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Reboot, Repeat? Nailing Nostalgic TV For A 21st Century Audience

The world has moved on since the likes of Sex And The City and Frasier were last on our screens, so the forthcoming reboots need to as well.



By Adam Bloodworth



GETTY

The Sex And The City cast are returning in a reboot (bar Kim Cattrall, right)

It might be 2021, but there's a bout of TV reboots coming out which are getting fans nostalgic for the nineties and noughties.

Frasier, Gossip Girl, Sex And The City and Friends are all making comebacks. Almost 20 years since Gunther last cast Rachel a flirtatious smile in Central Perk, something's pulling them back in to order more coffee.

Could it be the cash? It's been reported that HBO Max will pay each Friends

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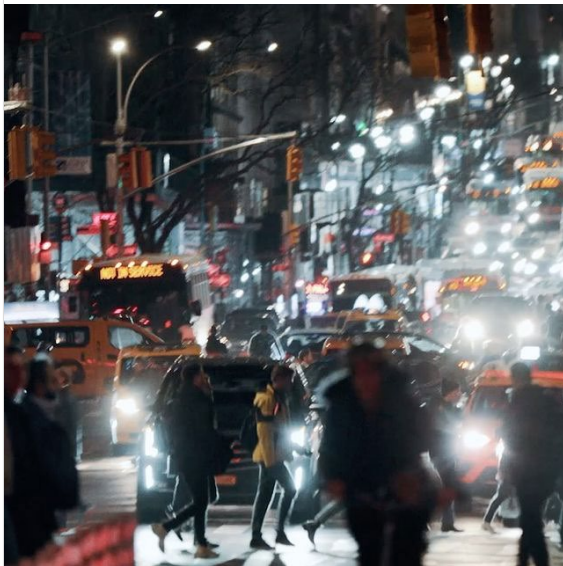
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cast member a cool \$2.5 million when the group reform later this year for an unscripted show looking back at the hit sitcom, while SJP and co are rumoured to be getting paid over one million dollars per episode for the Sex And The City reboot.





Perhaps nostalgia for bygone times when the world was a simpler, non-pandemic place, plays a part in audiences' desire to see these times reflected on screen. A Drum survey suggested so, proving comedy, nostalgia and family viewing shot up under lockdown.



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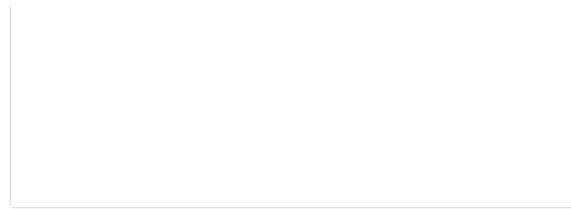
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I couldn't help but wonder... where are they now?
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But what must these reboots do to bring the feels of yesterday, and crucially, not feel tired and outdated - especially when it comes to diversity and inclusion. Certainly re-runs of *Sex And The City* and *Friends* can be an uncomfortable watch.

We spoke to four industry experts to hear their thoughts on the future of TV reboots.

Asio Highsmith, actor: “New York is kind of past *Sex And The City*’s influence at this point in time”

*Now working in property management, Asio played one of a handful Black characters in *Sex And The City*, a partner of Samantha’s called Chivon*



NBC

Chivon and Samantha in *Sex And The City*

“TV has started to be more representative of what’s going on right now. These writers are listening to what Instagram, Twitter and TikTok are saying. It’s a universe or galaxy that exists today that did not exist in 2000. That was a long time ago, right?”

“New York has changed so much. I think *Sex And The City* definitely influenced it a lot back then, but I think that New York is kind of past its

influence at this point in time.

“Back in the day there were a lot of questions, people wondered why there wasn’t more of an ethnic or Black presence on the show.

“There are so many things they could do by bringing a couple of Black girls on the show... bringing the Black women’s background to the show. I’m pretty sure they’ll be college educated, well-rounded Black women having their ups and downs in the city along with the other girls. That just seems like a no-brainer to me.

“It’s good to add some spice to a New York situation, bring it closer to a real situation. That was the issue with the other one, it wasn’t represented as well as it could have been back in the day, with colour on the show.

“I’m currently not acting, I’ve gotten into real estate, but I think about the show all the time. I shot on my birthday, I think it was my 26th birthday so everytime my birthday comes around I always think of the show fondly. They brought me out a cake and sang me happy birthday on set, it was a very special moment that I’ll never forget.”

Ginnia Cheng, comedian: “My absolute dream would be to see Carrie type out on her little laptop, ‘Is he right? Am I racist?’. And if she admits ‘Yes, I may be a little bit - but I’m willing to change’, I’d only love her more.”

Ginnia is a comedian working with the BBC’s Writersroom sessions, designed to help the broadcaster produce more diverse content



HALE DENHOLM, F&M MEDIA

Ginnia Cheng

“Growing up in the 90s and 00s, girls of colour just got used to not seeing anyone who looked like you on telly. It’s embarrassing to admit it wasn’t until Charlotte adopted an Asian baby in the very last episode of Sex And The City I realised - hey, that’s the first person of colour in the main cast!

