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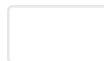
# Eddie Huang self-destructs: Why the “Fresh Off the Boat” author’s descent into misogyny is so depressing

I've compared him to Richard Pryor. But after his latest Twitter meltdown, even I have to say "you're on your own"

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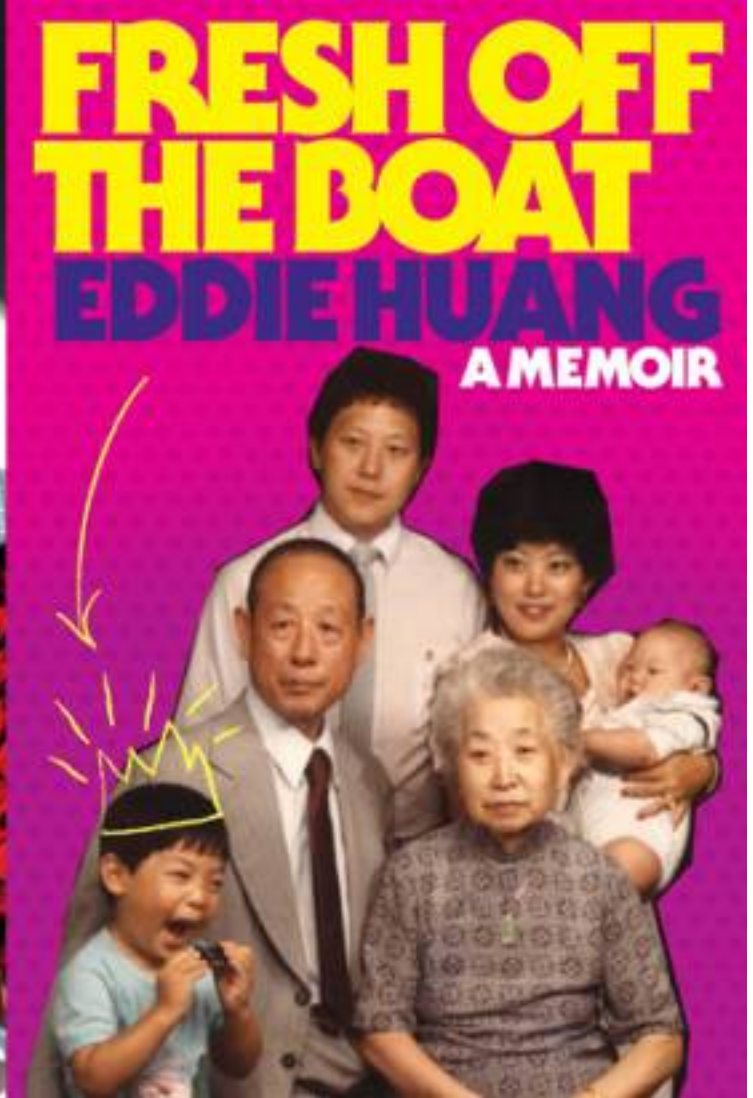
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This article originally appeared on **AlterNet** (<http://www.alternet.org/>).



(<http://www.alternet.org>) Last week, the sitcom-watching portion of Asian America finally got the news they'd been waiting for with bated breath: *Fresh Off the Boat* survived.

In fact, a lot of great shows survived, including shows whose survival was seen as a kind of referendum on TV diversity: *Blackish*, *Jane the Virgin*, and *Empire*, as well as the whole Shonda Rhimes juggernaut (*Scandal*, *How to Get Away with Murder* and *Grey's Anatomy*). But *Fresh Off the Boat* held a special significance.

The second ever Asian-American family sitcom in TV history will not share the fate of the first ever Asian-American family sitcom in TV history, Margaret Cho's *All-American Girl*—an ignominious ratings slide followed by a peremptory cancellation after one season. We'll get to see the fictional Eddie Huang continue to court his neighbor Nicole, watch what happens when he turns 12, and see what develops in the rivalry between Louis Huang's Cattlemen's Ranch restaurant and his arch-rival chain the Golden Saddle, etc.

Moreover, unlike *All-American Girl*, *Fresh Off the Boat* isn't a single anomalous network "experiment" that will define the fate of Asian-American representation in media for a generation. Coming on the heels of *Fresh Off the Boat*'s renewal is the pickup of Ken Jeong's *Dr.*

*Ken*, the third Asian-American family sitcom in TV history, which promises to be as different from *Fresh Off the Boat* as, well, Ken Jeong is from Eddie Huang. (Using a very loose analogy, the second-generation professional-class Dr. Ken is to the striving immigrant entrepreneur Huang family as Cliff Huxtable was to the Jeffersons. Two very different shows about two very different experiences.)

It's a good time for minorities looking to see themselves on TV. The only Asian-American I know who probably isn't feeling good about this is... *Fresh Off the Boat's* ostensible creator, the real-life Eddie Huang. It hasn't been a good month for Huang. It's likely that he won't be doing much with the show when it rolls around next season. And, I have to admit, that's probably good.

It's not easy for me to say this. I am a fan of Eddie Huang. I've even compared him to comedy legend Richard Pryor ([http://www.salon.com/2015/02/06/eddie\\_huang\\_is\\_our\\_richard\\_pryor\\_fresh\\_off\\_the\\_boat\\_and\\_t](http://www.salon.com/2015/02/06/eddie_huang_is_our_richard_pryor_fresh_off_the_boat_and_t)) a comparison I got in surprisingly little trouble for.

