

Current Biography® Yearbook 2024

Eva Ariak

Born: January 10, 1955

Occupation: Politician

Canadian politician Eva Ariak has been fighting for her home Nunavut territory, originally part of the Northwest Territories (NWT), since its creation in 1999. Canada's largest and northernmost self-governing Inuit territory, Nunavut has long suffered from a lack of resources present in other parts of the country. "That's what we are fighting for," Ariak told Lisa Gregoire for *The Walrus* (14 Apr. 2020). "To complete the map of Canada by having the same kind of resources and infrastructure that everyone else in Canada enjoys."

Ariak helped achieve that goal by rising through the ranks of local government, where she was no stranger to blazing trails and breaking barriers. In 1999, she became the first languages commissioner for the newly established Nunavut territory. Five years later, she took part in a groundbreaking initiative that involved translating a version of the Microsoft Windows operating system into Inuktitut, the primary Inuit language. Ariak made history in the territory's 2008 general elections, when she became the only woman elected to the Legislative Assembly, Nunavut's first female premier, and the fifth woman ever to preside over a territorial or provincial government in Canada. In January 2021, after a nearly decade-long absence, Ariak returned to politics as the sixth commissioner of Nunavut. In all her posts, she tirelessly worked to promote the culture and languages that make up her Inuit heritage, never forgetting the importance of her community. "In order for us to have Inuktitut language within our environment, we have to hear it, see it, speak it, and use it everywhere," she remarked in a discussion with *Kci-Nivesq* (12 May 2022), the magazine of the Native Women's Association of Canada. "[Inuktitut] language and culture is our identity."

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

The second oldest of seven children, Eva Qamaniq Ariak was born on January 10, 1955, in Arctic Bay, a small Inuit village situated on the northwestern tip of Baffin Island, then part of Canada's Northwest Territories. The Inuit are an Indigenous population primarily residing in the Arctic regions of Canada, Alaska, and Greenland. Ariak grew up in a household where her adoptive father, Aliguq, was a general laborer for Hudson's Bay Company, Canada's oldest corporation, and her mother, Kautaq, worked as an interpreter at a local health center. (Her Scottish-born biological father, Eric Harper Mitchell, helped launch Canadian Arctic Producers, a distributor of Inuit and Dene art; Ariak would not develop a relationship with him until later in life.)



Photo via Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain.]

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SELECTED WORKS

The Ring Virus, 1999; *Barking Dogs Never Bite*, 2000; *Linda Linda Linda*, 2005; *Air Doll*, 2009; *Cloud Atlas*, 2012; *A Girl at My Door*, 2014; *Sense8*, 2015–17; *Stranger*, 2017–20; *Rebel Moon*, 2023; *Rebel Moon—Part Two: The Scargiver*, 2024

—*Maria del Pilar Guzman*

Halle Bailey

Born: March 27, 2000

Occupation: Singer and actor

Performing with her sister Chloe as the duo Chloe × Halle, singer-songwriter Halle Bailey has been widely praised by critics for the pair's unique sound, a mix of R&B, jazz, and electronica, with perfectly enmeshed harmonies. Their rise to stardom was unconventional in many ways, however, particularly given how young the singers were when they found success. The two sisters initially attracted the attention of megastar Beyoncé in 2013 with their YouTube cover of her pop hit "Pretty Hurts." At the time, Bailey was only thirteen years old. Beyoncé then signed Chloe × Halle to a five-year contract with her record label Parkwood Entertainment in 2015. Bailey broke out as a solo performer when she landed the female lead Ariel in the 2023 live-action adaptation of *The Little Mermaid*, winning critical acclaim for her performance. She followed that feat with the supporting role of Nettie in the musical film adaptation of Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*, also released in 2023.

Throughout her rising success, Bailey expressed gratitude for the women like Beyoncé who had paved the way in the music industry for herself and her sister. "We follow their footsteps and will continue to work hard to blaze a trail for the women who will come behind us, all while holding a hand out to help pull our sisters for-



Photo by Micaelsco, via Wikimedia Commons.

ward too," Bailey told Anna Chan for *Billboard* magazine (10 Dec. 2020).