“But we’re sick of shows adding ‘characters of colour’ just to tick the boxes. The responsibility shouldn’t lie solely on these new minority characters to carry the diverse and inclusive storylines. It should be down to the main characters we already know to dive headfirst into the issues that have been raised.

“The truth is - as much as I adore them, if they were real characters, they would so totally get it wrong. We all do. It would be hilarious to watch them get

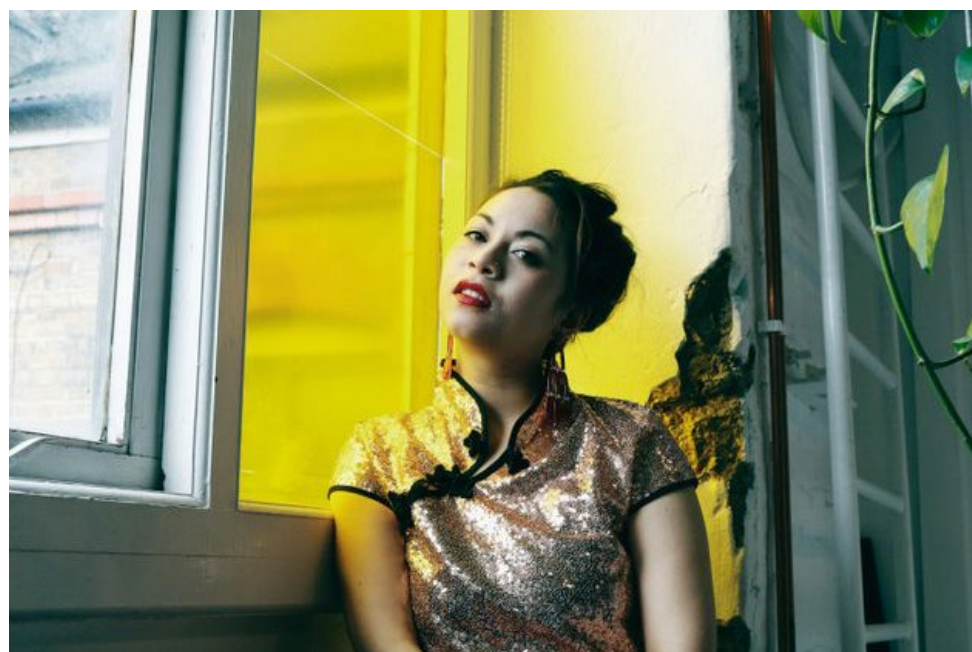
it wrong – but also heartwarming to watch them grow, and caters to those of us clinging on due to nostalgia.

“Luckily, both Sex And The City and Gossip Girl centre around characters who make observations and ask the crucial questions on everyone’s mind. My absolute dream would be to see Carrie type out on her little laptop, ‘Is he right? Am I racist?’. And if she admits ‘Yes, I may be a little bit - but I’m willing to change’, I’d only love her more.

“Of course, I would support the addition of characters of colour – but they must feel authentic, and they must not carry the weight of representing their entire race on the show on their shoulders alone.”

Alissa Jeun Yi, reboot writer: “An exciting reboot is not about regurgitating something someone’s done before.”

Alissa is a TV writer and performance artist working on the reboot of an iconic 90s British series, but the details are still under wraps.



KATT WEBSTER

Alissa Jeun Yi

“I recently worked on a reboot where the team were not only passionate about the original series, but driven to highlight the experiences of a more diverse range of characters and talk about issues facing society now.

“What surprised me was that no one wanted to ‘replicate’ a cookie cutter version of the original. It was an incredible show, so that would have been a

rather Herculean task!

“An exciting reboot is not about regurgitating something someone’s done before. We should work hard to honour the ‘well-loved’ spirit of the original but reimagine it for a time and an industry that in terms of representation and the telling of diverse stories, need to do better.

“Reboots like this can not only reignite the love for the original, but bring loyal, older generation audiences and younger, completely new ones together. With our reboot, I hope people are curious to watch both the original and the version inspired by it – and, regardless of whether or not they were there for the original - get something out of both.

“The original and the reboot should reflect that we live in a world that changes. They should not be afraid to speak to different times and different places; and this is how they can speak to each other.”

Doctor Deborah Gabriel, academic: “New spin-off series would perhaps be a better way to go, since producers should start with diversity, not try to add it later on.”

Dr Deborah, founder and Director of Black British Academics, is an expert in race, education and social justice and a consultant in equity, diversity, inclusion and social transformation.



DR DEBORAH GABRIEL

Dr Deborah Gabriel

“Popular American comedy dramas like *Sex And The City*, *Gossip Girl* and *Friends* – all making come-backs in 2021, are rooted in very different socio-historical contexts to today. In the Black Lives Matter era audiences demand equity, inclusion and cultural authenticity.

“But it is not simply a case of adding Black and Brown characters to all-white casts and plots that do not deal with the real-life, intersectional experiences of Black and Brown people. That usually creates tokenism and stereotypical representations.

“When rebooting old series producers must avoid assimilating Black and Brown characters into storylines that revolve around white lives and merely reproduce white privilege. New spin-off series would perhaps be a better way to go, since producers should start with diversity, not try to add it later on.

“We need holistic representations of Black and Brown people that reflect the diversity of identities, genders, cultures and communities.”

