**THE RUDERMAN WHITE PAPER**

**ON THE CHALLENGE TO CREATE MORE AUTHENTIC**

**DISABILITY CASTING AND REPRESENTATION ON TV**

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**THE RUDERMAN FAMILY FOUNDATION**

One of our goals at the Ruderman Family Foundation is to change the public’s awareness of people with disabilities. More specifically, we make the argument that full inclusion of people with disabilities is not a matter of charity, but of civil rights. We researched this White Paper in order to further the awareness around this civil rights movement. We believe that the results we found will meaningfully contribute to the conversation of diversity in entertainment as a civil rights issue that needs to be addressed more systematically by the media and entertainment industry.

**Our Mission**

The Ruderman Family Foundation believes that inclusion and understanding of all people is essential to a fair and flourishing community.

Guided by our Jewish values, we support effective programs, innovative partnerships, and a dynamic approach to philanthropy in our core area of interest: advocating for and advancing the inclusion of people with disabilities in our society.

The Foundation provides funding, leadership, expertise and insight in the U.S. and Israel, with offices in both countries. Visit us at: <http://www.rudermanfoundation.org>

**AUTHORS**

**Tari Hartman Squire** 's EIN SOF Communications is a strategic marketing, employment consultation, and media strategy leader, weaving sophisticated cause-related, social and/or guerilla marketing with innovative PR strategies to illuminate disability-inclusive diversity.

As a result of casting discrimination during a temporary disability, she and other disabled actors spearheaded SAG’s Performers with Disabilities Committee, and advocated to include disability in SAG’s Agreement with the AMPTP, 10 years before ADA. As Founding Executive Director of Media Access Office, she helped establish industry/disability advisory committees, casting clearinghouse, talent showcases, media advocacy, and Media Access Awards (started by Norman Lear, Fern Field and Loreen Arbus).

EIN SOF launched disability strategic marketing with its *My Left Foot* campaign (first ADA tie-in with DC Congressional Screening). Squire co-authored *Making News: Getting Disability Rights Coverage*, advised *AP Stylebook* on disability-savvy semantics, and co-leads DisBeat initiative linking reporters/screenwriters with authentic disability leaders.

For ADA20, she designed *Lights! Camera! Access!* (*LCA*) Summit for U.S. Department of Labor, hosted by the Television Academy. Conversant in American Sign Language, Squire co-chaired National Disability Leadership Alliance Employment Team; spearheaded National Spinal Cord Injury’s Business Council; and received Media Access Visionary Award for 25-year leadership. EIN SOF/Nielsen NRGi’s *Disability Market Research Initiative* building the business case was featured in *Adweek* & *Fortune Small Business*

For ADA25, Squire/Arbus created *LCA2.0* to increase disability employment, improve portrayals, and enhance accessible entertainment (captions and audio descriptions). *LCA2.0* events were hosted by The White House; CBS; Caucus of Producers, Writers & Directors; CUNY; NYU; and Gallaudet.

*LCA2.0* highlights: Ruderman TV Challenge; *Disability-Inclusive Diversity Competitive Edge* resource guide by American Association of Advertising Agencies; BBDO’s *Stories About Us* campaign for storytellers with disabilities; Cornell/National Disability Mentoring Coalition’s Mentoring Opportunity Pipeline; and CBS News/*LCA2.0*/DisBeat Internships.

Other clients include AT&T; Bank of America; Colgate-Palmolive; Droga5/Honey-Maid; Fox Searchlight/*The Sessions*; Kessler Foundation; Kimberly-Clark; Macy’s; Mattel/Toys “R” Us; Motorola; National Council on Disability; PBS/*Lives Worth Living*; Prudential; Raytheon; Smithsonian; Sundance Channel/*Push Girls*; UCLA Anderson; and World Institute on Disability/JPMorgan Chase Conference Accessibility Initiative. *EIN SOF means business 25/7. Diversity is a Business Imperative – Inclusion is a Choice.*

**Kristina Kopić** is the Advocacy Content Specialist at the Ruderman Family Foundation. She has developed the Foundation’s advocacy initiatives in Hollywood starting in 2016. Some of her chief research and pedagogic interests lie in deconstructing cultural norms and behavior—in particular the constructs of race, gender, and disability. Kristina holds a B.S. in Psychology, a B.A. in English, as well as an MFA in writing. She comes to advocacy from the field of academia where she taught rhetoric and research. She has worked on all the previous U.S.-based Ruderman White Papers in various capacities and is a very active blogger for the Ruderman Blog on all things regarding disability inclusion.

**Daryl “Chill” Mitchell** first came to public attention as a member of the three-man rap group Groove B. The Hudlin Brothers, who directed one of the group’s videos, cast the group in the feature film “House Party” in 1990, where Mitchell had the opportunity to work alongside Martin Lawrence, Tisha Campbell and other prominent actors. He found the experience so enjoyable that he decided to turn his focus from music to a full-time acting career.

He followed “House Party” with appearances in the feature films “Boomerang,” “House Party 2,” “Sgt. Bilko” and “Home Fries.” His more recent films include “The Inside Man” opposite Denzel Washington, “10 Things I Hate About You,” “Galaxy Quest,” “Lucky Numbers,” “Black Night” and “The Country Bears.”

On television, Mitchell was a series regular on “The John Larroquette Show” and “Veronica’s Closet,” and appeared on the “Fresh Prince of Bel Air,” “Law and Order,” “The Cosby Show,” “Here and Now,” “The Suite Life of Zack and Cody” and “I’m With Stupid.” Additionally, Mitchell made guest appearances on “Desperate Housewives,” “Wizards of Waverly Place,” “The Game,” “The Cleveland Show” and “See Dad Run.”

In November 2001, Mitchell was sidelined by a motorcycle accident that resulted in paralysis from the waist down; however, it never halted his momentum. Once he was in control of his wheelchair, Mitchell went back to work and signed on as a series regular for the role of Eli on the series “Ed,” a role which became the basis for the pilot titled “Eli.” Eli’s character gave Mitchell one of his favorite phrases, “Roll or fold,” which encompasses his take on life. Continuing his acting career in television, he starred and produced the series “Brothers” for 20th Century Fox.

Mitchell was born in the Bronx and raised in Long Island, NY with his five brothers and three sisters. Currently, he resides in Atlanta with his wife and three children. His birthday is July 16. He may be best known for his critically-acclaimed role of Patton Plame on the CBS hit, *NCIS: New Orleans*. Follow him on Twitter @DarylChillMitch and Instagram @DarylChillMitchell.

The views expressed in this document are solely those of the authors.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Much appreciation for their leadership goes to those who have cleared, paved and driven the intersection of disability and media for decades, including Adam Moore, Becky Curran, Consuelo Flores and Ellen Huang, the EEO & Diversity team at SAG-AFTRA. Thanks to Christine Bruno, David Harrell and Lillian Cho of Inclusion in the Arts, and founder Sharon Jensen for providing important services since 1986 such as consultation, casting assistance, insights and information; Thanks to Gail Williamson and Nina Genatossio of Kazarian/Measures/Ruskin & Associates (KMR) Diversity Department for strong support in our information gathering process and for representing performers with disabilities, proving that disability is part of diversity.

A big thank you to Anita Hollander, National Chair of the SAG-AFTRA Performers with Disabilities Committee who with Gail Williamson spearheaded and now almost singlehandedly continues to track the “The Watchdog Report ” of TV presence of performers & characters with disabilities and the “Watchdog Scorecard” of disability in all media.

Much gratitude to Norman Lear, Fern Field, and Loreen Arbus for initiating the groundwork for all who have followed by launching the Media Access Awards in 1978 to raise awareness of Hollywood’s initial efforts toward disability inclusion, and for the Media Access Office, liaison between the entertainment industry and disability community to increase employment and improve portrayals.

Appreciation also to Emma McElroy for research, hard work in creating spreadsheets for network, cable and internet shows so we can track progress, to Dominick Evans, filmmaker and creator of #FilmDis for his insights, and linguistic guidance and coining the phrase “disabled mimicry,” and Anita Cameron for explaining why “Blackface” is not like “Cripping Up.”

**LANGUAGE DISCLAIMER**

We at the Ruderman Family Foundation want to acknowledge that language use in the context of disabilities is an important issue that generates both strong discussion and strong feelings. The most frequent point of contention is whether people-first or identity-first language should be used. While it is our policy at the Ruderman Family Foundation to use people-first language (i.e. a person with a disability), we acknowledge that several segments of the disability community prefer identity-first language (i.e. a disabled person). The authors of this Ruderman White Paper intend to follow the best practices of the self-advocates within any given community, and will vary usage as seems appropriate when it comes to general descriptions of disability.

The Ruderman Family Foundation and the writers of the Ruderman White Paper denounce the use of any discriminatory or derogatory language.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Introduction:**

While 20% of the U.S. population has a disability, fewer than 2% of all television characters do. Additionally, our Ruderman White Paper on the Employment of Actors with Disabilities in Television last year found that 95% of top TV show characters with disabilities are played by non-disabled performers. The imperative for diversity is already widespread in many corners of the industry and we assert that disability is of course a part of diversity. Having laid the groundwork for this assertion, in this White Paper we move from conversation to a call to action.

