, where the group is “always working together, interconnected.”

The community is a big part of the BSA experience. Most of the students, having joined at a young age, have known their classmates for years and watched each other grow up.

For Bonnie Mai, “It started because my mom put me in music. I fell in love with it, once I grew up.” This love extended to the community at BSA: “playing with them, (being) able to make a lot of new friends.”

“The community is really nice,”

Gisele Francisco, another member of the Youth Ensemble said. “I’ve been friends with a lot of them since I was like five.” This sense of community extends to the teachers, as well. “The staff members (don’t) feel like normal teachers,” Kian Tsolov, a violinist in the ensemble, said. “I’ve been with them a long time, they can see you grow up. It feels different from a normal teacher.”

“It’s very different in music,” said

Michal Shein, a teacher at BSA. “You have the opportunity to start a student, see them through their entire schooling.” Michal has several students who started around middle school or even earlier, and “(I) see them through graduation. (It’s) so special.”

BSA has a very high retention rate, Shein added. “Kids come and stay.” After graduation, the program invites alumni in Boston to come back and train and work as teachers. “Every year,

students come back.”

Shein has been teaching at BSA since 2019, when she met Marielisa and Mariesther. BSA is “a very important model in the El Sistema program,” Shein said. “It’s a very special program, very intensive.”

The students at BSA were last week preparing for the collaboration with soloists Paul Laraia and Markus Placci at The Shalin Liu Performance Center in Rockport on May 18. “It’s very cool (that) we’re doing this project with BSA,” Laraia said. Both Laraia and Placci are also professors at the Boston Conservatory at Berklee, where they perform in a faculty string quartet that emphasizes engagement between Berklee and the wider Boston community.

In this upcoming performance, Laraia and Placci will be performing Mozart’s Sinfonia Concertante in collaboration with the Youth Ensemble. “We’re holding (the students) to a more professional standard... (and) they’re holding up incredibly well,” Laraia said. “(With) a few more rehearsals, it’s going to be a musically engaging performance.”

“(That’s) the thing I’ve always loved about (BSA),” Laraia added. “The teachers have always done this side by side, with students. Students are hitting a level they would not be able to hit on their own. Markus and I are adding to that model.”

“This has been a fantastic journey that started many years ago in Venezuela,” Mariesther said. “(My sister and I) grew up in El Sistema, the National System for Youth Orchestras and Choirs. We lived the transformational power of music and now it is our life mission to give it to others.”

“We have been in the neighborhood for years, hosted by several institutions, the Steinhart building, Boston Children’s Chorus, Chinese Evangelical Church, Kwong Kow Chinese School, Boston Chinatown Community Center, and finally since last year we have our own space here at 33 Harrison Ave. We are accepting students at both, our morning program for kindergarten and elementary school students, and our afternoon program for middle School and High School students.”

*The BSA’s upcoming shows include:*

**June 8:** End-of-Year Celebration Orchestra Concert, 5 p.m. at Boston Conservatory at Berklee, 132 Ipswich St, Boston

**June 10:** Youth Ensemble Students Solo Recital, 6: p.m. at Boston Conservatory, 8 Fenway St., Boston

**June 11:** Allston Students Solo Recital, 4 p.m. at Harvard Ed Portal – 224 Western Ave, Boston

**June 12:** Chinatown Solo Recital, 5 p.m. at Boston String Academy Music Center, 33 Harrison Ave., 4th floor

**July 14-25:** Boston String Academy Summer Camp, Boston String Academy Music Center, 33 Harrison Ave.





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Books & Literature

PART 2 of 2 PART INTERVIEW

Emily Feng on Political Crackdowns, the ‘Chained’ Woman and Dissidents

By Christopher John Stephens

In the previous issue of *Sampan*, we presented the first half of a two part interview with NPR reporter and author Emily Feng, who recently published her book, *Let Only Red Flowers Bloom: Identity and Belonging in Xi Jinping’s China*. The book explores who we are as reflected by our political surroundings and as defined by our cultural baggage in its collection of stories about people in China. In the first half, we discussed “Document Nine,” an initiative set forth by Pres. Xi Jinping, whose goal was to take control of culture, identity, and thought, as well as the nation’s strive toward “sinification” — to “sinify” ethnic groups — and comparisons of authoritarianism in China and Russia to the U.S.