EARLY LIFE

Halle Lynn Bailey was born on March 27, 2000, in Atlanta, Georgia, to Courtney and Douglas Bailey. She spent her early childhood in Mableton, Georgia, with two older sisters—Ski (pronounced "sky") and Chloe—and one younger brother, Branson. Courtney worked as a human resource professional. Douglas, who became Halle and Chloe's manager, was a stockbroker.

As a small child, Bailey was inspired by older sister Chloe's singing and dancing. "I realized after I started [following her] that I'm not just imitating," she recalled in a discussion with Brittany Spanos for *Rolling Stone* (23 June 2016). "I really had a passion for singing, acting and all this stuff we did together." Their parents encouraged the sisters, but neither parent was particularly musical. However, they enjoyed a wide range of music, and Bailey grew up listening to artists such as Jill Scott, Janelle Monáe, OutKast, and Erykah Badu. As a young child, Bailey also pursued acting. She landed small parts in commercials and in films such as *The Fighting Temptations* (2003), in which Bailey played a young version of a character played by Beyoncé, and *Last Holiday* (2006) starring Queen Latifah.

By the time Bailey was eight, she and her sister were teaching themselves to play instru-

Oklahoman, 2 June 2022, www.oklahoman.com/story/entertainment/2022/06/02/what-you-need-know-rising-oklahoma-country-star-zach-bryan/7460296001. Accessed 10 June 2024.

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SELECTED WORKS

DeAnn, 2019; *Elisabeth*, 2020; *American Heartbreak*, 2022; *Zach Bryan*, 2023

—*Maria del Pilar Guzman*

Laphonza Butler

Born: May 11, 1979

Occupation: Politician

Laphonza Butler has dedicated her career to empowering women and improving the lives of working-class people. Her professional experience has included labor leader and corporate planner. The third president of EMILY's List, a group that promotes and supports progressive Democratic women for office, she was a strategist and adviser for Hillary Clinton in 2016 and Kamala Harris in 2020. She left that position in 2023 to complete the term of the late US senator Dianne Feinstein, who died in office.

Butler described to John Casey for *Advocate* (12 Oct. 2023) how her varied career experiences had the same goal: "I've had many experiences and hold many identities, and I've done a lot of work in all these areas. All of those things have helped to shape how I show up in the world—knowing that I am a Black queer woman who comes from the labor movement, who has dedicated her life to economic empowerment for workers and for women. And being a fighter for our fundamental freedoms."

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Laphonza Romanique Butler was born on May 11, 1979, in Magnolia, Mississippi. The youn-



Photo via Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain.]

gest child of Lonnell and Sarah Butler, she has two older brothers. Her upbringing in Magnolia in a working-class family taught her that education and hard work were the way to a more financially secure future.

Butler's father owned a small business, but when he became terminally ill with a heart disease and was unable to work, Butler's mother supported the family by working a variety of jobs, including as a certified nursing assistant, bookkeeper, security guard, and classroom aide. Her father died when Butler was sixteen.

Butler's parents also taught her the importance of public service. She recalled their influence in an interview with Madison Feller for *Elle* (23 Nov. 2021): "We weren't the family that talked about elections or politics at the dinner table, but we *were* the family that talked about what it meant to be in service to others. What do we do to help somebody?"

After graduating from South Pike High School in Magnolia in 1997, Butler attended Jackson State University, exemplary among the historically Black colleges and universities honored by the US government. She graduated with a degree in political science in 2001. While there, she studied with professors who had first-hand experience in the civil rights movement during the 1960s and 1970s. They had been pioneers with groundbreaking groups such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

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—*Barb Lightner*

Yadira Caraveo

Born: December 23, 1980

Occupation: Politician and pediatrician

Yadira Caraveo, whose career as a pediatrician can be defined by compassion, hard work, and genuine care for her community, brought these ideals to Congress when she became the first Latina member elected from Colorado following the 2022 elections. Caraveo previously served as a member of the Colorado House of Representatives, where she used her experience growing up in a working-class immigrant family and then as a physician working in those same communities to advocate for those in need.