We collaborated with Tari Hartman Squire (Lights! Camera! Access! 2.0) and Daryl “Chill” Mitchell (*NCIS: New Orleans*) to design and issue a soft challenge—the Ruderman TV Challenge—to the creators of scripted television pilots – 151 pilots on 39 delivery platforms of broadcast, cable and internet for the 2017-2018 TV pilot season, asking them to audition and cast more performers with disabilities, including “five lines & under” and background or atmosphere roles.

Our objectives are perhaps best summarized by creator and executive producer Scott Silveri’s in his remarks upon receiving the Television Academy Honors Award in June 2017 for the breakthrough ABC show *Speechless*:

*“Before I was a part of this show, I didn’t care a lick about it. I’m very late to the party. For 20 years, the number of people with disabilities I cast was a whopping zero. I should know better.*

*I’m here to share my first very positive and fortunate first-hand experience that barriers to casting those with disabilities are false and they are imagined. The rewards are great. There is a real appetite for their stories. I am not saying go out and create a show about disability...*

*For those of us with a say about who gets on TV and who doesn’t, I simply ask you to recognize part of our responsibility is to represent society as a whole. You can’t do that without representing disability. So please consider this diversity among the very worthy kinds of diversity, which we take seriously.*

*Thank you to 20th Century Fox for supporting the show from the very beginning. Thank you to ABC for giving us a home, and for treating us with such care.”*

*Scott Silveri, Creator/Executive Producer of Speechless Television Academy Honors Acceptance Speech June 9, 2017*

**Results:**

This White Paper details the methodology and preliminary results of our challenge and concludes with observations, current trends and our recommendations moving forward in order to continue the drive for more sustainable disability inclusion in Hollywood, and around the world.

When it comes to hiring performers with disabilities for scripted series and/or pilots, the leaders are as follows:

* Networks: 11 CBS series and/or pilots hired actors with disabilities
* Cable: HBO with 3
* Internet: Hulu with 3

In addition, our data collection also shows that Fox has been excelling in auditioning talent with disabilities with 14 of the 23 Fox Studios (not to be confused with broadcast network) dramas and 9 of the 13 comedies having auditioned performers with disabilities.

Please note, these auditions and hires were not necessarily for guest star, recurring or principal roles, but also included background/atmosphere, and “five lines & under” roles. As we expand talent pipelines, we will continue to challenge content creators to audition and cast performers with disabilities for principal and regular roles.

**Conclusion:**

Although we have seen a move in the right direction—more scripted series are open to auditioning and casting talent with disabilities, more performers with disabilities are having positive experiences—we still must acknowledge that we are far from parity with the disability community. The number of working actors with disabilities is far below the 20% of people with disabilities in the population.

Unfortunately we cannot determine an exact number of working actors with disabilities due to the lack of industry documentation. For example, the SAG-AFTRA quarterly “Casting Data Reports” include categories gender, age, lead or support role, Asian Pacific, Caucasian, Latino/Hispanic, N. American Indian, but there still is no category for disability, despite advocacy efforts for decades—and there should be. Therefore, we must continue fortifying talent pipelines and dismantling stereotypes as we advance toward full inclusion and representation of disability on large, small, and personal handheld screens.

**FOREWORD**

**By Daryl “Chill” Mitchell**

I started my acting career in 1990 with the movie *House Party* and from there went on to 43 acting credits in film and television. As an African American young male I found my path in the industry wasn’t easy. It was very perplexing at times when I would get overlooked for projects or wouldn't even be considered because the role was written as a young white male. I remember telling my manager—Brian Medavoy at the time—that if he was going to represent me, he had to treat me as if I had a disability. I remember this conversation well and looking back, it was prescient. At that time I wasn't using a wheelchair, but I knew that my career needed specialized attention and a strategic hard push.

Fast forward to 2001: after a great 11-year long career, tragedy strikes. I became paralyzed from the waist down after a motorcycle accident. I got right back into the game, but the game seemed to have changed for me overnight. I remember saying to myself that “I’m black all over again.” Doors that had once been ajar were now back to being fully shut. The frustration I experienced re-entering the industry, not just as a Black man, but a Black man with a disability was huge. I can only imagine the frustration, obstacles, and instant rejection performers with disabilities who are trying to enter the industry for the first time face. One thing I had going for me was that I had already made my mark prior to my accident. I had laid the ground work. It was great to know that I had a lot of respect and admiration from industry professionals. They were willing to at least give me a shot because I had a proven track record pre-accident.

Once I got my wheels into that door and was given the chance to audition, more than half the battle was won. I remember seeing skeptical faces brighten up when they realized that just because I acquired a disability, my talent didn’t. So I'm here today to say all people want is a chance. Performers with disabilities want the exact same treatment as those without. We understand that this is a tough industry and that it takes many auditions to land a part, but what we want is the chance to audition. Let us show you what we’ve got before you decide we’re not right for the role.

Somebody took a chance on me and I want to thank Fox for giving me the opportunity to not only develop and star in my TV show, but produce it, writing on it, produce the music for it, and even though it was very short-lived, the experience working with all those great people was priceless. I wouldn't trade it for nothing in the world. I also would like to thank CBS television for giving me and many others the opportunity not only in front of the camera, but behind the camera, such as my son, Desmin.

Desmin Mitchell, was diagnosed with Asperger's—basically he is on the autism spectrum. He has been working as an extra on *NCIS: New Orleans*—the show I’ve been on for the last three years. He has been an extra for two seasons and when he wasn’t in front of the camera, he was around the set, familiarizing himself with all the processes and helping when needed. The powers-that-be saw an ambitious, knowledgeable, competent young man, and they gave him a shot—a job as a production assistant. This has made my son more vocal, more confident, and his self-esteem is through the roof. They saw the right person for the right job and they hired him—Desmin’s disability was irrelevant. He can do the job. They love him and he loves them, and that means more to me than any amount of money anyone could ever pay me.

So I say this because I just want the powers-that-be to know that when we speak of disability inclusion, we are talking about giving people a chance. So many times when producers or casting directors hear the word “disability” they think “inability” and we need to change this preconception. I wouldn’t have my job if I wasn’t the right fit. Desmin wouldn’t have his if he couldn’t do it. We’re not asking for special treatment, but just equal treatment.

In our study we found some good news. We’re moving in the right direction. I hope all the “creatives” and all the decision-makers will use this momentum and resources to not just move in the right direction, but to race there. It’s not just the right thing to give people a chance, but the more diversity and authenticity we have, the better our art becomes.

**SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION**

**What We Did Last Summer**

In July 2016, we at the Ruderman Family Foundation released the [Ruderman White Paper on Employment of Actors with Disabilities in Television](http://rudermanfoundation.org/white_papers/employment-of-actors-with-disabilities-in-television/). It was co-authored by actor and veteran Hollywood inclusion activist Danny Woodburn and Kristina Kopić, one of the writers of this paper. What we found was that out of the very few characters with disabilities in the top ten television shows, only one was played by an actor with an actual disability. That one was Daryl “Chill” Mitchell as Patton Plame in the CBS series *NCIS: New Orleans*. Numerically this meant that 95% of characters with disabilities were played by non-disabled actors. This finding was staggering. Imagine if 95% of all women characters were played by men. Chances are, the sentence itself sounds absurd.

We also made the argument that today it would be inconceivable for 95% of Black characters to be played by White actors in blackface. Indeed blackface itself as a practice is almost, [though not entirely](https://contextualhealing.wordpress.com/2009/02/05/tropic-thunder-and-post-racial-blackface/), inconceivable these days. Although we have to state that this comparison between “disabled mimicry” or “cripping up” and “blackface” is not entirely analogous, and it is important to recognize the difference. For example, according to Anita Cameron, ADAPT Activist and Director of Minority Outreach for the disability rights group Not Dead Yet, “Disabled mimicry is not at all the same as blackface which was a sinister invention and cinematic aggression specifically designed as a genre for the sole purpose to demean Black people and make us look foolish with hideous make-up, and exaggerated stereotypes of buffoonery – stereotypes on steroids.” Filmmaker and disability rights activist Dominick Evans who coined the phrase “disabled mimicry” adds, “By contrast, disabled mimicry is based on lowered expectations that performers with disabilities lack the talent to portray a specific role and/or talent with disabilities don’t exist, or can’t be found.”

While we acknowledge that blackface has a deeply racialized history and origin driven by blatant racism, the argument we made in last year’s White Paper maintains that there are some nuanced parallels when it comes to the effect of blackface, as compared to the effect of disabled mimicry: 1) the erasure of a group of people and 2) public acceptance of that erasure.

Blackface is still pervasive within living memory. For example, as recently as 1965, during the Civil Rights Movement, [Laurence Olivier received an Oscar nomination for playing Othello in blackface](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0059555/awards?ref_=tt_awd). Today we recognize that casting Black actors to play Black characters is a given. There are still many obstacles for Black actors—as Chill detailed in his foreword—but convincing people that the role of a Black character shouldn’t go to a White actor in makeup isn’t one of them anymore. However that is one of the obstacles which the disability community still faces in Hollywood—the belief that disability is something to be acted. As Dominick Evans notes, “Disability is presented as one of the ‘greatest’ challenges a nondisabled actor can take on, often one they take in hopes of winning the highest honors for their craft.”