Here is the second half of the interview, edited for brevity and clarity (the entire interview can be viewed at [Sampan.org](#)).

**Sampan:** Xi’s 709 crackdown against Chinese lawyers and human rights activists will mark 10 years in July. How is its legacy today? How much were you at risk when meeting with Zhang Xiaohui and others in the world of Chinese business? You continued to be at risk when reporting on poverty alleviation efforts. Was this common for reporters like yourself and even more so for female Asian reporters?

**Feng:** The round up and detentions of hundreds of human rights lawyers in 2015 was a watershed moment. It signaled a willingness of the Communist Party under Xi to take a harder political line. It also marked the end of what had been an incredibly influential constitutional reform movement in China that notched real legal wins that were slowly but surely working within China’s political system to liberalize the same system and create real protections for civil liberties in China.

*After the 705 crackdown, with many of the most effective lawyers in prison or disbarred from practicing, Chinese civil society experienced more blows it was unable to defend itself again — more cases of censorship, arrests and detentions over political charges including the all-too-common “picking quarrels and provoking troubles”*

*This political clampdown affected foreigners, in particular journalists like myself, working in mainland China, and yes, it was especially concentrated on Asian female journalists like myself. For years, I was in denial that the pressures and harassment I experienced in China were related to my ethnicity — I prided myself on speaking Mandarin well and loving Chinese culture and brushed off accusations of being a “race traitor” — but looking back I think my gender and ethnicity played a big role.*

**Sampan:** “The Chained Woman” is a particularly resonant, haunting story in this book. She is, as advertised, a chained woman, abused and humiliated for TikTok clicks in 2022. She became emblematic of the thousands of women trafficked over the decades and her identity remains unknown. Who was she? You refer to the online internet sleuths, the “human flesh search machine” and their numerous theories as to the woman’s identity. Was she Yang Qingxia? Was she Xiaohuamei? Do you know her status now?

**Feng:** Her story haunts me because we still do not know who she is, or how she is doing. She had been discovered in the dead of winter, chained by her neck in an outdoor shed, and for many Chinese people, in her anonymity, she came to represent the collective trauma people had suffered under the One Child Policy, from human trafficking in and around China exacerbated by these state controls, and now from the current pro-natalist policies of the state.



FENG

**Sampan:** Your chapter on the Uyghur people, “The Detained,” refers to controls put on that population, and not the ethnic Han Chinese.” I felt guilty each time bored security guards let me through at the many checkpoints when fellow Uyghur people were stopped and hassled.” The plight of the Uyghur certainly seems to have slipped under the radar over the past few years. What’s happening with them now?

**Feng:** The chapter you’re referring to has been one of the stories that has stayed with me the most over the years, regarding a Uyghur family forcibly separated by the Chinese state in the region of Xinjiang. After much perseverance from the father and grandmother of this family, they were partially reunited — though each member of the family bears deep emotional scars from the experience. Sadly, the father died this year of cancer, and his children have never been able to see their mother again, as she remains imprisoned in Xinjiang. The last I saw them, the two Uyghur children were doing well in Istanbul and have a good support structure around them. However, the degree of suffering they have had to

endure is unimaginable.

**Sampan:** You write eloquently about Taiwan: “For many Chinese dissidents living in political exile... the island was proof that the dream of Chinese democracy...was already a reality for 23 million people.” Hong Kong has a “one country, two systems” structure that’s set to dissolve in 2047. Taiwan remains a disputed entity, for some an appendage of mainland China and or others an independent nation. Is there fear that Xi will do to Taiwan what Putin did to Ukraine? Your final scene about Weiming Chen’s CCP VIRUS 2 sculpture brings together a collection of dissidents for the June 4th, 2022 opening, including pro-Taiwan independence advocates, Hong Kong exiles, and dissidents from the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. Where do you see this freedom movement going in the future? Where do you want to go in the future as a reporter still fighting the good fight?

