

Succession, *Dopesick* and *The Dropout* receive 45 Emmy nominations

James Martin, David Walsh
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The nominations for this year's Primetime Emmy Awards, intended to "honor the best" in US television and organized by the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, were announced July 12. The awards ceremony will be held on September 12.

The nominations point to the extremely contradictory conditions and moods that prevail in the television industry, and beyond. Those moods, fortunately, include sharply critical ones. Most significant perhaps are the large number of nominations collected by *Succession*, *Dopesick* and *The Dropout*, 45 between them.

Each of these series (*Succession*, with three seasons under its belt, is categorized as a Drama Series, whereas *Dopesick* and *The Dropout* are "limited series") depicts the criminality of different but all of them powerful sections of the American ruling elite.

Succession treats a fictional family that dominates the global media and entertainment industry, suggestive of Rupert Murdoch and his corporate empire. As the WSWS pointed out, in Season 3 of *Succession*, the chief of the media conglomerate in question "faces a growing scandal over his role in the cover-up of heinous crimes—assaults on workers, sexual abuse scandals and murders." Furthermore, he "ends up crowning a fascist headed for the White House at a hotel room during the Future Freedom Summit, much like the real-life Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC)." Overall, we wrote, "Treachery, power, abuse, corruption, backstabbing, betrayals and outright fascist conspiracy are portrayed powerfully and sharply criticized and satirized in *Succession*."

Dopesick focuses on the opioid crisis, the criminal role of Purdue Pharma and its marketing of the drug OxyContin, and the activities of the billionaire Sackler family, owners of Purdue. The mini-series also dramatizes the social misery that made possible mass opioid addiction in the US and was substantially worsened by it.

Dopesick, we wrote, "spans the period from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s and is unrelenting in its criticism of Purdue and its sympathy for the epidemic's victims. The series does not simply flesh out a collection of statistics—the creators, writers and actors have produced a genuinely compelling social drama." The series is "unusual in its unvarnished hostility to the legal pill mill, presided over by the Sackler family and the three Purdue executives who realized OxyContin was being abused early in the crisis." *Dopesick*, in short, makes "an unanswerable case for the takeover of these enterprises run by sharks and their transformation into public utilities operated according to the health needs of the population."

The Dropout follows the rise and fall of Elizabeth Holmes and Theranos, a biotechnology company once valued at \$10 billion, which proved to be a vast fraud. *The Dropout*, the WSWS argued, "says an immense amount about the parasitical, swindling and openly thieving character of contemporary American capitalism. ... The drama brings to life the brutal reality of doing medical research within contemporary capitalism. The wealthy investors ultimately do not know or care about the science, their sole objective being to reap a windfall from a breakthrough technology."

The picture of corporate-financial America that emerges from these three, detailed and conscientious dramatic efforts is unflattering in the extreme. The US business world, according to its artistic representation here, is dominated by lawlessness to the point of depravity and the desire to accumulate almost unimaginable personal wealth, combined with shortsightedness, arrogance and political reaction.

Other significant series received Emmy nominations. *The White Lotus*, which gathered the most nominations for a limited series with 20, is a sharply drawn satire of rich American guests at a luxury resort on a Hawaiian island and the disaster that unfolds as their lives

intertwine with those of the hotel staff. The show, created by Mike White, features outstanding writing, acting, music and cinematography.

The rich and upper-middle class families in *The White Lotus*, with little in their heads, are miserable in their relationships and generally stunted in their emotional lives. The staff are treated badly, or condescendingly, or as playthings of the rich.

Severance is another show of note that has attracted a wide audience and received 14 nominations, including for a drama series and for lead actor Adam Scott. The show is a corporate-dystopian black comedy thriller. The tone of the show is off-key at times, but there is a healthy disgust for the status quo and contempt for the hypocrisy that prevails in white collar environments.

Squid Game, another dystopian series, appealed to a huge global audience. The show's narrative centers around various people who have failed in life and are deeply in debt. The contestants end up participating in a survival game out of desperation to win millions of dollars. But the losers die. The WSWS observed in its review, "The series is clearly a critique of capitalist society, and generally deals with the issues confronting the characters in a humane way—in spite of the brutal and violent premise."

Impeachment, which received five nominations, is a valuable dramatization of the right-wing conspiracy to oust President Bill Clinton in the late 1990s through a sex scandal. In our review of *Impeachment*, we noted, "The casting is particularly brilliant, with veteran actors Sarah Paulson as Linda Tripp and Clive Owen as Bill Clinton, and less well-known performers Beanie Feldstein as Monica Lewinsky and Annaleigh Ashford as Paula Jones."

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There were other notable shows such as *Abbott Elementary*, *Barry*, *Only Murders in the Building* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* among this year's Emmy nominees. Perhaps with weaker results this season, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* also received 14 nominations.

It is no secret that serious drama is largely confined to the small screen at this point. For the most part, the situation in movie theaters, swamped by Marvel-Disney and various superhero films, simply goes from bad to ghastly.

This year's box office successes include *Top Gun: Maverick*, little more than military propaganda (\$600 million); the comic book-inspired *Doctor Strange in the*

Multiverse of Madness (\$411 million); the tedious, empty *The Batman* (\$369 million); *Jurassic World: Dominion* (\$351 million) and so forth.

The pandemic has accelerated processes well under way by the beginning of 2020 toward the concentration of film production into fewer and fewer hands, with the increasing and relentless production of "blockbusters." If the Hollywood studios had their way, they would turn out a handful of bloated, bombastic films a year between them, each earning more than a billion dollars. The death of independent filmmaking is being widely discussed.

One website (Nothing in the rulebook) has noted that even before "the COVID-19 pandemic, many industry professionals were lamenting the pressures exerted on independent film—caused by streaming, and the increasingly risk-averse nature of Hollywood studios (who tend to favour blockbuster sequels and prequels over investment in arthouse and independent cinema)."

Screen Daily commented recently: "The pandemic has shifted the balance of cinema releases even further in the direction of blockbusters and away from local and independent titles. This has been replicated in key international markets including the big English-language ones of the UK-Ireland and Australia, but also in Italy where the big local comedies failed to ignite in 2021, and even in France where the older demographic has had its usual dedication to independent cinema shaken by Covid concerns. Now indie distributors are looking to find space for titles among a release schedule that is still holding back blockbusters first planned for 2020."

Domestic box office revenue for 2021 was \$4.5 billion, more than twice the figure for 2020, but still down 61 percent from 2019. International revenue in 2021 was down nearly 50 percent from 2019.



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