After completing her medical residence in pediatrics at the University of New Mexico in



Photo via Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain.]

2012, Caraveo moved back to her native Adams County, where she commenced her medical practice, first at Horizon Pediatric and Primary Care in 2012 and then at Peak Pediatrics in 2014. It was during her early years as a pediatrician, serving a predominantly low-income community, that she came to learn about the financial struggles of her young patients' families with health care and medicine, rent, and schooling, among others.

Realizing that her patients needed help that could not be provided by her medical skills alone, Caraveo ran as a Democrat and became a Colorado state representative in 2018, championing policies to improve health-care accessibility. Re-elected for a second term in 2020, she then brought her work on behalf of Coloradans to Congress when, in 2023, after a narrow victory over Republican senator Barbara Kirkmeyer, she became the first congressperson to serve the newly created Eighth Colorado Congressional District. Labeled an underdog in the time running up to the 2022 election, the distinction did not faze Caraveo, who told Sandra Fish for the *Colorado Sun* (14 Nov. 2022), "I've been an underdog my entire life. . . . This was just another challenge to rise up through hard work."

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Yadira Caraveo was born on December 23, 1980, in Denver, Colorado, and raised in Adams County in the northeastern part of the state as the eldest of the four children of Elsa, first an education worker and then a stay-at-home mom, and Hector Caraveo, a construction worker. Her parents immigrated from Chihuahua, Mexico, in the 1970s, entering the United States undocumented and settling in the quiet suburbs of Adams County, north of Denver. It was there where Caraveo and her siblings—a sister named Ariday and two brothers—grew up, taking advantage of the educational and economic opportunities her parents did not have back in Mexico. "We expected all the kids to go to college and have an education," Caraveo's mother told Fish, before continuing to say, "But we never expected to have a congresswoman-elect."

The importance of kindness, community, and a strong work ethic were pillars in her family dynamic, the latter of which she exercised to excel in her studies at Northglenn High School. Following her graduation, she commenced her

Working on My Farewell, 2015; *No Rain, No Rose*, 2017; *Scarecrow*, 2018; *Asterisk the Universe*, 2020; *Mermaid Salt*, 2022; *Pagan Church*, 2024

—Maya Greenberg

Kate Crawford

Born: 1974

Occupation: Researcher and academic

Kate Crawford is an expert on technology, machine learning, and artificial intelligence (AI). She is perhaps best known for sounding a clarion call on the social, political, and ethical costs of AI, drawing attention to these issues not only through academic research and media outreach but also through art and other creative expressions. In her works she has articulated key ways that AI can be harmful to both individuals and society at large, especially when left unregulated. For example, her acclaimed book *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence* (2021) highlights the often-hidden environmental impact of such technology. “This idea of AI as being ethereal, mathematical algorithms in the cloud is absolutely not the case. In actual fact, the only way they work is by extracting vast amounts of data, human labor, and natural resources,” Crawford noted in an interview for her inclusion on *Time* magazine’s 2023 list of the most influential people in the AI field. “AI is the extractive industry of the twenty-first century.” Another crucial aspect she emphasized is the way AI can perpetuate and exacerbate human biases. As she told Ana Vidal Egea in an interview for *El País* (27 May 2023), “The most important question is how we are going to ensure that generative AI systems are equitable and that they encourage human flourishing, rather than concentrating power and increasing inequity.”

EARLY LIFE

Kate Crawford was born in 1974 and grew up in Canberra, Australian Capital Territory. As a teenager she got involved in computer programming and other high-tech systems, particularly through her interest in electronic music. “I’ve always been somebody who coded, built my own technologies,” she told Egea. “I started writing music . . . with samplers, computers, and that



Photo by Andresmh, via Wikimedia Commons.

really means that you start doing your own coding.” Crawford was active in the Canberra branch of an electronica collective known as Clan Analogue. As such, she performed with other artists and groups in a variety of projects, several of which explored the emerging concept of cyberfeminism, or the way the Internet and related technologies intersect with feminist perspectives.