The argument we are making is that non-disabled actors “cripping up” or engaging in disabled mimicry is depriving one group of people—in this case America’s largest minority group at [20% of the population](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/miscellaneous/cb12-134.html)—the right to self-representation. It furthermore perpetuates the myth that actors with disabilities are not even good enough to portray themselves.

And television isn’t the only culprit. When we turn to movies, [just shy of half of all the Oscars for Best Actor](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/02/23/since-rain-man-majority-of-best-actor-winners-played-sick-or-disabled/?utm_term=.b8bef851b7f0) since 1988 have gone to non-disabled actors playing disabled characters. That is a rather stunning level of erasure. Audiences clearly are welcoming of stories about people with disabilities, yet there is little backlash over the fact that the disabilities on screen are make-believe. There are no actual people with disabilities—at least no open disabilities, and definitely not visible ones—receiving the awards and honors—not since 1987 when Marlee Matlin, a Deaf performer, won an Oscar for Best Actress in *Children of a Lesser God*.

To emphasize the pervasiveness of the phenomenon of casting non-disabled actors to portray characters with disabilities, the day we are slated to publish this report, [the movie *Stronger*, featuring Jake Gyllenhaal playing a double-amputee is scheduled to be shown.](https://www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/names/2017/08/27/director-says-stronger-will-premiere-spaulding-rehabilitation-hospital-sept/hSgebanTQifPp6AVitwiGO/story.html) Later this year the movie *Wonderstruck* is being released. While it did hire [a few Deaf actors](http://deadline.com/2016/04/todd-haynes-wonderstruck-millicent-simmonds-deaf-actress-1201741276/), the adult lead role—a Deaf character—went to Julianne Moore, a hearing actress.

**Why On-Screen Representation Matters**

Our [July 2016 White Paper](http://rudermanfoundation.org/white_papers/employment-of-actors-with-disabilities-in-television/), laid out several pages of reasoning as to why self-representation on TV matters and the gist is worth a recap here. Simply stated, the key reason is that television viewing is America’s primary leisure activity.

According to the 2016 U.S .Bureau of Labor Statistics’ American Time Use Survey, the average American spends [more than four times as much leisure time watching TV as they do socializing with friends and family](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/atus.nr0.htm). And there are no leisure activities in-between. Television is first (2.7 hours per day) and socializing is second (0.65 hours per day). In other words, the average person spends more time immersed in the lives and stories of TV characters than the lives and stories of their actual friends and family. The significance of this amount of time spent is not to be underestimated.

We know that the more we witness groups of people represented in positive ways, the more we become open to those groups —a process often called [Contact Hypothesis](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=CDSyHPt98E0C&oi=fnd&pg=PA262&dq=allport%27s+contact+hypothesis&ots=I92YYvOSzd&sig=6cNzyEVuV9XDyG971-UYx1f5Z0o#v=onepage&q=allport's%20contact%20hypothesis&f=false). Television offers a prime example of how this kind of exposure works. For example, [comparative media studies](http://www.npr.org/2012/05/12/152578740/how-tv-brought-gay-people-into-our-homes) have shown that the exposure of LGBTQ characters on TV, starting with *Will and Grace* in the 1990s, has gradually changed people’s minds about members of the LGBTQ community. Historically, homosexuality had been widely regarded as an aberration and something shameful. Today, TV portrayals of gay characters who are simply normal, everyday people going about their lives are widely credited for swaying popular opinion to the point that today [62% of Americans support same-sex marriage](http://www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/).

It is because of these phenomena of acceptance-though-television that we strongly argue there needs to be better and more proportionate on-screen representation of people with disabilities. Even though approximately [56.7 million people](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/miscellaneous/cb12-134.html)—almost 1 in 5 American residents—have a disability, the disability community remains one of the most [marginalized, disenfranchised, and stigmatized](http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/disability/en/) minorities in our country.

The lack of on-screen presence in our number one leisure time activity is a testament to this marginalization. According to GLAAD’s “Where Are We On TV” the 2016-2017 TV season featured a total of [1.7% of characters with disabilities](http://glaad.org/files/WWAT/WWAT_GLAAD_2016-2017.pdf). Given the 20% of the population with disabilities, this is a vast under-representation. And given our findings last year that 95% of these characters are portrayed by non-disabled actors, people with disabilities are almost entirely absent from the screen.

While the general marginalization of people with disabilities explains this near-absence we must resist creating a Catch-22 situation. Just as the LGBTQ community became widely accepted by the general population in part thanks to positive and authentic on-screen portrayals, so too does the disability community stand to gain equality and greater equity if we start projecting authentic images of people with disabilities into America’s living rooms via large, small, and hand-held screens.

In short: TV representation matters because it impacts the quality of real human lives by helping to form the foundation of quality inclusion and interaction. The more visible our diversity is, the less our leaders can dismiss us from funding, healthcare, safety, employment, and the  "life, liberty & pursuit of happiness" which is every American's legacy.

**Our Argument—We Are Not Absolutists**

We often have arguments levied our way claiming that not every single character with a disability could possibly be played by an actor with a disability. Some argue that there are certain types of disabilities just too rare to find actors for. To these claims we say: we are not absolutists. Our claim is not that every character with a disability must be portrayed by an actor with a disability. Instead, we advocate for more equity and frequency for performers with disabilities to be considered for ANY role, whether or not the script indicates disability.

At this point we’d also like to address one of the most common arguments we encounter against full inclusion. It often goes something like this: what if the character was non-disabled for part of the movie?

To that we say: computer-generated imagery (CGI) is a phenomenal technology that must be used equally. If we can make legs and arms disappear in post-production, we must also be willing make them appear. One of the more incredible examples of what today’s technology can accomplish on screen is evident in *The* [*Fast & the Furious 7*](http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/behind-screen/how-furious-7-brought-late-845763). Paul Walker, one of the principle actors, passed away in a car accident unrelated to the production. It was decided to use body doubles and CGI to finish his few remaining scenes. If we have the capability to engender an entire person on screen, then there should be little trouble engendering a limb for an actor who is an amputee, or allowing an actor who is quadriplegic a few scenes of walking on screen. The technology doesn’t present the obstacle; rather societal attitudes do.

Our bottom line is that we must shift those social attitudes and offer talent with disabilities the same opportunities at growth and development as we do to talent without disabilities. It is okay for a non-disabled actor to portray a character with a disability if that person truly is the best fit for the role. But the reverse must hold as well. Production teams must be willing to audition actors with disabilities for a wide variety of roles whether or not disability is specified in the script.

**What We Did Last Fall**

Disability inclusion in Hollywood has been a decades-long fight by several veteran advocates and organizations. Our July 2016 White Paper was well-received in the community and widely covered in general mass-audience outlets, like [Variety](http://variety.com/2016/tv/news/disabled-actors-television-study-1201813686/), [LA Times](http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-disabled-actors-hollywood-20160717-snap-story.html), [Indie Wire](http://www.indiewire.com/2016/07/disabled-characters-on-television-study-underrepresented-1201706732/), [Vice](https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/bjzqka/hollywood-is-still-casting-able-bodied-actors-to-play-characters-with-disabilities), [Teen Vogue](http://www.teenvogue.com/story/actors-play-disability-character-representation-tv), and many more.

In order to bring even more attention to the need for disability inclusion in the television industry and to make use of the momentum and conversation generated, we produced the Ruderman Studio-Wide Roundtable on Disability Inclusion on November 1, 2016.

It was a half-day event featuring an In-Front-of-the-Scenes panel ([Robert David Hall](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0004371/?ref_=fn_al_nm_1), [Danny Woodburn](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0940173/?ref_=nv_sr_1), [Jason George](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0313464/?ref_=nv_sr_1), [Orlando Jones](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0428963/?ref_=nv_sr_1), [RJ Mitte](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm2666409/), [Marlee Matlin](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0559144/), and [Micah Fowler](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm5094896/?ref_=nv_sr_1)) and a Behind-the-Scenes panel ([Glen Mazzara](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1185659/), [Tari Hartman Squire](http://einsofcommunications.com/about/team/), [Dr. Stacy Smith](http://annenberg.usc.edu/faculty/communication/stacy-smith), [Jenni Gold](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0325004/), [Gail Williamson](http://www.dsiam.org/advocacy.htm), and [Scott Silveri](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0798859/)). In the audience were several executives from the studios, networks, unions and disability community. The goal was to have an honest discussion that laid out the imperative of disability inclusion in Hollywood—what Squire calls the “Disability Narrative Imperative.”

We were heartened by the turnout (a full house) and by the conversation (you can read the in-depth recap as covered by [Deadline Hollywood](http://deadline.com/2016/11/actors-with-disabilities-speak-up-marlee-matlin-disability-inclusion-roundtable-ruderman-foundation-1201846632/), [BuzzFeed](https://www.buzzfeed.com/arianelange/disability-hollywood-inclusion?utm_term=.pmo916LdL#.sjx8l5bGb), and [The Mighty](https://themighty.com/2016/11/disabled-actors-discuss-disability-exclusion-in-hollywood-diversity/), among others). Panelists expressed frustration, yes, but also optimism that change might be in the air. And this momentum, input, and feedback made us recognize that there was enough critical mass to attempt a direct “call to action.”

