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## *Celebrate Diversity with a Screening of Culturally Significant Films*

Movies can be more than just spandex-clad superheroes saving the world from imminent destruction. They can also be a major method of cultural expression that can both entertain and educate viewers on the worldview of the filmmaker and characters. While a film's basic plot chronicles a glimpse into the life of the protagonist, her motivations and actions may be influenced by cultural factors. The story, the setting, and the characters may provide deeper insight into particular cultural themes that a filmmaker is trying to advance. It is certainly one way that we can educate ourselves on other cultures that are not our own.

### TO WONG FOO, THANKS FOR EVERYTHING! JULIE NEWMAR

The State of Tennessee became the first state to officially pass a law explicitly banning drag shows in public spaces. Fourteen other states have anti-drag-specific legislation pending and nearly thirty states have education and bathroom bills targeting queer and transgender citizens. Now more than ever may be the best time to screen this 1995 iconic queer film.

In *Too Wong Foo*, Patrick Swayze, Wesley Snipes, and John Leguizamo play drag queens road-tripping from New York to Los Angeles to compete in a national drag beauty pageant. Their car breaks down along the way, and they are forced to stay in a rural Midwestern town while awaiting a replacement part for their car. The movie chronicles their interaction with the townspeople and how the queens teach the townspeople to be themselves, let go, and find their inner strength. Say the queens: "Your approval is not needed / Approval neither desired, nor required." Themes of being yourself and finding your strength when faced with societal adversity are central to LGBT+ movies. This particular movie was also significant in that it starred three straight, major A-list Hollywood actors who completely committed to the roles.

*Left to Right: Wesley Snipes, Patrick Swayze, John Leguizamo*

### DO THE RIGHT THING

This 1989 Spike Lee Joint stars Ossie Davis and Danny Aiello and explores the racial tension between an Italian-American pizzeria owner and its African-American neighborhood residents. In this film, Mookie is a delivery man at a local pizzeria owned by Sal. Sal's pizzeria contains a "Wall of Fame" that is decorated with famous Italian-Americans. Mookie's friend, Buggin' Out, asks Sal about why there are no Black Americans on the wall since the pizzeria is located in a predominantly Black neighborhood. Sal responds that

*Danny Aielllo, L, and Ossie Davis, R.*

the pizzeria is his business, and he will decorate as he sees fit. Buggin' Out then initiates a boycott of Sal's, and tensions erupt from there, leading to violence and tragedy. The film explores the tension not only between people of different races/cultures/religion, but intra-cultural tension on how to fight racism, i.e., through violence or through peaceful protest. It also explores themes of personal morality in the context of cultural influences.

*Do The Right Thing* was nominated for Best Original Screenplay (Spike Lee) and Best Supporting Actor (Danny Aiello). In 1999, the film was deemed "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" by the Library of Congress and was selected for preservation by the National Film Registry.

## THE JOY LUCK CLUB

*The Joy Luck Club* is a 1993 film based on the eponymous novel by Amy Tan. The film centers on four Chinese immigrants, all older women, who gather regularly to eat and play mahjong. Both the novel and the film are structured around this gathering and cut to numerous vignettes, which include their stories about immigrating from China to the United States, marrying, having daughters, and the conflict experienced trying to raise their American daughters with traditional Chinese values. The movie depicts the complexity of mother-daughter relationships: there is always a strong bond in spite of generational, and cultural conflicts. Themes of immigration, values of tradition, language, and mistranslation are also pervasive as these women struggled to make new lives in a foreign country.

This film was the first major studio film that had an all-Asian cast. In addition, *The Joy Luck Club* is significant in its non-stereotypical portrayal of Asian female characters. Many of the actresses cast would later interview about how most of their prior roles were as objectified Asian stereotypes.

*The primary cast of the Joy Luck Club*