In 1995, Crawford and fellow Clan Analogue musician Nicole Skeltys formed the group B(if)tek. “That band was very much about thinking about the relationship of gender and technology,” she told Egea. The duo initially played at local parties and small clubs, but after releasing their first album, *Sub-Vocal Theme Park*, in 1996, they developed a cult following. They signed a major-label record deal, performed in larger venues (including the Sydney Opera House), toured Europe with the Beastie Boys in 1999, and earned considerable acclaim in the Australian arts scene. They went on to release two additional albums, *2020* in 2000 and *Frequencies Will Move Together* in 2003, before breaking up. Crawford also worked as a journalist during this period, writing for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and various online outlets with a focus on media and politics.

EARLY ACADEMIC CAREER

In 2002, Crawford became a lecturer of media and communications at the University of Sydney. In that capacity, she continued to explore the social implications of technology; she later

to be at home in that space [where] there's no expectations," he told Samantha Leach in an interview for *Bustle* (20 Feb. 2024). "I can just do them and no one has to see them." Elordi also enjoys photography and is an avid reader.

SUGGESTED READING

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SELECTED WORKS

The Kissing Booth series, 2018–2021; *Euphoria*, 2019–2022; *Saltburn*, 2023; *Priscilla*, 2023

—Joy Crelin

Sean Evans

Born: April 26, 1986

Occupation: Talk show host

Sean Evans is the host of the popular YouTube show *Hot Ones*, where he asks celebrity guests ten questions while they consume ten hot wings. Some guests have fared better than others in the challenge, which sees each consecutive wing smothered in increasingly hotter sauce. Chef Padma Lakshmi and actor Charlize Theron could take the withering heat; basketball star Shaquille O'Neal—whose expressions of pain became a meme—could not. The show, Jon Caramanica wrote for the *New York Times* (10 May 2017), "thrives on the visible trial of physical discomfort." This discomfort, paired with Evans's thoughtful and deeply researched questions, creates a sense of intimacy that sets *Hot Ones* apart from other talk shows. The shared trial of the hot wings—which Evans consumes alongside each guest—paves the way for honesty. The show's creators realized early on that, like alcohol, the sauce, as Natalie Jarvey in an interview for *Vanity Fair* (1 Nov. 2022) put it, "broke down guests' inhibitions and forced them to set aside their talking points." Starting from humble beginnings, by 2023 the show had become a YouTube sensation and often attracted millions of viewers per video.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Sean Evans was born on April 26, 1986, in Evanston, Illinois, to parents Michael Evans and Donna Arthofer. He and his younger



Photo by BRUNCH, via Wikimedia Commons.

www.nytimes.com/2020/09/11/fashion/men-s-style/jerry-lorenzo-the-designer-behind-the-cult-label-fear-of-god.html?searchResultPosition=1. Accessed 30 Oct. 2023.

—Mari Rich

Natasha Lyonne

Born: April 4, 1979

Occupation: Actor and filmmaker

American actor and director Natasha Lyonne first came to prominence by playing supporting roles in a number of films throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Her roles were often sidekick characters and the occasional LGBTQ icon; for example, she drew early attention for her appearances in teen comedies such as *American Pie* (1999) and *But I'm a Cheerleader* (1999), as well as the crime drama *Party Monster* (2003).

After decades of work in the entertainment industry, Lyonne rose to stardom with her portrayal of Nicky Nichols in the award-winning Netflix series *Orange Is the New Black* (2013–19), a comedy-drama series set in a women's prison. Soon after, Lyonne attracted even more attention and acclaim when she cre-



Photo courtesy of the Peabody Awards, via Wikimedia Commons.

ated and starred in the groundbreaking sci-fi comedy series *Russian Doll* (2019–22), playing a role that Lyonne considered a romanticized version of herself. In an interview with Eva Wiseman for the *Guardian* (21 July 2019), Lyonne admitted that she had been trying to write the story of *Russian Doll* since her childhood. “I reappeared, to tell that story,” she said, describing the series as a “comedy about drama and the legacy of trauma” and something “from that natural, internal world.”