**What We Did Just Now: Call to Action**

This is how the Ruderman TV Challenge came about. The imperative for diversity was already widespread in many corners of the industry, as we had laid the groundwork for the assertion that disability is of course a part of diversity. With this covered, it was a good time to move from conversation to action. We collaborated with Tari Hartman Squire (Lights! Camera! Access! 2.0) and Daryl “Chill” Mitchell to design and issue a soft challenge to the creators of television pilots—151 on 39 delivery platforms of broadcast, cable and internet for the 2017-2018 TV pilot season—asking them to audition and cast more performers with disabilities, including “five lines & under” and background or atmosphere roles.

This White Paper details the methodology and results of our Challenge and concludes with observations, current trends and our recommendations moving forward in order to continue the drive for disability inclusion in Hollywood.

**SECTION TWO: METHODOLOGY**

While unscripted television shows have had some success in authentic portrayal of people with disabilities, starting with breakthrough shows like *Push Girls*, *Little People Big World* five years ago, and more recently *Born This Way*, the scope of this Ruderman TV Challenge was created to approach and impact scripted television.

The Challenge was designed with three major components:

**A. Build Awareness** (February – July 2017);

**B. Information Gathering** (August 2017)

**C. Evidence Analysis** (September 2017)

**Part A: Build Awareness (February – July 2017)**

Utilizing [Deadline’s 2017 Pilot Primetime Panic](http://deadline.com/category/primetime-pilot-panic/) as an inventory, we identified 151 scripted television pilots across 39 delivery platforms in network, cable and internet. A banner ad on *Deadline* was purchased during pilot season from February 22 – March 1, 2017 to announce and build industry-wide awareness of the TV Challenge. The banner ad read: *“Cast Performers with Disabilities. Not sure how? We are here to help”* Its click through landed on the Ruderman Family Foundation’s page explaining the [Ruderman TV Challenge](http://rudermanfoundation.org/the-ruderman-tv-challenge/).

The major tactics we used to build awareness were:

**1. Captioned Videos**

**2. Social Media**

**3. Industry Events**

**4. E-mail Blasts**

**1. Captioned Videos:**

Awareness of the Challenge was built with a series of captioned videos disseminated on social media from February – June 2017. Each of the videos featured a high profile media professional related to disability who announced the Challenge, offered The Ruderman Family Foundation and *Lights! Camera! Access! 2.0* (*LCA2.0*) as resources to provide assistance, and a link for more information.

Separate videos featured:

* [Marlee Matlin](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_dPg-J4gO4)
* [Danny Woodburn](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qbr-J4UPdhQ)
* [William H. Macy](https://www.facebook.com/RudermanFamilyFoundation/videos/1535319469868931/)
* [Stephanie Nogueras](https://www.facebook.com/RudermanFamilyFoundation/videos/1562399343827610/)
* [Angela Rockwood](https://www.facebook.com/RudermanFamilyFoundation/videos/1524390470961831/)
* [Geri Jewell](https://www.facebook.com/RudermanFamilyFoundation/videos/1638758229525054/)

Toward the end of the awareness-raising stage of the Challenge, we also featured one video where director [Julian Higgins explicitly took us up on the Challenge](https://www.facebook.com/RudermanFamilyFoundation/videos/1620860884648122/) and brought Blair Williamson into the video. Williamson is an actor with Down syndrome who Higgins auditioned and cast for the show *Guidance* on Awesomeness TV.

**2. Social Media:**

Social media played a key role in building word-of-mouth and spreading information about the TV Challenge, culminating with a “Call-to-Action” for performers with disabilities to participate in a three-minute follow-up (to last year’s Ruderman White Paper) questionnaire posted on Survey Monkey during the first two weeks in August 2017.

Multiple postings on social media were designed to raise awareness of the TV Challenge targeting the entertainment industry and disability community. In addition to posting the videos listed above, periodic postings about the TV Challenge were included on more than 40 Facebook pages of disability-intersectional entertainment industry organizations.

**3. Industry Events:**

Announcements were made at a variety of industry events in which flyers were also disseminated, including:

February 23 – Creative Artists Agency (CAA) Take Action Day:

Not surprisingly, this event did not include disability as diversity, so flyers announcing the Ruderman TV Challenge were designed and passed around. Danny Woodburn addressed the issue, and *Deadline*reporter Anita Busch [included this exclusion in her coverage](http://deadline.com/2017/02/barbara-boxer-its-not-up-to-meryl-streep-to-tailor-a-message-for-middle-america-1201958412/): *“To the point that there is still much room for progress. During the panel discussion, which was titled “Protecting Vulnerable Communities,” actor Danny Woodburn stood up to criticize organizers for not having a representative of people with disabilities on the panel when the group makes up 20% of the U.S. population. ‘We can’t be left out of the discussion. Ever.’”*

February 24, 2017 – Writers Guild of America West (WGAW):

The Writers with Disabilities Committee met with Diversity executives—for the first time ever—and invited *LCA2.0* producers Loreen Arbus and Tari Hartman Squire to announce the Ruderman TV Challenge and present on *LCA2.0*. Executives included ABC, CBS, Disney, Fox, and NBCUniversal who received our TV Challenge flyer. We thank the WGAW Writers with Disabilities Committee for producing its excellent PSA entitled [*Look Around*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jy-gTl3mgAA) to encourage disability inclusion.

April 3, 2017: CBS/Lights! Camera! Access! 2.0 Flash Mentoring:

CBS Corporate Diversity and CBS Entertainment Diversity hosted LCA2.0 with a panel of industry professionals moderated by Danny Woodburn, and including Gail Williamson (KMR Talent), Jim LeBrecht (Berkeley Sound Artists); DJ Kurs (Artistic Director, Deaf West Theatre); and David Renaud, staff writer, CBS’ *Pure Genius*. The TV Challenge was announced to the audience of media executives and aspiring media professionals with disabilities.

April 24, 2017: Caucus of Producers, Writers & Directors/Lights! Camera! Access! 2.0: Disability Through a Brand New Lens

The Ruderman TV Challenge was announced and flyers handed out. Loreen Arbus moderated the panel that included Allen Rucker (WGAW Chair Writers with Disabilities Committee); Ben Lewin (writer/director *The Sessions*); Scott Silveri (Creator/Executive Producer *Speechless*), Angela Rockwood (model, producer Push Girls) and Sandra Mae Frank, Assistant Director Deaf West Theatre’s *At Home AT The Zoo @ The Wallis* (also Lead Actress Deaf West Theatre’s 2016 Tony Nominated Best Musical Revival *Spring Awakening*).

Additionally, following the April 24 Summit, The Caucus of Producers, Writers & Directors posted a questionnaire about the Ruderman TV Challenge and *LCA2.0* in order to promote the Challenge.

May 3, 2017: Bentonville Film Festival:

The Ruderman TV Challenge was announced during the disability as diversity panel featuring Inclusion Films Workshop creator Joey Travolta and producer Hester Wagner; performer, writer and activist Maysoon Zayid; Jane Seymour; Tari Hartman Squire, and local Arkansas education and rehabilitation specialists.

**4. E-mail Blasts:**

E-mail announcements of the Ruderman TV Challenge were sent to contacts associated with entertainment industry entities and the disability community, including SAG-AFTRA; Caucus of Producers, Writers & Directors; Academy of Television Arts & Sciences; Writers Guild of America West; Directors Guild of America; Breakdown Services; Casting Society of America; networks such as CBS, NBC, ABC, HBO, studios like Fox, Central Casting, plus individual casting directors, producers, agents, writers, executives, and disability-related entities such as Inclusion in the Arts; National Disability Mentoring Coalition; PolicyWorks; Deaf Film Camp; SIGNmation, Inclusion Films Workshop; Meet the Biz; Easterseals Disability Film Challenge and others.

**Part B: Information Gathering**

During the May 14 – 18, 2017 UpFront announcements as to which pilots were ordered to series, we developed three spreadsheets (network, cable, and internet) designed to track progress.

Each spreadsheet contained tabs at the bottom naming the different network, cable or internet distributor with columns to identify 1) name of comedy or drama series; 2) producing studio; 3) creative team; 4) casting director(s); 5) Other Scripted Shows and Notes; and 6) Performers with disabilities auditioned and/or hired.

We felt it important to divide comedy from drama shows for a variety of reasons. For example, most comedy shows are shot on a single location in a soundstage on a studio lot, whereas there are more exterior locations in drama shows. As revealed in the survey of performers, there is a perceived hesitancy to hire performers with physical disabilities in non-series regular roles (with the exception of Robert David Hall on the long-running CBS show, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, Daryl “Chill” Mitchell in the CBS hit, *NCIS: New Orleans*, and RJ Mitte, in AMC’s *Breaking Bad*) due to inconsistencies of wheelchair accessibility and restrooms at exterior locations.

We also felt it was important to know the creative teams and other shows that casting directors cast so that in the future, we can track patterns and trends to further identify champions. This will allow us to offer assistance, support and additional resources of the ever-expanding talent pipeline, particularly to those shows that shoot in locations other than Hollywood and New York where the talent pipeline is more robust and experienced.

