Now in its fourteenth year, the Television Academy Honors recognizes fiction and nonfiction programs that — creatively, accurately and responsibly — address some of society’s most pressing concerns.

The subjects tackled this year — in programs seen on broadcast, cable and streaming services — are wide-ranging. They include sexual assault, a government’s persecution of its LGBTQ+ community, the immigrant experience in America, one young leader’s fight for our planet, the harmful effects of social media and the struggle for justice in the U.S. prison system.

The Television Academy Honors evolved from the efforts of Television Cares, as the Academy committee devoted to social outreach was previously known. Its cochairs, former Academy chairman John Shaffner and Lynn Roth — along with another former Academy chairman, Dick Askin — envisioned an annual event that would recognize what Shaffner called “television with a conscience.” Eventually, the committee was renamed to focus on the Television Academy Honors.

Over the years, the event has raised awareness of programming on topics such as terrorism, teen suicide, racism, drug addiction, the death penalty and Alzheimer’s disease.

The programs we now celebrate have made us see and think differently about issues that many of us believed we already understood. They come at a time when television has never played a more important role — as an information medium, as well as a source of comfort, companionship and entertainment. But above all, we salute these compelling programs for moving audiences and motivating minds to change.

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE 2021 TELEVISION ACADEMY HONORS COMMITTEE

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CONGRATULATIONS
to our 14th annual TELEVISION ACADEMY HONORS RECIPIENTS

HBO ORIGINAL
I MAY DESTROY YOU
HONOREE

HBO ORIGINAL
WELCOME TO CHECHNYA
HONOREE

Thank you, ACADEMY HONORS COMMITTEE, for your recognition.
Scratch that. Actually, Noah was on his couch quite a bit during the global crisis, hosting the “Daily Social Distancing Show” on Comedy Central and diving into hot-button topics with commentary and, yes, comedy.

Consider the debate over teaching critical race theory (CRT) that’s been roiling school districts and parents alike. “Basically, America treats history the way most people treat their browser history,” Noah says. “Just delete all the embarrassing stuff and hope no one notices.”

The Television Academy honors *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* for its unwavering commitment to tackling social justice crises with keen insight. Noah’s commentaries exude calm and reason tinged with humor. On CRT, for instance, Noah notes the disparities in how U.S. history is taught from one state to another.

“There is no national standard for teaching history in this country,” he explains. “In seven states, they do not directly mention slavery when teaching American history. In eight states, there is no mention of the Civil Rights crusade. And only two states even mention issues related to white supremacy.”

While various political movements have expressed opposition to what they see as an “anti-white curriculum,” Noah suggests a more even-handed approach. “I get why these parents are upset,” he says. “They don’t want their kids learning that white people are inherently racist. But that is not what teaching about racism necessarily does. I believe you can look at your history critically without believing you are to blame for it.”

Addressing the polarization over CRT, Noah says writing history is like telling the story of a breakup. “Each person wants to tell the story about how they were the one who was right, and the other person was a jerk.”

Will his perspective move the needle on this and other issues? Hard to say. But Noah’s primary goal is to open dialogues. “Reexamining your history is not easy to do. But should we keep telling ourselves stuff we wish had happened — or start telling what really happened?” he asks. “That’s a conversation that needs to keep happening.”

For Trevor Noah, the pandemic was not a time to check out from reality and hunker down on his couch.
CONGRATULATIONS TO
FOR LIFE
TELEVISION ACADEMY HONORS RECIPIENT
Yet the man remains behind bars, serving a life sentence for drug trafficking. Not one to squander his time, Wallace (played by Nicholas Pinnock) studies law, passes the bar and begins to litigate cases for other inmates.

The Television Academy honors *For Life*, the ABC drama series inspired by the true-life story of Isaac Wright Jr., convicted in 1991 on ten drug charges and sentenced to mandatory life in prison. While incarcerated, Wright worked as a paralegal and helped overturn wrongful convictions for several fellow inmates; his own conviction was overturned after six years in prison.

In *For Life*, Aaron Wallace, too, works to help fellow inmates and to overturn his own conviction — he hopes to return someday to his family and his life. His efforts are aided in part by a progressive female prison warden (Indira Varma), an advocate for prison reform.