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Born Natasha Bianca Lyonne Braunstein on April 4, 1979, in New York City, into an Orthodox Jewish family, Lyonne later took her mother's family surname for professional credits. Her maternal grandparents were Hungarian Holocaust survivors.

After spending her early childhood in Long Island, she and her family briefly moved to Israel, where the young Lyonne participated in her first acting role in a television film called *April Fool* (1989). Soon after, Lyonne's parents divorced; at that point she and her older brother returned with their mother to New York, where they spent the rest of their childhood.

Lyonne attended the Ramaz School, a private Jewish school in Manhattan, but was later expelled for dealing marijuana. She later described the school as an oppressive, elitist environment, dominated by wealth and materialism and contributing to her conflicted feelings about religion she described feeling as an adult.

Though Lyonne's family moved to Miami for a brief time, and she was briefly enrolled at a Florida high school, she left without graduating and returned to New York to study film at New York University. She left school without a diploma once again, however, unable to meet tuition requirements. In an interview with Periel Aschenbrand for *Tablet* magazine, she described herself “a black sheep” and “very educated for a high school dropout” (7 Sept. 2016).

EARLY ACTING CAREER

Despite her lack of formal training, Lyonne continued to pursue an acting career and soon found early success, landing one film role after another. By the time she was a young woman she had already worked alongside various well-known figures. Perhaps most notably, when she was still a teenager, Lyonne was

www.democracymcintosh.com/analysis/from-virginia-to-congress-jennifer-mcclellan-champions-voting-rights. Accessed 5 Oct. 2023.

—Molly Hagan

Summer McIntosh

Born: August 18, 2006

Occupation: Swimmer

For Summer McIntosh, the thing that makes swimming such an appealing sport is its unique blend of simplicity and complexity. “It’s simple: you touch the wall first, you win,” she told Kristina Rutherford for *Sportsnet*. “But also, there’s the race strategy and different techniques and your splits and how much everything can change in the last few metres of a race.” An avid swimmer from early in life, McIntosh quickly demonstrated her knack for both the simple and the complex elements of her sport, becoming a strong competitor on the junior level and making her senior-level debut while still in her early teens. In 2021, at the age of fourteen, she made her debut appearance for her native Canada at the Olympic Games, impressing onlookers with finishing fourth place in two events.

McIntosh reached a number of new milestones in the years following her Olympic debut, winning four medals at the senior-level World Championships in 2022 and six at that year’s Commonwealth Games. In 2023, she broke two senior world records at the Canadian Swimming Trials and went on to claim four more World Championships medals. Yet although winning medals and breaking world records was exciting for her, she preferred to treat each race the same, no matter how significant the meet. “I try to disassociate and forget the actual competition; that way, it’s just another race, whether it’s a qualifying round or the Olympics,” she explained to Courtney Shea in an interview for *Toronto Life* (13 Apr. 2023). “I focus on all the training I’ve done, and that’s where my confidence comes from. Then I tell myself to just relax and have fun, which isn’t easy with all the pressure. But, the more you do it, the more you know what works for you.”

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Summer McIntosh was born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, on August 18, 2006. She was the

second of two daughters born to Jill Horstead McIntosh, a former swimmer who competed in the 1984 Olympic Games, and Greg McIntosh. Raised in the Etobicoke district of Toronto, McIntosh and her older sister, Brooke, participated in a wide variety of sports. “As a kid I tried pretty much every sport you can think of—horseback riding, soccer, gymnastics, figure skating,” she recalled to Shea. “I was competitive at everything, even board games and cards.” Brooke chose to focus on figure skating, becoming a competitive pairs skater, whereas McIntosh chose swimming. She became increasingly serious about her chosen sport as she grew older, training at the Lakeshore Swim Club and later the Etobicoke Swim Club.