**Feng:** Taiwan and Ukraine are incomparable in the political legacies which they inhabit and present very different challenges militarily and logistically in the event of invasion. Yet in principle, Taiwan certainly has drawn a direct comparison between itself and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and largely as a result, Taiwan has initiated some of its most significant military reforms. It also has noticed and been extremely alarmed by the Trump administration’s Russia-friendly rhetoric and recent criticism of Ukraine. China surely has taken note as well of the U.S.’ foreign policy about-face and will take American deterrence much less seriously in the future — another reminder that nothing the U.S. does on the world stage occurs in a vacuum and instead has stark consequences for other democratic societies.



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# Review: Omar El Akkad’s ‘One Day’ Puts West’s Hypocrisy on Full Display

By Christopher John Stephens

It would be trivial to start any discussion of the genocide in Gaza, now 19-months old and counting, looking at how the consequences of campus protests and journalistic free speech have decimated both the fourth estate — the media — and academia. Look toward statistics of over 53,000 killed and 100,000 wounded by Israeli forces, and nearly 2,000 killed since the breaching of a ceasefire. Palestinian forces reportedly killed 1,195 people, including 815 civilians in their initial invasion of Israel.

Look beyond the statistics and the pain takes on different shapes. A Tufts graduate student who signs her name to an editorial criticizing her university’s complicit role in the war-making process gets kidnapped off the sidewalk outside of her apartment. The current U.S. president brazenly threatens to cut funds from major touchstones in U.S. academia if they refuse to tow ideological lines. In the guise of fighting anti-Semitism, the message has become more clear than ever; criticize the war in Gaza, go against the Israeli government, and you are branded an anti-Semite. There is no middle ground.

How do we process the pain? How do we make sense of the incomprehensibly

horrible? Omar El Akkad’s *One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This* is an at times brutal, often graceful, sublime call to action. Through ten linked essays, journalist and novelist Omar El Akkad takes readers through the stages of comprehending the magnitude of what’s continuing to happen in a barrage with seemingly no realistic conclusion. The essays are simply titled but infused with a controlled rage: “Departure,” “Witness,” “Values,” “Language,” “Resistance,” “Craft,” “Lesser Evils,” “Fear,” “Leavetaking,” and “Arrival.” It’s as if he’s reminding us that October 7, 2023 was a removal from complacency, the start of a journey toward something and somewhere else, but the notion of having arrived at a conclusion is extremely subjective.

El Akkad’s bona fides are impressive. Born in Egypt in 1982, raised in both Qatar and Toronto, he was barely out of his teens when he started his journalism career as the “War on Terror” began. In locations like Guantanamo, Afghanistan, and through other assignments like Black Lives Matter, Ferguson, and climate change protests, El Akkad has managed to weave together rage and measured polemic. He makes it extremely clear in his opening essay how he views the system of justice in which he’s been reporting for

over two decades:

“Rules, conventions, morals, reality itself: all exist so long as their existence is convenient to the preservation of power. Otherwise, they...are expendable.”

Later, as a prelude to the memories he’ll invoke and the path he’ll want us to follow in 187 intense pages, he makes his message even more clear: “We are all governed by chance. We are all subjects of distance.”

The essays are simply titled but infused with a very clear mission statement: “Departure,” “Witness,” “Values,” “Language,” “Resistance,” “Craft,” “Lesser Evils,” “Fear,” “Leavetaking,” and “Arrival.” It’s as if he’s reminding us that October 7, 2023 was a removal from complacency, the start of a journey towards where we are now, but we have not landed in a safe place. He’s especially focused on delineating what might have gone wrong with Western ideologies and the lead up to the 2024 election. Reading this book (published in February 2025 and covering events just prior to the November 2024 US Presidential election) offers a sense of possible hope, a sliding doors notion that where we are now might not have happened had we taken action prior to July and backed a stronger Democratic candidate.