This is a key reason why the *LCA2.0* series of Resume Review, Flash Mentoring and Speed Interview Summits plan to expand in 2018-2019 from Hollywood, New York and Washington, DC to also include Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Atlanta and Orlando.

Information was gathered from a variety of sources including casting directors, agents, Inclusion in the Arts, Watchdog Scorecard and most importantly, the performers themselves who completed the three-minute follow-up survey to the first Ruderman White Paper. To achieve the widest reach for the survey, multiple postings on social media were done to raise awareness of the Challenge to the industry and disability community. We posted on Facebook extensively and with the help of multiple allies, similarly to the way we shared the videos in the initial awareness-building stage.

To help build further awareness for the Challenge, the National Disability Mentoring Coalition created this [Medium post](https://medium.com/disabilitymentors/ruderman-tv-challenge-survey-ecfa3c06fcf9) that was disseminated to industry Facebook pages and LinkedIn groups.

**SECTION THREE: DATA ANALYSIS**

**A Changing Awareness**

In the midst of our data collection, two prominent content creators spoke up for disability inclusion. While this is still a rare occurrence, it indicates that the industry is moving in the right direction with more insiders recognizing the value of authentic auditioning and casting.

At a recent open captioned screening at Sony produced by SIGNmation, Edgar Wright, director of the movie *Baby Driver* said the following in connection to casting CJ Jones, a Black, Deaf actor:

I had an amazing time working with CJ Jones … It's quite a tricky part to cast. CJ was one of the only Deaf actors that I actually auditioned. Once I’d seen him perform, and I thought he was fantastic, it was very difficult for me to look at an actor who was pretending to be Deaf. So it became a very clear decision to us that we have to give CJ the part. He’s fantastic! Actually, when I got into the casting of it, it’s actually a revelation to me hearing about that stuff through you (CJ) that I wasn’t as aware that that wasn’t happening. Where to me in the audition process it was very clear that we had to give you the role as a real Deaf actor. It became like a no-brainer to me. It was like, I can’t, I couldn’t even watch the audition tapes of the other actors. I actually feel very proud even though it’s something I wasn’t really conscious that we were doing anything that groundbreaking when I did it. So as I journeyed through talking to you (CJ) I started to realize that you were one of the first African American Deaf actors…I feel very honored that that was the case. And I hope that this is, you know, could be, a kind of breakthrough in terms of more Deaf actors getting roles.

Similarly pro-disability-inclusion are remarks by Scott Silveri upon receiving the Television Academy Honors Award in June 2017 for the breakthrough ABC show *Speechless* that cast Micah Fowler, an actor with cerebral palsy:

Before I was a part of this show, I didn’t care a lick about it. I’m very late to the party. For 20 years, the number of people with disabilities I cast was a whopping zero. I should know better.

I’m here to share my first very positive and fortunate first-hand experience that barriers to casting those with disabilities are false and they are imagined. The rewards are great. There is a real appetite for their stories. I am not saying go out and create a show about disability...

For those of us with a say about who gets on TV and who doesn’t, I simply ask you to recognize part of our responsibility is to represent society as a whole. You can’t do that without representing disability. So please consider this diversity among the very worthy kinds of diversity, which we take seriously.

Thank you to 20th Century Fox for supporting the show from the very beginning. Thank you to ABC for giving us a home, and for treating us with such care.”

In addition to these positive remarks by non-disabled creators, performers with disabilities are also sensing a positive change.

**Survey of Performers with Disabilities**

In our 2016 *Ruderman White Paper on the Employment of Actors with Disabilities* in Television we conducted an on-line survey of performers with disabilities. As noted in that paper, it is difficult to assess how many performers with disabilities there are in total, but if we review ActorsAccess sm of Breakdown Services, the actors’ primary registration site, over 4,000 registered actors self-identify as having a disability.

In 2016, 177 performers completed our survey. This year, 185 did. With these numbers being relatively comparable, we lay out our two years of results side-by-side. The 2016 data is in blue, the 2017 is in red (the table format below is displaying the same information in a different format to ensure greater accessibility of information.)

While the key parts of the survey have stayed identical, some questions cannot be compared because we didn’t ask them in 2016. Those questions are:

* During the last 12 months (July 1, 2016 - July 31, 2017), the number of auditions for scripted television series or pilots (network, cable or internet platforms) that I have received:
* If applicable: the names of the shows you have **auditioned** for: (the answers of which we used – along with other data sources - to track which shows auditioned performers with disabilities)
* During the last 12 months (July 1 2016 - July 31, 2017), the number of times I have been **hired** for scripted television pilots or series (network, cable or internet platforms):
* If applicable: the names of the shows you have been hired for: (the answers of which we used – along with other data sources - to track which shows hired performers with disabilities)

(Note: The numbering of the below questions does not necessarily correspond to the order in which they were listed on our survey.)

1. As a performer with a disability I am … Non-Union vs. Union

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2016 | 2017 |
| Union | 109 | 93 |
| Non-Union | 68 | 90 |

2. I identify as a Performer with a Disability …

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2016 | 2017 |
| Yes | 158 | 173 |
| No | 19 | 11 |

3. My disability is "visible" or “apparent” i.e. noticeable to people when we interact …

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2016 | 2017 |
| Yes | 137 | 152 |
| No | 40 | 33 |

4. I have representation (an agent or manager to solicit work) …

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2016 | 2017 |
| Yes | 109 | 125 |
| No | 68 | 56 |

Note, the number of actors with representation has increased – this is a positive trend and will be a significant factor in the number of auditions moving forward.

5. I have had acting training … (note that on this question, respondents were able to check more than one answer)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2016 | 2017 |
| No training | 16 | 43 |
| Specialized school for acting | 41 | 36 |
| Degree in Performing Arts | 69 | 51 |
| College or University for at least 2 years | 56 | 51 |
| Class led by professional acting teacher | 117 | 117 |

Note: respondents had the ability to select more than one category which is why the numbers tally to more than the total number of respondents.

The following questions only refer to the last 12 months. We have no comparative data from our first 2016 survey as we did not ask these questions. However, the numbers for all of the 2017 questions become a sort of “baseline” for future comparative research to help inform a strategic action plan toward increased employment in front of the camera.

6. During the last 12 months (July 1, 2016 - July 31, 2017), the number of auditions for scripted television series or pilots (network, cable or internet platforms) that I have received:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Number of actors auditioned from July 1, 2016 to July 31, 2017 |
| More than 20 times | 3 |
| 11-20 times | 3 |
| 6-10 times | 8 |
| 1-5 times | 96 |
| 0 times | 75 |

7. During the last 12 months (July 1, 2016 - July 31, 2017), the number of times I was hired for scripted television series or pilots (network, cable or internet platforms):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Number of actors hired from July 1, 2016 to July 31, 2017 |
| More than 20 times | 0 |
| 11-20 times | 1 |
| 6-10 times | 0 |
| 1-5 times | 50 |
| 0 times | 131 |

The final question in our survey was aimed at qualitative data:

8. Can you briefly describe your overall experience in the business as it pertains to your disability? Additionally, if there is one specific example or experience you wish to share anonymously, please share below.

This question has given us valuable qualitative insight. Like last year, we have quantified it for representation in this section. Below is a breakdown of the number of positive, neutral, negative, and no answers:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2016 in raw numbers | 2016 in % | 2017 in raw numbers | 2017 in % |
| No answer | 27 | 15.3 | 56 | 30.3 |
| Positive | 15 | 8.5 | 19 | 10.3 |
| Neutral | 51 | 28.8 | 43 | 23.2 |
| Negative | 75 | 42.4 | 67 | 36.2 |

**Survey Analysis**

We can see that even though most actors with disabilities have training and representation, they receive woefully few auditions and land even fewer roles. We recommend that future research also surveys actors **without** disabilities in order to have exact comparison data. However, even without direct comparison the fact that a vast majority of actors with disabilities have not been hired for an acting gig in the past year is disconcerting and indicative of discrimination.

While the qualitative data differences are very small, it is worth nothing that there is a very slight increase in performers with disabilities reporting positive experiences in the industry (1.8%) and a small decrease in the reporting of negative ones (6.2%). A recurring issue we identified is the need for qualified and certified sign language interpreters on set, as well as for wheelchair accessible auditions and sets. Below are some particularly salient of the 132 comments we’ve collected:

Negative:

* I would still describe entry into TV/Film acting for actors with disabilities virtually impossible. If one only auditions a handful of times per year, it is difficult to build on the audition experience to improve one's technique. The auditions become much more important because one is aware the opportunity is very rare. Even the best actors would find it hard to work under those circumstances, yet we do. It is that much more frustrating when you do well, and they still cast a non-disabled actor.
* I was the first person with a visible disability ever to be cast in a primetime series. The role of Cousin Geri on the NBC sitcom, *The Facts of Life*. I also received Emmy consideration for my role of Jewel on HBO's *Deadwood*. In my career that goes back 4 decades, I have been sent out on fewer than 40 auditions. ~Geri Jewell
* I was merely a token and treated as a token figure/interpreter--not as a performer in my own right.
* I feel that I have been able to audition for roles that pertain to my disability but also roles that do not. The casting community seems to be open to the idea of bringing us in for work, and even seek us out for some of it. Once it gets to hiring is where it seems to stop at least in my experience. A few roles I have been up for (along with my disabled peers) have gone to people without disabilities and that can become frustrating as well.
* In my first few weeks in New York I took a class with a commercial casting director. Our focus that class period was on close-ups. I did the audition and the casting director said "Great job. Are you able to come in on Thursday for this? See class, I do call students in for real auditions." I was so excited, I went up after class to ask if I should prepare anything. The casting director says "Yeah, you know, I'm not actually going to be able to call you in. See, we were in close up and I didn't notice your disability. I just forgot about it. If I brought you in I'm afraid they would laugh me out of the room.
* It's had its ups and downs. "Disabled Character" roles don't come along that often and I wish I'd get seen more for roles that aren't disability specific, the teacher, the lawyer, the mother..... I've been acting for over 15 years and have been a member for SAG/AFTRA for 12 years and have worked hard, trained hard, created my own content, been proactive, etc...... and it can be frustrating because I am not where I'd like to be in my career. (I am though thankful for the successes I've had.)
* I had a guy point-blank tell me that if any parts for blind people became available, [he would] keep me in mind. … I don't want to just wait for the one part for a total of 1% come along every year!