Throughout her early years as a swimmer, McIntosh balanced her training and competitive career with traditional, in-person schooling. After completing eighth grade, however, she began attending school remotely in order to dedicate more time to her sport. “I’m really grateful that I have that balance,” she told Anastasia Bucsis for the CBC’s *Player’s Own Voice* podcast (7 Oct. 2022). “I can really do school at my own pace and take my time with it and not feel like I’m like cramming to go to morning practise and then go straight to school and then right back to practise.”

EARLY CAREER

Having honed her swimming skills throughout her early childhood, McIntosh began competing in 2014. She proved herself to be a strong competitor, breaking numerous age-group records



Photo via Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain.]

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—Mari Rich

Cillian Murphy

Born: May 25, 1976

Occupation: Actor

“My favorite actors have always been the ones where you go, ‘Is that the same guy?’” actor Cillian Murphy told Sam Schube for *GQ Style* (2 Oct. 2019). That description could also be used to describe Murphy himself. Though visibly recognizable in many of his projects, he became known for playing a wide range of characters in an array of genres and media over the course of his career. Murphy first established himself as a theater actor in the 1990s with plays such as *Disco Pigs*, before moving primarily into cinema in the first decade of the twenty-first century and displaying his skills with roles in projects such as the 2002 horror film *28 Days Later*. With his villainous turn in 2005’s *Batman Begins*, he began a long and productive association with filmmaker



Photo by Tim Cornbill, via Wikimedia Commons.

Christopher Nolan that would include parts in well-received blockbusters such as *Inception* (2010) and *Dunkirk* (2017).

In addition to his film work, beginning in 2013 Murphy made a name for himself in television with the series *Peaky Blinders*, in which he portrayed gangster Tommy Shelby for six seasons. “I never thought I’d get to play a character that would last a decade and be able to go so deep and have such rich material. And then, to pretty much make it as we wanted to make it,” he told Nancy Tartaglione in an interview for *Deadline* (9 June 2022) about that project. “When you look back on it, it is quite humbling.” Although *Peaky Blinders* ended in 2022, Murphy remained in the public eye thanks to his starring role in another highly lauded Nolan film, *Oppenheimer* (2023), in which he earned much critical acclaim for his portrayal of the titular twentieth-century scientist.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Cillian Murphy was born on May 25, 1976, in Douglas, Ireland. The first of four children, he grew up near the city of Cork, where he was raised by parents who both worked in the education field—his mother was a French teacher, and his father worked for Ireland’s Department

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—Joy Crelin

S. S. Rajamouli

Born: October 10, 1973

Occupation: Filmmaker

By the 2020s, Indian filmmaker S. S. Rajamouli had become one of the highest-grossing filmmakers working in the Telugu-language cinema industry, often referred to as “Tollywood.” In 2016, he was honored by the Indian government with the prestigious Padma Shri (or Padma Shree), a civilian award given in recognition of his contributions to the arts. Popular among audiences in India for films such as his *Baahubali* series, including *Baahubali: The Beginning* (2015) and *Baahubali 2: The Conclusion* (2017), Rajamouli was credited with helping expand the global popularity of Indian cinema during the 2010s and came to even wider attention in 2022. That year saw the release of Rajamouli’s epic historical action film *RRR*, a heavily fictionalized tale of two revolutionaries and their fight against the British imperial authorities in India, known as the British Raj.