Before he gets into the deserved hectoring against those in the Democratic party who looked away for the sake of expediency, El Akkad expounds on the role of the journalist. They are, in essence, “a tourist in someone else’s misery.” He writes that “...the journalist cannot be an activist,” that the only real obligation outside reporting is “...to agitate against silence.” The fact that Palestinian reporters “...are in effect the world’s sole source of information about the reality of the obliteration of Gaza” is balanced against the fact that 108 Palestinian journalists have been killed as of July 2024 in the act of doing their jobs (and dozens more in total have been murdered by Israeli forces).

El Akkad knows of what he writes when it comes to “the immigrant class” and how they are segregated by narrative. “Some are afforded the privilege of an arrival story, a homecoming. Others, only departure after departure.” It’s this enforced peripatetic nature of the Palestinian people that is of concern here. El Akkad understands that he needs to provide a context through which the essence of this book can be sustained. This is a carefully constructed book whose passages can be extremely bracing if you’re not prepared for them. El Akkad clearly calls out the American left for hollow, performative acts of concern. He reminds the reader that the Democratic party in 2024 was focused on repeating the fact that the opposition was a clear threat to democracy, but they offered no concrete solutions.

“The moral component of history...is simply a single question...When it mattered, who sided with justice and who sided with power?...”

There’s a wealth of material in this book

that can be somewhat frustrating, but in a good way. El Akkad’s reflections on his time in Guantanamo Bay are worthy of a separate, more expansive entry, but they do lead us to this question: “What is the statute of limitations on resentment, on rage, on revenge?” This leads to an even stronger line in a book that’s festooned with jewels:

“Forget pity. Forget even the dead if you must, but at least fight against the theft of your soul.”

More nostalgia for a past long gone and never to return again surfaces when El Akkad muses about Donald Trump in 2015, how most mainstream liberals then believed he was “...a singular entity, a freak storm somehow returned to shore, rather than a symptom of an entirely different climate.” El Akkad implores his readers to examine photos of the darkest times in US history and look “...at the faces of those who watch from the sidelines...you’ll see a childish little smirk.” Moments later, in a passage which takes justifiable digs at Nancy Pelosi, El Akkad takes direct and justifiable aim at New York Democratic Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, whose thoughts about Gaza in an undated TV interview conclude with: “I don’t associate myself with what’s happening.” El Akkad responds: “...It must take great courage, to dissociate so fully, and under such difficult circumstances.”

How will the war play itself out? El Akkad properly does not offer any answers. There will be no Palestinian Martin Luther King to lead his people to a homeland with no bloodshed or horror. He worries that this very book will be too political, too problematic. The horrible story of US soldier Aaron Bushnell’s self-immolation as the ultimate sacrifice protest is paired with the unspeakable tragedy of five year old Hind Rajab, killed by the Israeli military after having called out for help. “What is the word for what she felt?” El Akkad writes. He may implore that “no atrocity is too great to shrug away now...” but history could contradict that statement.

There will be a reckoning. Omar El Akkad knows this and we need to understand it. “None of this evil was ever necessary,” he writes, and most of us should at least want to believe. Little by little, what is acceptable now will be unconscionable in a more equitable future. *One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This* comes to us with a ponderous title which itself is an abbreviated version of a post first published on X and viewed over 10.4 million times. While the title might be ponderous, the total effect of this collection is anything but. This book is equal parts Paulo Friere, Franz Fanon, Susan Sontag, and James Baldwin. El Akkad’s 2017 dystopian novel *American War* may have won many awards both here and in Canada, but it’s *One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This* that has the greatest chance of serving as the primary text for our troubled, dangerous times.



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To view the full Notice to Bidders, please see link below.