Positive

* My experience overall in the business has been quite interesting. Of course, I had the privilege to experience it as an able-bodied individual and now while seated in a wheelchair it's a whole other world. I created and produced a TV show... And during the pitch meeting I was able to go around Hollywood to all the different networks to share my story... And it was quite interesting to see all of the reactions of each individual at those meetings. Most of the folks didn't even know what to do with me being in a wheelchair. As I shared my stories they couldn't [fathom] or visualize how I possibly could execute most of the daily tasks. Later, I realized I needed to create a vision board... An actual tool to showcase exactly how each event or daily task took place. Slowly but surely my reactions started to turn around and become positive. Thereafter, the show was sold!
* In OZ, I was hired as an everyday soccer mom, wife of a man who needed a new kidney and was bumped for a prisoner. The role had nothing to do with disability and, in fact, I was sitting the whole time, so no disability was even shown. A fine example of hiring a PWD for a non-descript, non-specific role, simply because she was the right ACTOR for the ROLE, regardless of disability.
* I feel like all the people that are running the audition or working on a set are very considerate and accommodating. Everyone always seems to have a story they want to share about a friend or a family member that also has a disability. I always get the feeling that they're happy to see me.

**Hiring Performers with Disabilities across Networks, Cable, and Internet Platforms**

Due to the multiple data sources, and no “one source” like the SAG-AFTRA Casting Data Report, our project, our data collection, and our preliminary results should not be considered as comprehensive and final. We expect that the full impact of our Challenge will only manifest itself in the coming months following the release of these preliminary results because the 2017 – 2018 television season is just starting, and in some cases, pilots picked up as mid-season replacements have not yet started production.

With that said, below are the numbers we have been able to verify for auditioning and casting of performers with disabilities for the recent pilot season and current TV season across all three delivery platforms.

**Network:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Network** | **Number of Shows (Series/Pilots) that Hired PwDs** | **Series/Pilot names** |
| ABC | 5 | *Designated Survivor, Quantico, Speechless, Untitled Marc Cherry/Reba McEntire pilot, Ten Days in the Valley* |
| CBS | 11 | *Blue Bloods, Bull, CSI: Crime Scene Investigation, Doubt, Elementary, MacGyver, Madam Secretary, NCIS: Los Angeles, NCIS: New Orleans, Pure Genius, Wisdom of the Crowd* |
| CW | 0 |  |
| Fox | 1 | *Lethal Weapon* |
| NBC | 3 | *Blacklist, Game of Silence, Heartbeat* |

**Cable:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Channel** | **Number of Shows (Series/Pilots) that Hired PwDs** | **Series/Pilot names** |
| AMC | 1 | *Fear of the Walking Dead* |
| Audience Network | 0 |  |
| Bravo | 0 |  |
| Cinemax | 1 | *Quarry* |
| Comedy Central | 1 | *Broad City* |
| CMT | 0 |  |
| Disney Channel | 0 |  |
| Disney XD | 1 | *Kirby Buckets* |
| Freeform | 1 | *Switched at Birth* |
| FX | 2 | *American Horror Story, Feud: Joan and Bette* |
| HBO | 3 | *Curb Your Enthusiasm, Game of Thrones, Vice Principals* |
| History Channel | 0 |  |
| Nickelodeon | 1 | *Loud House* |
| Pop | 1 | *Nightcap* |
| Showtime | 2 | *Homeland, Shameless* |
| Spike | 0 |  |
| Starz | 1 | *Survivor’s Remorse* |
| SYFY | 1 | *Magicians* |
| TBS | 1 | *Detour* |
| TNT | 0 |  |
| TV Land | 0 |  |
| USA Drama | 0 |  |
| VH1 | 0 |  |

**Internet:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Platform** | **Number of Shows (Series/Pilots) that Hired PwDs** | **Series/Pilot names** |
| Amazon | 2 | *Borsch, Love You More* |
| CBS Internet | 0 |  |
| Crackle | 0 |  |
| Epix | 0 |  |
| Hulu | 3 | *Chance, Difficult People, The Path* |
| Netflix | 2 | *Lady Dynamite, Master of None* |

It is important to note that Web pilots and series also auditioned and hired performers with disabilities, dispelling the myth of increased production costs: *Don’t Shoot the Messenger, D.P.W, FDR, Guidance, Life Interrupted, Lunch Time Special, My Gimpy Life, Overexposed*

**The Connection between Auditioning and Hiring**

In terms of comparing auditions to hires of performers with disabilities for the July 1, 2016 – July 31, 2017 data collection phase, here is the data:

**Total of Auditions vs Hires of Performers with Disabilities by Platform**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Platforms** | **Number of Shows (Series/Pilots) that Auditioned PwD** | **Number of Shows (Series/Pilots) that hired PWDs** |
| Network Totals | 45 | 20 |
| Cable Totals | 31 | 17 |
| Internet Totals | 15 | 6 |

The grand total of these platforms combined is as follows:

91 shows/pilots auditioned performers with disabilities, 43 show/pilots hired performers with disabilities. This means that for the above indicated timeframe, 60% of all shows/pilots auditioned and 28.5% of all shows/pilots hired performers with disabilities.

**Breakdown by Network:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of Shows (Series/Pilots) that Auditioned PwD** | **Number of Shows (Series/Pilots) that hired PWDs** | **Names of Shows/Pilots (hires underlined & bolded)** |
| ABC | 11 | 5 | **Designated Survivor,** How to Get Away with Murder, Libby & Malcom, The Middle, Modern Family, **Quantico,** Roseanne, Scandal, **Speechless, Untitled Marc Cherry/Reba McEntire pilot, Ten Days in the Valley** |
| CBS | 14 | 11 | **Blue Bloods, Bull, CSI: Crime Scene Investigation, Doubt, Elementary, MacGyver, Madam Secretary,** Me, Myself and I, **NCIS: Los Angeles, NCIS: New Orleans, Pure Genius,** Training Day, Untitled Jenny Lumet pilot, **Wisdom of the Crowd** |
| CW | 1 | 0 | Riverdale |
| Fox | 11 | 1 | Empire, The Exorcist, Fresh Off the Boat, Ghosted, Gotham, LA to Vegas, Life in Pieces, **Lethal Weapon**, Lucifer, The Mick, The Passage |
| NBC | 8 | 3 | **Blacklist**, Blindspot, **Game of Silence**, Gone, **Heartbeat**, Law & Order: SVU, Mysteries of Laura, This is Us |

**Breakdown by Cable:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of Shows (Series/Pilots) that Auditioned PwD** | **Number of Shows (Series/Pilots) that hired PWDs** | **Names of Shows/Pilots (hires underlined & bolded)** |
| AMC | 2 | 1 | **Fear of the Walking Dead**, Halt and Catch Fire |
| Bravo | 1 | 0 | Odd Mom Out |
| Cinemax | 1 | 1 | **Quarry** |
| Comedy Central | 1 | 1 | **Broad City** |
| CMT | 2 | 0 | Nashville, Still the King |
| Disney Channel | 1 | 0 | Raven’s Home |
| Disney XD | 2 | 1 | Herby, **Kirby Buckets** |
| Freeform | 1 | 1 | **Switched at Birth** |
| FX | 2 | 2 | **American Horror Story, Feud: Joan and Bette** |
| HBO | 4 | 3 | **Curb Your Enthusiasm, Game of Thrones**, VEEP**, Vice Principals** |
| Nickelodeon | 2 | 1 | Henry Danger, **Loud House** |
| Pop | 1 | 1 | **Nightcap** |
| Showtime | 3 | 2 | **Homeland,** Ray Donovan**, Shameless** |
| Starz | 2 | 1 | One Percent, **Survivor’s Remorse** |
| SYFY | 1 | 1 | **Magicians** |
| TBS | 3 | 1 | **Detour,** The Last O.G., World’s End |
| USA Drama | 2 | 0 | Queen of the South, Shooter |

**Breakdown by Internet Content Creator:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Number of Shows (Series/Pilots) that Auditioned PwD** | **Number of Shows (Series/Pilots) that hired PWDs** | **Names of Shows/Pilots (hires underlined & bolded)** |
| Amazon | 2 | 2 | **Borsch, Love You More** |
| Audience | 1 | 0 | Loudermilk |
| Crackle | 1 | 0 | The Oath |
| Hulu | 4 | 3 | **Chance, Difficult People, The Path,** Time After Time |
| Netflix | 8 | 2 | Fundamentals of Caring, House of Cards, **Lady Dynamite,** Luke Cage, **Master of None**, Santa Clarita Diet, Seven Seconds, Stranger Things |

**Additional web pilots and series that hired performers with disabilities:**

*Don’t Shoot the Messenger, D.W.P., Guidance, Life Interrupted, Lunch Time Special, Overexposed*

Auditions are crucial for performers to get exposure as well as experience auditioning. Once casting directors audition performers with disabilities, they become “known talent.” While the number of hires of performers with disabilities remains woefully low, we are optimistic that with an increase in auditions, if an actor is not hired for the role they auditioned for originally, we hope and expect in the future that actor will be invited to audition for a role that might be a better fit, now that they are known to the casting directors and production teams. Time will tell.