RRR, with its infectious pop song-and-dance numbers, over-the-top action scenes, and other features common in some Indian films, became a massive success in India. Perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, *RRR* also attracted significant attention from Western audiences and critics. Simon Abrams, interviewing Rajamouli for the *New Yorker* (16 Feb. 2023), asked the director why the very elements that had dissuaded Western audiences from watching Indian films in the past were what attracted them to *RRR*, including the incorporation of songs and other el-

ements of musical films. Rajamouli replied, “[I] don’t disagree with Westerners’ complaints about the songs in Indian films. There are many times where the songs can hamper the film’s narration,” Rajamouli stated; however, he also felt that if songs “[make] the story go forward, rather than stopping the story . . . even Westerners will enjoy it.” Speaking to Abrams about striking a balance in *RRR*’s action sequences, Rajamouli continued, “We, as human beings, like to see fantastic things happen. But, if action is not substantiated properly, then it becomes ridiculous. If it is substantiated . . . audiences will applaud.”

RRR became a global box office hit and also won, among numerous other awards, an Academy Award for best original song. In the wake of the film’s success, Rajamouli saw his international profile grow significantly, yet the director remained committed to his own artistic integrity. As he told Anupama Chopra in an interview for *Film Companion* (14 Apr. 2023), “Film is a combination of art and commerce. But I’m very clear that the art should lead the commerce.”

EARLY LIFE AND CAREER

Koduri Srisaila Sri Rajamouli was born on October 10, 1973, to mother Raja Nandini and father V. Vijayendra Prasad, a noted screenwriter and

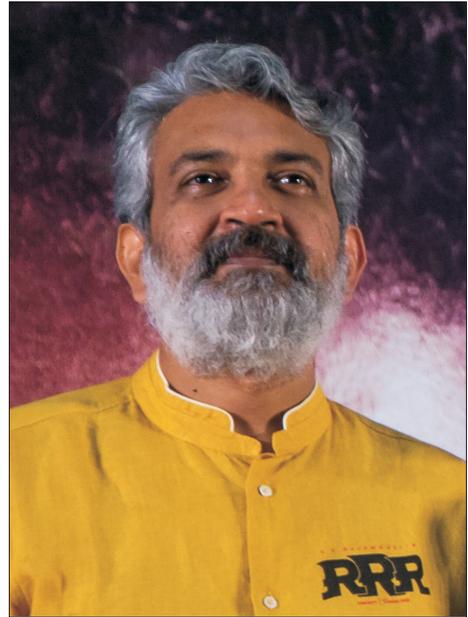


Photo by Dani Charles Silverscreen Media Inc., via Wikimedia Commons.

SUGGESTED READING

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—Joy Crelin

Gene Luen Yang

Born: August 9, 1973

Occupation: Cartoonist

“My main goal with all my comics,” cartoonist Gene Luen Yang told Petra Mayer in an interview for *NPR* (22 Oct. 2013), “is to tell a story compelling enough to get the reader from the first page to the last.” By all indicators, Yang proved himself able to consistently reach that goal and beyond. Initially a self-published cartoonist, he first gained widespread notice with the graphic novel *American Born Chinese* (2006), which won a 2007 Eisner Award for best new graphic album, was the first graphic novel ever to win the American Library Association’s Michael L. Printz Award, and was also the first graphic novel to be nominated for a National Book Award. Yang went on to earn further acclaim for later works such as the two-volume *Boxers & Saints* (2013), another National Book Award nominee.

Yang’s career received an even bigger boost in 2016. That January, the Library of Congress named him the National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature for 2016–17. Then, in September, he was selected for the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship program. “I didn’t have a first thought; it was mind-numbing shock. For three days,” he recalled to Carolyn Kellogg in an interview for the *Los Angeles Times* (21 Sept. 2016). “When I thought of the MacArthur Awards before this, I thought of scientists. I know they give awards to other writers and artists as well, but I primarily thought of it as an award for scientists, cancer research.” With the aid of funds from the fellowship, Yang was able to dedicate himself to work on a variety of original projects, including his next graphic novel, the semi-autobiographical *Dragon Hoops* (2020), as well as existing properties, such as several superhero series published by DC Comics. As his diverse body of work expanded, *American Born Chinese* was also adapted into a television series that premiered on the streaming service Disney+ in May 2023.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Gene Luen Yang was born on August 9, 1973, in Alameda County, California, and raised outside the city of San Jose. He was the first of two sons born to immigrant parents: his father was from



Photo by Gage Skidmore, via Wikimedia Commons.