But the going is tough for Wallace, who keeps coming up against the district attorney who prosecuted him and against a corrupt system that too readily opts for easy convictions and plea deals. Still, he travels to court in the prison bus, clad in his orange jumpsuit, and changes into a suit once there. It’s a precarious life, both inside the prison — where rival gangs are out to get him — and inside the courtroom, where the D.A. is intent on ruining any chance for Wallace to litigate his cases successfully.

Aaron Wallace is innocent. But he inhabits a world where innocence, integrity and justice are tenuous principles at best — and they don’t always win the day.
NETFLIX THANKS THE TELEVISION ACADEMY AND PROUDLY CONGRATULATES OUR HONOREE

/the social dilemma_

“Jeff Orlowski’s film may be THE MOST IMPORTANT DOCUMENTARY YOU WILL SEE THIS YEAR.”

Los Angeles Times
In 2018, at age fifteen, the Swedish schoolgirl started camping out on weekdays in front of the country’s Parliament, calling on politicians and the public to take stronger action on climate change. Since that time, she has become a worldwide cause célèbre, resolutely sounding a call for action that’s been heard by millions.

The Television Academy honors I Am Greta, a 2020 documentary directed by Nathan Grossman that chronicles Thunberg’s unlikely rise from student activist to global thought leader. Starting with her one-person school strike, the film recounts the personal story behind her fight and reveals the challenges and risks she and her family faced when that cause took flight.

Thunberg, who has been diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome, is a self-professed shy person. Yet the condition, she says, has given her a single-focused “superpower” that increases her strength and determination. And she is hardly shy about confronting world leaders, often in person and with scorching denouncements.

“Our leaders are acting like children,” Thunberg says to one political group. “You keep talking about moving forward, but you do so with the same bad ideas that got us into this.”

In the past three years, Thunberg has addressed the United Nations Climate Change Conference and parliaments in Britain, France and other European countries. She has met with presidents, dictators — even Pope Francis — and was named Person of the Year by Time magazine in 2019.

But she has also become a target for ridicule from some world leaders and news outlets that refuse to acknowledge climate change. She has even received death threats.

Thunberg takes it in stride. “It’s quite hilarious when the only thing people can do is mock you, or talk about your appearance or personality, as it means they have no argument or nothing else to say.”

Thunberg herself has plenty to say. Will enough of us listen?
Ketel One Vodka congratulates all the marvelous honorees as the official spirits partner of the 2021 Emmy® Awards.
After a stay in Italy, this Twitter star–turned-novelist is back in London, with the deadline for her second book fast approaching. But Arabella (star Michaela Coel, also creator, executive producer, writer and a director of the series) is sleep-deprived, anxious and looking for a break from work. She meets friends in a bar and, the following morning, finds that she has no memory of the evening’s events. At least, not initially.

The Television Academy honors *I May Destroy You*, an absorbing HBO drama that explores sexual consent, drug use, liberation versus exploitation, and barrier-breaking within a world of social-media interactions, all mired in increasingly shifting landscapes and dubious nuance.

Arabella’s fateful night starts at that bar — a celebration of sorts — but when she shows up at her publisher’s office the next morning, she is bleeding from a head wound, bruised, groggy and not making much sense. Over the course of the series, she strives to fill in those missing hours, starting with a frightening flashback to being raped. The flashback consumes her.

It also works to destroy her and her world in both overt and subtle ways. She loses her book deal. She loses trust in those around her. She keeps returning to the place where it all started, that bar, looking for the man who raped her. But Arabella is stymied by the gaps in her memory. “How does your brain create an image of something you’ve never seen?” she asks at one point. Is that memory, or is it imagination?

In search of answers, Arabella continues her journey, confused and terrified. But it’s a journey she must make on her own if she is ever to regain her sense of self.

Arabella’s world has just turned upside down.
We Applaud
THIS YEAR'S TELEVISION ACADEMY HONORS Recipients

PROUD TO BE THE OFFICIAL ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINE OF THE TELEVISION ACADEMY
It will be nearly ten years before his parents can return.