We’d like to commend all the delivery platforms who have auditioned and cast performers with disabilities, now and for the remainder of this television season, well into the future.

We’d also like to note that Fox Studios (not to be confused with the Fox Broadcast Network) also excelled at auditioning performers with disabilities. According to the Ruderman Foundation survey, 14 of 23 Fox drama shows and 9 of 13 Fox comedy shows have already auditioned performers with disabilities

**Data Conclusions**

Based on our data collection, there are 79 performers with disabilities hired for the past pilot and current television season across all delivery platforms. It’s important to state that we did not distinguish between types of characters. This is a data limitation. We do not know if the roles these actors were cast for were principal characters or five-lines-and-under characters, or simply background characters, though we suspect the majority were not principal characters.

To our knowledge there is no comprehensive study that has looked at pilots and series across network, cable, and internet platforms, so we cannot assess what percentage of the total pool of actors these 79 performers with disabilities represent. However, we can draw some estimates. GLAAD’s “Where Are We on TV” tallies all regular primetime broadcast scripted characters and their [latest report](http://glaad.org/files/WWAT/WWAT_GLAAD_2016-2017.pdf) puts that number at 895. Given the specificity of the variables that report measures (primetime, broadcast, and regular characters), the number 895 is only a fraction of the total available roles across all content platforms, including minor, guest, and background characters.

But for the sake of making a point we’ve taken this number as the hypothetical total of all roles. 79 out of 895 is 8.8%. So this would hypothetically mean that of all actors hired last pilot season and this television season thus far only 8.8% have disabilities. Again, this is a vast overestimate due to the extrapolation parameters we’ve set. But even this highly inflated number comes nowhere near the 20% of the population with disabilities. However, we undertook this hypothetical exercise to demonstrate that even under the most optimistic circumstances, performers with disabilities are egregiously underrepresented and near-absent from our screens. It is our sincere hope that with more awareness-building through *LCA2.0* Collaborative partners, Inclusion in the Arts, SAG-AFTRA and through more “Calls-to-Action,” like our Challenge, this reality will change for the better.

We are hopeful that this Ruderman TV Challenge will serve as a catalyst to spark auditioning and hiring of performers with disabilities across the entertainment landscape. We have observed patterns of bumps when awareness is raised about inclusive casting. For example, Anita Hollander observes:

The AMPTP/SAG-AFTRA PWD Task Force meeting in Dec 2014 created a bump in auditions in 2015. We met again last fall on November 1, 2016 and again I observed much more actual casting activity on the Watchdog Scorecard in 2017 in TV.

The most significant bump I saw this year was in Live Theatre in NYC, with at least 12 AEA simultaneous contracts on & off Broadway going to PWDs, while regional theatres have been progressing throughout the country in PWD lead roles (Sacramento, Berkeley, LA, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Miami), the most recent being California Shakespeare (Berkeley) hiring a young black actress with CP as Laura in Glass Menagerie (Phoebe Fico) and a new production of Tribes in SoCal with a Deaf actor in the lead, happening right now.

In addition to building awareness about the social and business imperative of inclusive and authentic auditioning and casting, we believe that talent pipelines are crucial. Certain cities, like New York, LA, and Chicago, for example, have remarkable pools of talent with disabilities and we realize that this might play a part in the decision to audition and cast performers with disabilities. The more local performers with disabilities are available in shooting locations, the greater the likelihood that they will be cast.

In the next Section (PRO-ACTIVE INITIATIVES, EMERGING TRENDS & MOVING FORWARD), we list examples of emerging trends and embrace some recommendations for best practices when it comes to nurturing talent pipelines.

**SECTION FOUR: PRO-ACTIVE INITIATIVES, EMERGING TRENDS & MOVING FORWARD**

Through the process of this Ruderman TV Challenge, we want to acknowledge several outstanding pro-active initiatives and emerging trends moving forward, representing a various aspects of the entertainment industry. These are a sample of emerging best practices:

**CBS:**

The authors have their eye on CBS and congratulate its 11 series and pilots that have hired performers with disabilities, including series regulars Robert David Hall (*CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*) and Daryl “Chill” Mitchell (*NCIS: New Orleans*) and background actor in *Madam Secretary* to reflect the fact that the real State Department (according to the Office of Personnel Management Report) hired 8.38% of employees with disabilities (non-foreign service). In addition to that, we commend CBS Corporation Diversity and CBS Entertainment Diversity for hosting the April 3, 2017 *LCA2.0* Flash Mentoring and Networking Summit, plus scheduling subsequent informational interviews with performers with disabilities, *CBS News/LCA2.0/DisBeat* internship for college students with disabilities is now in its third year. This is a great example of the pipeline building addressed in the previous section.

**Central Casting**

During the course of our TV Challenge, *LCA2.0* worked with Central Casting on several series to locate background adult and child performers with disabilities. At the time of this White Paper release after our July 31, 2017 information gathering cycle was complete, our outreach to secure 10 kids with disabilities for *NCIS* resulted in over 65 submissions. This tapped a nerve in both the demand and supply side of the talent employment equation, and fortifies the talent pipeline for *LCA2.0* Collaborative partners and Central Casting, and at the same time points to an emerging trend in hiring performers with disabilities in background and atmosphere roles.

The authors encourage content creators to cast performers with disabilities in the background of all series to “more accurately portray the American Scene.”

**Fortifying the Youth Talent Pipeline:**

Increase in the desire of youth with disabilities to develop media careers can be in part attributed to the success of increased positive role models, mentors, and success of organizations such as Deaf Film Camp, Inclusion Films Workshop, Changing the Face of Beauty, Runway of Dreams and other youth art programs that are inclusive of kids with disabilities. As a result, *LCA2.0* partners Cornell University and the National Disability Mentoring Coalition (NDMC) are working to create the first-ever Media Mentoring Opportunity Pipeline to identify, match and track media mentors and mentees with disabilities.

Mentors will include not only performers, but also professionals with disabilities who have developed careers below the line and behind the scenes like Kaitlyn Yang, CEO of Alpha Studios and Jim LeBrecht, CEO of Berkeley Sound Artists.

In addition, PolicyWorks is customizing its “College to Careers” curriculum for media so that youth, traditional and non-traditional aged students with disabilities can learn the basics of each media sector (TV, advertising, movies, news, theatre and interactive) to sharpen their competitive edge. The next move is to encourage content creators to continue to cast performers with disabilities in recurring, guest star and principal roles as well. At the same time, we are developing strategies for youth with disabilities to include media-related pre-employment skill building in their Individual Education Plan (IEP).

**American Association of Advertising Agencies (4As):**

Advertising is a business component and cousin of television series and has always strived to represent real customers. Just like authentic representation in scripted series is crucial to the lived experience of people with disabilities, so too is advertising, a key player in the challenge to create diverse and accurate disability representation on our screens.

In recent years, disability advocacy has increased in significant ways including advertising executive [Josh Loebner’s blog](file:///C:\Users\kkopic.CORP\Documents\Ruderman%20TV%20Challenge\advertisinganddisability.org), Katie Dricoll’s Changing the Face of Beauty, Mindy Scheier’s Runway of Dreams, Rick Guidotti’s Positive Exposure and individual models like Shaholly Ayers, model for Nordstrom now being covered by [people.com](http://people.com) and Angela Rockwood, *Push Girls* producer and Nordstrom model who are gaining much-deserved and long-overdue visibility.

To document and help drive this emerging disability inclusion trend, the American Association of Advertising Agencies is collaborating with the *Lights! Camera! Access! 2.0* Collaborative to design and write the *Disability-Inclusive Diversity Competitive Edge*, sponsored by The Loreen Arbus Foundation*.* Josh Loebner, Angela Rockwood, and Tari Hartman Squire are authoring this first-ever disability employment and portrayal tool kit and handbook for advertising agencies, scheduled for 2018 release. To underscore the importance of disability and intersectionality issues, guest writers include articles by disability-media and thought leaders and key influencers such as Maysoon Zayid, Vilissa Thompson, Emily Ladau, Beth Haller, Dominick Evans and others. We encourage readers to check out the Disability Intersectionality Resources section of this White Paper to meet these disability thought leaders.