[http://bc.mbta.com/business\\_center/bidding\\_solicitations/current\\_solicitations/](http://bc.mbta.com/business_center/bidding_solicitations/current_solicitations/)

On behalf of the MBTA, thank you for your time and interest in responding to this Notice to Bidders  
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

Phillip Eng  
General Manager & CEO of the MBTA

May 14, 2025

Affordable Housing Lottery

The Parkside

184 Water Street

Wakefield, MA

Monthly Rent Amount

One (1) 2 Bedroom Apartment for \$2,701

Rent is subject to change in future years. Tenants will pay the cost of utilities (electric cooking, heat, hot water, electricity, water & sewer). One complimentary parking space is included for residents. Pets are permitted, subject to restrictions.

The **Parkside** is a new rental opportunity in Wakefield. This is a lottery for one (1) affordable apartment. The Parkside is a new, mixed-use development adjacent to Nasella Park. With just seven units, The Parkside offers boutique, luxury living. The building is pet friendly, provides elevator access, and is EV-ready. Every unit is a corner unit with a park view, and the residents will enjoy a home that feels truly personal. The affordable apartment, which is front-facing and located on the second floor, features a primary bedroom with a dedicated full bathroom, an in-unit laundry hook-up, and a gorgeous kitchen. Through the lottery process, this unit will be rented at an affordable price to a household with an income at or below 80% of the area median income. The apartment is expected to be ready for occupancy immediately following the lottery and all required screenings.

Maximum Household Income Limits

\$92,650 (1 person), \$105,850 (2 people), \$119,100 (3 people) \$132,300 (4 people)

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Public Info Session

June 5, 2025 at 6:00 pm via Zoom

Go to [zoom.com/join](https://zoom.us/join) or call (646) 558-8656 and enter Meeting ID: 818 9317 7595, Passcode: 088159

Application Deadline

June 30, 2025 at 2:00 pm

Applications may be emailed to [info@sebhousing.com](mailto:info@sebhousing.com), faxed to (617) 782-4500, or mailed to SEB Housing, Re: The Parkside, 257 Hillside Ave, Needham MA 02494. Applications postmarked by the deadline must be received within 5 business days.

Lottery


July 14, 2025 at 6:00 pm via Zoom


Go to [zoom.com/join](https://zoom.us/join) or call (646) 558-8656 and enter Meeting ID: 857 2736 5609, Passcode: 276410

Attendance is not required at Info or Lottery sessions. To view the recorded sessions at a later date, please search for The Parkside on the SEB Housing YouTube channel.

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For Lottery Information and Applications, or for reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities, go to **[www.sebhousing.com](http://www.sebhousing.com)** or call (617) 782-6900 x2 and leave a message or postal mail SEB Housing, 257 Hillside Ave, Needham MA 02494. For TTY Services dial 711. Free translation available. Traducción gratuita disponible. Tradução livre disponível.





Events Calendar

Civic Summit 2025: Be the Change-Mayor’s Office of Civic Organizing

Date: Saturday, June 7

Time: 9 am -4 pm

Address: Boston University Questrom School of Business, 595 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215

Join the Civic Summit 2025: Be the Change, hosted by the Mayor’s Office of Civic Organizing.

Event link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/civic-summit-2025-be-the-change-tickets-1335437261799?aff=>

Admission: free after registration

BPS Wellness Summit 2025

Date: Tuesday, May 28

Time: 8 AM to 12:30 PM

Address: The Great Hall in Codman Square, 6 Norfolk St, Boston, MA 02124

Event Link:<https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/bps-departments/health-and-wellness/policy>

Join members of the Boston Public Schools community as we come together to share resources, success stories, and inspire one another to create safe, healthy, and sustainable learning environments.

Admission: free, RSVP

Zishi Liu, American Anxiety

Date: Sunday, June 1

Address: The EP will be available on Spotify, Apple Music, and all major platforms, starting June 1

Acclaimed jazz saxophonist and composer Zishi Liu unveils his latest EP, American Anxiety, a deeply personal and politically charged avant-garde jazz statement.