The Television Academy honors Apple TV+'s *Little America*, a series of dramatized true-life stories that tell the often-heartbreaking accounts of immigrants trying to make lives for themselves in America. Executive-produced by Emily V. Gordon and Kumail Nanjiani (*The Big Sick*), among others, the series reveals some of the struggles and triumphs of newcomers as they try to retain their cultural identities and, at the same time, assimilate to American ways.

The experiences are varied. Ai (Angela Lin) wins a cruise for herself and her two children — but it brings back bitter memories of being shipped away as a child to another family because of China’s one-child policy. Faraz (Shaun Toub) plans to build a grand house for his family, if only he can remove the gigantic rock that sits on his land. Each of these stories radiates with warmth and the human experience, especially as viewers meet the real people at the end of each episode.

Back to Kabir (who is played by several actors as he grows up): he is left behind with a disinterested relative to manage the motel, but being an exceptional child, he wins a national spelling bee and gets to meet First Lady Laura Bush — whom he asks for help.

For each immigrant in *Little America*, there is both success and surrender. When Kabir’s parents finally return, he has grown into a young man and has made their business prosper. Ai, for her part, confronts her childhood trauma and comes to terms with how it has shaped her as a parent. And Faraz? Well, it turns out that breaking up the rock is just the beginning of his American dream.
THE OFFICIAL WINE OF THE EMMY® AWARDS SEASON

HERE’S TO THE HONOREES

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE HONOREES FROM STERLING VINEYARDS

STERLING VINEYARDS

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The companies behind these platforms have grown exponentially over the past fifteen years by creating online portals that keep users constantly engaged — while mining personal data for profit. Should we care?

The Television Academy honors The Social Dilemma, a revealing documentary from filmmaker Jeff Orlowski in which current and former tech insiders suggest that the business model for these platforms is, in essence, polarizing our society, causing emotional harm and undermining democracy.

“You post pictures, and you get rewarded by thumbs up, hearts and likes, and you conflate that with value, you conflate it with truth,” says Chamath Palihapitiya, former vice-president of user growth for Facebook.

More troubling, “Facebook discovered they were able to affect real-world behavior and emotions without ever triggering the user’s awareness,” says Shoshana Zuboff, Harvard Business School professor and author of The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power.

One consequence, especially for young people, has been a huge spike in depression and anxiety. “The number of American teenage girls who are admitted to a hospital because they cut themselves or harm themselves... that number was pretty stable,” says Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist and author of The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion. “Then it started going way up, around 2011 to 2013. It’s now up 62 percent for older teen girls and 189 percent for preteen girls. Even more horrifying, we see the same pattern with suicide.”

He contends that these patterns correlate with the increased use of social media.

While many tech execs interviewed call for government regulation — and for tech companies to use more ethical business practices in web design — all agree there’s little financial incentive to do so. The result? “We have less control over who we are,” one insider notes, “and what we believe.”
As the first Chechen to acknowledge publicly that he's gay and testify about the Chechen government’s brutal crackdown on the LGBTQ+ community, Lapunov knows that if government agents can find him, they will kill him — simply because he’s gay.

The Television Academy honors the HBO documentary Welcome to Chechnya, a frank and terrifying account of Chechnya’s mass detention, torture and suspected slaughter of gay and transgender people, an effort under way since 2017. The documentary also tells of the ragtag group of professionals who have come together to create an underground network to help spirit these targeted people out of the country.

As recounted by several victims, the Chechen government’s campaign to eradicate all gay and transgender people has led to citizens being rounded up, tortured, electrocuted and, in some cases, killed. One young pop star who had been living abroad, Zelim Bakaev, disappeared in 2017 while back home for his sister’s wedding. There is little doubt that Bakaev — targeted for being gay — was abducted, tortured and killed by Chechen authorities and their proxies.

Lapunov stepped forward to tell the press and the Russian courts of his own detention and torture, but his claims were ultimately unheard because a Russian judge denied his case.

So, the fight to relocate victims to other countries continues, but it is difficult and increasingly dangerous. At the time this documentary was made, 151 people had been successfully resettled — none of them in the U.S., which, at the time, refused any requests for asylum.

When asked in one interview about the Chechen government’s crackdown, President Ramzan Kadyrov scoffed, “We don’t have gays here.”