



**THE PALEY** CENTER FOR MEDIA

**PALEY** EDUCATION @Home  
presented by **citi**

What We're Watching



# Teen Transmitters Takeover!

For six weeks, *What We're Watching* is being taken over by the Paley Center's teen internship cohort! Each week a different pair will bring you their thoughts on the 2020 media landscape along with personalized recommendations. We hope you enjoy this unique opportunity to hear directly from young voices about the impact this year has had. This week we hear from **Katijah Lavan**, Rising Senior, Bronx Academy of Letters, and **Ellington Fagan**, Rising Junior, Bronx High School of Science.



## What We're Watching: A Night at the Movies

The effect of COVID-19 on millions of people's livelihoods has been immediate and profound. As thousands of schools and small businesses closed up, a growing number of business owners could not help but think of an unclear, grim future for their companies. Industries changed overnight, and global markets crumbled as COVID-19 impacted the world. However, one industry a little closer to home was changed overnight: one that many Americans would be enjoying over the course of the months-long quarantine: movies. A heavily impacted industry amidst this pandemic, movie theaters have remained closed and film releases have transitioned to being digital. The massive transition to staying home has increased streaming prevalence, a medium that was already gaining relevance and traction over other forms of media distribution. It is indisputably going to have far reaching impacts for the industry. The only question is: how will it be changed?

The most obvious guess at the near-future trajectory of this trend is the erasure of going out to the movies. In this timeline, leverage is siphoned from theaters as people stick with the convenience of streaming and forgo “a night at the movies” altogether.

Interestingly, drive-in theaters have had a resurgence lately. Small business owners have taken to opening up makeshift drive-in theaters in order to supplement lost income due to the pandemic. A night out at the movies seems to have kept its allure. However, drive-in theaters don't seem to be the long-term solution to this cinema crisis, as many people who have set up a drive-in theater barely break even with costs, or experience struggles purchasing the rights to show films from production companies.



A more likely scenario is that bigger movies get released with more promotion while smaller movies get smaller releases without advertising. The Andy Samberg and Cristin Milioti comedy *Palm Springs*, which was released on Hulu in July, got rave reviews and lots of press. It is a triumphant movie of the “coronavirus era.” This could hurt the small film industry as there may not be enough money to be made in their releases. There is an economic incentive to make movies for the purpose of attracting as many people as possible. This usually means bigger names, bigger budgets, and, worst of all, more sequels. The renewed enthusiasm with which the movie industry will capitalize on its biggest players will undoubtedly drown out smaller productions like *Miss Juneteenth* which was an equally acclaimed indie film, also released online,

that did not get as much attention as *Palm Springs*.



Another factor not so much discussed are the streaming platforms themselves. They can gain in leverage and increase their viewership, while movie theaters lose relevance. This could mean that streaming services raise the bar on the quality of their content and bigger stars dominate over smaller ones. For example, it is telling that some of the most popular movies during this pandemic, *Palm Springs* and *The King of Staten Island*, were both fronted by very well-known stars. This could homogenize the platform and even, as streaming platforms use more of their leverage to host exclusive movies featuring the biggest stars of the day, push us further into just having cable all over again.

However, in an attempt to be optimistic, this may be good for smaller creators on streaming platforms. A common practice has always been to cast a well-known actor for a role in a small movie because that's how funding was secured. The real victory with streaming is that when relegated to the same type of platforms, the lines between what is a big and a small movie tend to disappear. It is less about a lack of domination of an industry by its biggest players and more about smaller films becoming more accessible as you don't have to travel an hour to find the nearest theater that's showing the film. Regardless of how the world's biggest corporations play their cards, one thing

is for certain, accessibility is the future and is here to stay.

As always, if you have any questions, thoughts, or ideas, don't hesitate to reach out to us at [eduny@paleycenter.org](mailto:eduny@paleycenter.org)!

Happy streaming,

**Katijah Lavan**, Rising Senior, Bronx Academy of Letters

**Ellington Fagan**, Rising Junior, Bronx High School of Science.

Photos—*Palm Springs*: Hulu; *Miss Juneteenth*: Vertical Entertainment

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We hope this inspires you to watch and learn together in a new way at home! The Paley Center is here for you and, now more than ever before, we would deeply appreciate your support. Please consider making a donation:

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