Find more information about the EP at: <https://www.zishimusic.com/zs-lu-2154qas2>.

Food Security, Mental Health & Immigration Resources Community Event

Date: Saturday, May 31

Time: 10:30 am -2:30 pm

Address: **Dewitt Center**, 122 Dewitt Drive, Boston, MA 02120

Know your rights, consult experts, and find resources for Food Security, Mental Health & Immigration.

Event link:<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/food-security-mental-health-immigration-resources-community->

Admission: free

15th Annual Dance for World Community by Jose Mateo Ballet Theatre

Date: Saturday, June 7

Time: 12 - 6 pm

Address: Harvard Square, Harvard St, Cambridge, MA 02138

The festival is a free, public, all-day event featuring performances and classes from over 60 local dance companies, as well as over 20 social justice organizations and non-profits designed to raise awareness about dance and its potential to address social and environmental issues.

Event link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/15th-annual-dance-for-world-community-tickets->

Admission: free after registration

Free Pilates Class on the Greenway – Outdoor Fitness Movement with Jill

Date: Tuesday, May 27

Time: 5:15 -6 p.m.

Address: Sudbury Street, Sudbury Street, Boston, MA

Join for a free outdoor Pilates class every Tuesday at 5:15 pm from May 22– July 24 on the Greenway (North End Lawn between Salem & Sudbury). Led by Master Instructor Jill Rothenberg and team, this all-levels class features fun music, a supportive community, and a full-body workout.

Event link:<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/free-pilates-class-on-the-greenway-outdoor-fitness-movement-with-jill-tickets>

Admission: free, RSVP

Boston Career Fair

Date: Friday, June 13

Time: 9:30 am- 12:30 pm

Address: Hilton Hotel, Street Boston

CONNECT with the right employers. This career fair is a great recruitment event to connect with top employers in the areas of Government, Sales, Retail, Education, Information Technology, Engineering, Healthcare, Financial Services, Management, Manufacturing, Customer Service, as well as other career paths.

Event link:<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/boston-career-fair-tickets-497848577497?aff=>

Admission: free after registration

Sprouts of Resilience: A Tofu Making Workshop by Pao Arts Center

Date: Saturday, June 7, 2025

Time: 1:00 PM 4:00 PM

Address: 99 Albany Street, Boston, MA 0211

Join artist Ying Ye in this final activation, a communal gathering where participants will collectively transform soybeans into tofu through their labor, symbolizing acts of cultural healing.

Admission: free RSVP, \$ 10 suggested donation



## Arts &amp; Reviews

# Beauty and Humanity Permeate Bioh's 'Jaja's African Hair Braiding Salon'

By Virginia Sun

The play *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* offers its audience a seat in a Harlem Black hair salon. But the audience will come away with much more than a new style – in fact it might just come away with a deep sense of shared humanity, empathy, and even an immediate fear for the lives of those – so often in the shadows – around them.

The immersive play reels the audience in to watch the stylists gossip, roll their eyes at difficult customers, and spill secrets. Written by Jocelyn Bioh, a Ghanaian-American playwright and performer, *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* is currently running in its New England debut by the Speakeasy Stage Company through May 31. Nominated for five Tony awards in 2024, including Best Play, the show is fun, humorous, and lively. The production's discussion of the dehumanization of immigrant lives is timely.

The play opens on a hot summer day on the job in Jaja's African Hair Braiding salon. The braiders are talented, high-spirited women from Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. Marie (played by Dru Sky Berrian), is a smart 18-year old and DREAM-er who has her sights set on college. She runs the shop for her mother, Jaja (played by Maconnia Chesser), who is getting married to her white boyfriend to ensure a more secure future for herself and Marie. *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* is a story of female solidarity, the West African diaspora, and lives both bound to immigration status. In their complexity, they supersede any U.S. government attempts to reduce these characters to disposable non-lives.