His original memoir *Fresh Off the Boat* (<http://www.amazon.com/Fresh-Off-Boat-A-Memoir/dp/0812983351>) was a breath of fresh air for me and many other Asian readers, in much the same way people say Pryor's stand-up was in the 1970s—an explosive, unapologetic rejection of the respectability politics that weigh like an albatross around the neck of every person of color with a platform.

What I admired about Huang and even tried to imitate (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/07/18/model-minority-rage-why-the-hulk-should-be-an-asian-guy.html>) was the unfiltered rawness of his emotions—resentment, frustration and selfish arrogance all on full display, tossing aside the mask of humility our culture associates with “model minorities” in general and Asian-Americans especially.

You don't realize how ingrained it is for our subculture to adopt unassuming modest deference as our default defensive pose until you see someone refusing to do it. To me, it always made sense that Huang would appropriate the language of hip-hop to give a voice to emotions he was denied as a child. Hip-hop is the language of suppressed emotion boiling over, a voice that embraces over-the-top violence, sexuality, aggression precisely because these are the things that respectability politics cowers in fear of.

I was with him when he casually described enduring beatings from his father, going to prison for brawling with fratboys, lusting after white girls with “pink nipples” as forbidden fruit, and still being angry enough about it all that he refuses to “rep America.” I was with him in standing by baring ugly things about his past and his present that all of us—but especially those of us pressured to be a “credit to our race”—don't get to say. I can't describe what a rush

it was to see him, in print (<http://www.vulture.com/2015/01/eddie-huang-fresh-off-the-boat-abc.html>), kick aside the storybook redemptive ending of the immigrant's tale and refuse to say "America is great."

Because it isn't great.

I've backed him up so much that it's painful for me to have to peel away and say, okay, Eddie, you're on your own. But increasingly, I've had to do that when I see his Twitter drama. Increasingly, I've had to remind myself that self-righteous anger without self-reflection is hollow, and not very liberating at all.

I'm biased, because I like the show and Eddie Huang clearly doesn't (<http://www.nwasianweekly.com/2015/04/eddie-huang-perfectly-imperfect-fresh-off-the-boat-author-talks-about-race-life-food-and-why-he-doesnt-watch-the-show/>). He's tweeted about how he doesn't watch it, how he feels it's a dilution of his life story.

I respect that. I can't imagine how I'd feel seeing bits and pieces of my own life manipulated to make "good TV." I thought his initial *Vulture* (<http://www.vulture.com/2015/01/eddie-huang-fresh-off-the-boat-abc.html>) op-ed describing his criticism of the show was an oasis of refreshing honesty in a desert of insincere TV hype. If he'd left it at the message of that op-ed – that he was conflicted emotionally about his own relationship to the show but still supported the show and its creators as its own, separate entity – then I'd be fine with it.

But to continue to slag off the show months after its premiere, based on the content of episodes he already knew about and even did voiceover work for, and essentially throwing everyone else working on the show under the bus—that's not just unprofessional, it's disingenuous. As others have pointed out (<http://www.vulture.com/2015/04/eddie-huang-fresh-off-the-boat-twitter.html?mid=imdb>), it's not like Huang didn't know he was making an ABC sitcom when he sold the rights to adapt his memoir. It's not like Huang wasn't handsomely paid for those rights, and it's not like he doesn't continue to profit from the visibility his association with the show gets him.

The more I think about it, the more a specific thing sticks in my craw: that Huang called out his friend Melvin Mar, a producer for *Fresh Off the Boat*, as an "Uncle Chan," his version of the slur "Uncle Tom."

It's a big damn deal to use that name on a specific person, as opposed to using it to describe a behavior or class of people. It's a way to throw shade not just on someone's actions but their intentions, their integrity—to accuse them of willfully selling out their identity. And it's hard for me to see how it's fair to throw "Uncle Chan" at Mar, who gets paid to sell the show to his

bosses and to the viewers, but say the epithet doesn't apply to Huang for selling his rights to Mar in the first place. It feels almost like Huang is absolving himself of Uncle-Chan-ness by being the one to push the title onto others, casting the first stone.

That's what started to turn me off, recognizing that cocky arrogance is an attitude that doesn't just "punch up," but once engaged, tends to punch in all directions.































































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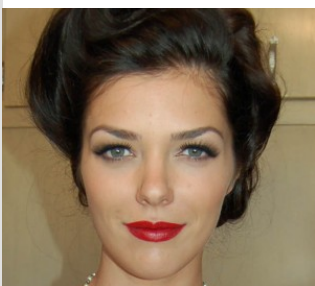
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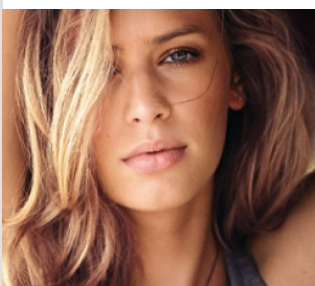
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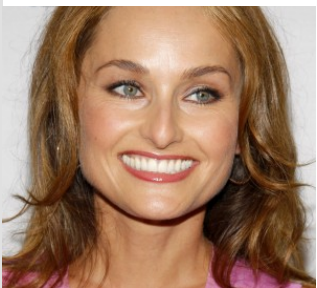
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