**BBDO:**

Over the years, BBDOhas created effective disability-savvy commercials including Wells Fargo (two lesbian moms adopting a Deaf daughter), Guinness Wheelchair Basketball, and the iconic 1980s DuPont commercial with returning Vietnam Veteran Bill Dempy playing basketball on his prosthetic leg. So it is no surprise that BBDO is one of the core partners of *LCA2.0*, with BBDO executives JD Michaels and Casey Adams serving as mentors, hiring Storm Smith, the first Deaf African American filmmaker for BBDO’s prestigious year-long Creative Residency program, and launching its *Stories About Us Campaign* to solicit fiction from storytellers with disabilities. BBDO will also provide the forward for the 4As *Disability-Inclusive Diversity Competitive Edge* – a comprehensive disability in advertising handbook for employment and portrayals scheduled to be released in 2018.

**Media Mentoring Opportunity Pipeline:**

At the time of this release, *LCA2.0* is in conversation with industry associations across genres in television, film, advertising, news, theater and interactive, unions, universities, arts organizations, government entities and grass roots national disability organizations to fortify the talent pipeline.

Due to high demand, *LCA2.0* will continue to produce its regional Resume Review, Speed Interview and Flash Mentoring Summits in Hollywood; New York; Washington, DC and in 2018-2019 plans to expand to Boston; Chicago; San Francisco; Atlanta and Orlando.

**Other Innovative Initiatives:**

While this Ruderman TV Challenge is focused on casting of performers with disabilities in scripted television, we want to acknowledge other innovative, proactive initiatives to increase industry-wide employment in front of and behind the camera.

It is important to note that with the proliferation of accessible technology, recording devices such as the iPhone, and Do It Yourself (DIY) online self distribution, an increasing number of performers with disabilities are not just waiting around for auditions to come their way, but are pro-actively taking charge of their own careers and are in the process of creating their own Deaf and disability-savvy content across delivery platforms. One of the first was Oscar-winning Marlee Matlin who created the YouTube web series, [*My Deaf Family*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-Gc85nQK8w) in 2010, years before *Switched at Birth*; followed by Teal Sherer with [*My Gimpy Life*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjdN81GmUTc0) in 2011 to more recently Craig Fogel’s [*Don’t Shoot the Messenger*](http://www.themessengerasl.com/episodes.html) that was an Official Selection of the 2016 Toronto Webfest and Steve Wisnoff’s [*Life Interrupted*](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCciDGtXfgDvDqkLr8n__XJg). In addition, performers like Maysoon Zayid are developing their own television series.

Performers and filmmakers with disabilities are also collaborating on groundbreaking projects such as the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge, participating in Deaf Film Camp, Inclusion Film Workshops, ASL Cabaret, Performing Arts Studio West and other projects.

The resources in the next section are not exhaustive, but will provide a variety of opportunities for aspiring and current media professionals, as together, we work toward disability-inclusive diversity in all forms of entertainment—now, and for generations to come.

**SECTION FIVE: RESOURCES**

**In Front of the Camera/Where to Find Performers with Disabilities:**

Breakdown Services/Actors Access (over 4,000 self-identified performers with disabilities): [www.actorsaccess.com](http://www.actorsaccess.com)

Inclusion in the Arts: (consultation on portrayals and casting performers with disabilities): [http://inclusioninthearts.org](http://inclusioninthearts.org/)

Deaf West Theatre: <http://www.deafwest.org>

National Theatre of the Deaf: [www.ntd.org](http://www.ntd.org)

Meet the Biz: <http://meetthebiz.net>

SAG-AFTRA EEO & Diversity: <http://www.sagaftra.org/content/committees>

National Arts & Disability Center: <https://www.semel.ucla.edu/nadc/arts-employment>

SIGNmation: <http://www.signmation.com/index.html>

Performing Arts Studio West: <http://www.pastudiowest.com>

Changing the Face of Beauty: <http://changingthefaceofbeauty.org>

Actors for Autism: <https://www.actorsforautism.org>

Central Casting: <https://www.centralcasting.com/register/>

Damon Brooks & Associates: <http://damonbrooks.com>

KMR/Diversity Talent: <http://kmrtalent.com/diversity/>

Axis Dance: <http://www.axisdance.org>

Infinite Dance Flow: <http://www.infiniteflowdance.org>

Amputees in Hollywood: www.amputeesinhollywood.com

Born To Act Players: <http://www.borntoactplayers.com/>

Mediability: <https://mediability.pro>

EPIC Players (NYC): <https://www.epicplayersnyc.org>

Veterans in Film & Television: [www.vftla.org](http://www.vftla.org)

Veteran Artists Program: [www.veteranartistprogram.org](http://www.veteranartistprogram.org)

**Talent behind the Camera and Authentic Disability Portrayals:**

Deaf Film Camp: <http://www.deaffilmcamp.com>

Inclusion Films Workshop: <https://www.inclusionfilms.com/new-page-1/>

Easterseals Disability Film Challenge (open to aspiring filmmakers with disabilities):

[http://www.disabilityfilmchallenge.com](http://www.disabilityfilmchallenge.com/)

DisBeat (authentic disability sources for journalists and screenwriters):

[www.adalegacy.com/DisBeat](http://www.adalegacy.com/DisBeat)

National Center on Disability & Journalism: <http://ncdj.org>

Rooted in Rights: <http://www.rootedinrights.org>

National Disability Leadership Alliance (National Disability Organizations): <http://www.disabilityleadership.org>

Exceptional Minds: <http://www.exceptionalmindsstudio.org>

AAPD/Tony Coelho NBCU Internship: <http://www.aapd.com/nbcuniversal-tony-coelho-media-scholarship-program/>

Words I Wheel By: <http://wordsiwheelby.com>

Why People-First Language Doesn’t Always Put the Person First: <https://www.thinkinclusive.us/why-person-first-language-doesnt-always-put-the-person-first/>

Alpha Studio/ Kaitlyn Yang: <http://www.alphastudios.com>

Berkeley Sound Artists/Jim LeBrecht: <http://www.berkeleysoundartists.com>

SuperFest: <http://www.superfestfilm.com>

ReelAbilities: <http://reelabilities.org>

**Other Disability-Media Related Resources:**

Ruderman White Paper on Employment of Actors with Disabilities in Television:

<http://www.rudermanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/TV-White-Paper_final.final_.pdf>

USC Annenberg’s Diversity, Media and Social Change: <http://annenberg.usc.edu/sites/default/files/Dr_Stacy_L_Smith-Inequality_in_900_Popular_Films.pdf>

GLAAD Where Are We On TV: Annual Diversity Report: [www.glaad.org](http://www.glaad.org/)

National Arts & Disability Center: <https://www.semel.ucla.edu/nadc/arts-employment>

National Endowment for the Arts/Office of Accessibility: <https://www.arts.gov/accessibility/accessibility-resources/nea-office-accessibility>

Kennedy Center’s Leadership Exchange in Arts & Disability (LEAD):[*https://www.kennedy-center.org/accessibility/education/lead/*](https://www.kennedy-center.org/accessibility/education/lead/)

WGBH: National Center for Accessible Media (captions and audio descriptions)*:* [*http://ncam.wgbh.org*](http://ncam.wgbh.org)

*LCA 2.0* Clinton Global Initiative (Commitment to Action):

<https://www.clintonfoundation.org/clinton-global-initiative/commitments/light-camera-access-20>

*LCA 2.0*/EIN SOF Communications (employment and portrayals): [www.EINSOFcommunications.com](http://www.einsofcommunications.com/)

Media Access Awards: [http://mediaaccessawards.com](http://mediaaccessawards.com/)

SAG-AFTRA Diversity Committees(including PwD): [www.sagaftra.org/content/committees](http://www.sagaftra.org/content/committees)

Writers Guild of America West – Diversity: <http://www.wga.org/the-guild/advocacy/diversity>

Disability & Media Alliance Project: <https://d-map.org>

Rick Boggs (audio description): www.audioeyes.com

Bridge Multimedia (captions and audio descriptions): [www.bridgemultimedia.com](http://www.bridgemultimedia.com)

Woman of Her Word (audio descriptions): www.womanofherword.com

**Resources Regarding Intersectional Disability Issues:**

#FilmDis/Dominick Evans: [www.dominickevans.com](http://www.dominickevans.com)

(which included an informative piece: “What is #Cripface and Why Is Discussing It Important” <https://storify.com/dominickevans/filmdis-discusses-what-is-cripface-and-why-is-dis> )

Disability Visibility Project/Alice Wong: <https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com>

Ramp Your Voice/Vilissa Thompson: <http://rampyourvoice.com>

Black-ish & Speechless: The Night that Primetime TV Got It Right: <http://rampyourvoice.com/?s=black-ish>

Accessible Hollywood/Tatiana Lee: https://accessiblehollywood.com

Lead on Network/Day Al-Mohammed: <http://leadonnetwork.org/wordpress/intro/>

Krip Hop Nation/Leroy Moore: <http://kriphopnation.com>

Musings of An Angry Black Womyn/Anita Cameron: <http://www.angryblackwomyn.com/blog/all-slurs-arent-the-n-word>

Media Dis & Dat Blog/Beth Haller: <http://media-dis-n-dat.blogspot.com>

How Did We Get Into This Mess?/David Perry <http://www.thismess.net>