The show's strong sensory elements stand out. One can almost feel the heat in the store after the air conditioning box noisily breaks. Shoulders bounce in the audience as the stylists dance to booming Afrobeats. The set design is masterful – filled with the colors, chairs, styling products, and a front desk that makes you feel like you are at the family-owned salon around the corner. Camaraderie and sisterhood among the braiders permeate the salon room.

This physicality makes the braiders' labor visible and undeniable. As playwright Jocelyn Bioh has commented on in interviews, braiding takes a toll not only on the braider's hands but also their entire body. In the play, a woman's hands swell after a day of doing micro-braids. The time passes, mealtimes come and go, wayward husbands stop by the shop, drama ensues – and through this, the women continue to work. Hair care is also often an act of emotional care for clients, given how important and identity-defining hair is. Jaja's African Hair Braiding's visualization of this physical and emotional labor is important, as the work of people who braid, work in nail salons, and other services is often unrecognized and undervalued.



The play also serves sharp social critique about how both government policies and some white Americans frame immigrant workers as disposable. Jaja responds to U.S. rhetoric telling “dirty Africans” to go back to their “shat-holes” by saying, “Okay, so you want me to go? Fine, I will go. But when do you want me to leave? Before or after I raise your children? Or clean your house? Or cook your food? Or braid your hair so you look nice-nice before you go on your beach vacation?”

Beyond immigrants' indispensability as laborers, Jaja's African Hair Braiding makes an undeniable point of their humanity – an important counter to the “logic” of current immigration policies, both in 2019 when the play was written and today.

Through the play, we get a sense of the duality of the women's strength and the extreme vulnerability they have as undocumented immigrants. The real framing, which the play masterfully accomplishes, is not whether these women are disposable or indispensable to the U.S., its service economy, or even as hair- and care-workers to their clients – but how they are needed by each other. *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* makes clear that U.S. immigration policies may not count these West African immigrants as full lives. But in the sacred space of the salon they are the center to which the audience is pulled – a continual flow of time, stories exchanged, gossip, relationships, and big dreams. In its physicality and realness, the shop seems to be a permanent, timeless world. Thus it is all the more shocking when that world comes to a halt when Jaja is abducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and her daughter Marie is forced into hiding.

ICE's abduction of Jaja casts an im-

pactful, haunting shadow over the play, especially given the largeness of Jaja's character and her dreams, which the salon is a physical representation of. It forces audience members to consider the very real question of: What can one do when a loved one is taken in a van by ICE? This question permeates the conscience of many people of immigrant backgrounds and people of color in Boston, especially given the reality of recent abductions including of Tufts PHD student Rümeyza Öztürk by plainclothes police officers in an unmarked car. As encroachments on the civil rights of both immigrants and non-immigrants ramp up, Bioh's play thinks through this unthinkable question by emphasizing solidarity and networks of care, which the salon is the backdrop for.

Much of the pathos and humor comes from conflicts among the braiders. It seems at first that the primary conflict of the play is that between the women. There are intergenerational and inter-

cultural differences, as well as mother-daughter differences between Jaja and Marie, who have different visions of what the American dream means. But it soon becomes clear that solidarity underpins their relationship, no matter their beef, when one of them is under real threat. As one of the braiders notes after Jaja's abduction, “it could have been any of us.”

Despite the darkness of the current political moment and its threat to immigrant lives, *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* and the masterful performances by the actors under the skilled direction of Summer L. Williams is filled with lots of laughter, humor, lightness, and joy. Jocelyn Bioh has oft commented on how humor contains within it truth.

*The show's humor and truth-telling makes it a must-see, running until May 31 at the Boston Center for the Arts, 527 Tremont St. in the South End. Tickets \$25-85.*

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## 与我见面 ▶ 春季活动

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电影系列

## UNIQLO 日本电影节

▶ 5月22日至6月1日



开放日

## 阵亡将士纪念日

▶ 星期一 5月26日  
▶ 免费入场

展览

## 见证人性： John Wilson 的艺术

▶ 最后展期  
▶ 展览截止至 6月22日



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