Taiwan, while his mother had lived in both Taiwan and Hong Kong. Yang's parents' history and his own childhood as an American of Chinese descent would have a strong influence on several of his later publications, including *American Born Chinese*.

As a child, Yang enjoyed drawing and "doodled a lot in class," as he told Alice C. Chen for *SFGate* (11 May 2008). His interest in comics developed following a trip to a bookstore with his mother, who bought him his first comic book. "I do remember very clearly . . . seeing the spinner rack in the corner, a wire frame rack that would carry a month's worth of comics," Yang later recalled to Manoush Zomorodi in an interview for the NPR program *TED Radio Hour* (2 June 2023). "And I remember her buying a copy of DC Comics Presents No. 57, starring Superman and the Atomic Knights." That early purchase sparked an enduring passion for reading and collecting comic books, and Yang soon began drawing comics of his own. He was also drawn to the field of animation, in which he hoped one day to work.

Yang attended high school in the San Jose area and took classes at Foothill Community College during the summers. Following his graduation, he enrolled in the University of California, Berkeley, to study computer science. Still drawn to comics and storytelling, he also pursued a minor in creative writing. Yang earned his bachelor's degree from Berkeley in

1995. He would later continue his education at California State University, East Bay, from which he earned a master's degree in education in 2003.

AMERICAN BORN CHINESE

After graduating from Berkeley, Yang briefly worked in software development before switching his focus to teaching. In 1998, he joined the faculty of Bishop O'Dowd High School in Oakland, California, where he remained until June 2015. A computer science teacher, he also served as director of information services and at times taught mathematics. While working full time at Bishop O'Dowd, Yang spent much of his free time writing and drawing his own comics, which he initially self-published. Early works included *Gordon Yamamoto and the King of the Geeks* (1997), an adaptation of Bible stories called *The Rosary Comic Book* (2003), and *Loyola Chin and the San Peligran Order* (2004).

A turning point in Yang's comics career came in 2006, when the company First Second Books published a graphic novel he had been working on for some time. "*American Born Chinese* took me five years to finish," he told Amy Kurzweil in an interview for the *Believer* (11 Oct. 2023). "And during those five years, I had no idea how the book was going to turn out, if I was going to actually like it by the end." Drawing from a range of influences—including Yang's childhood, historical depictions of Asians in US media, and the Chinese story of the Monkey King—*American Born Chinese* tells the story of a Chinese American boy, Jin, who must navigate issues such as identity, assimilation, and the need to remain true to oneself.

To Yang's surprise, *American Born Chinese* proved highly popular with readers and earned strong reviews from mainstream critics. "I was kind of shocked by the reaction," he told Zomorodi. "I was incredibly surprised and also encouraged by the amount of support that book got from librarians and from teachers and from booksellers, of course, but really from these readers." The work garnered several major honors, including a 2007 Eisner Award for best new graphic album and the American Library Association's 2007 Michael L. Printz Award for excellence in young adult literature. Even more prominently, it made history as the first graphic novel to be named a National Book Award Finalist.

Gerry Conway was born on September 11, 1947, in Norfolk, England. He pursued an interest in music in school and focused on the drums. At the age of sixteen, he dropped out of school to work at EMI Records.

Conway had a long career in music, working with a number of bands and musicians that now are considered the face of English folk rock of the time. In the 1960s, he played in bands such as Election, Fotheringay, and with Alexis Korner.

For six years in the 1970s, he was the touring drummer in Cat Stevens' band, playing on the albums *Teaser and the Firecat* and *Catch Bull at Four*. When Stevens gave up his pop music career, Conway toured and recorded with Kate & Anna McGarrigle. In the early 1980s, he was the drummer on two Jethro Tull albums, *The Boatswain and the Beast* and *Crest of a Knave*. He spent most of the 1980s as part of Richard Thompson's live band during their tours.

From 1998 to 2002, Conway was the drummer for Fairport Convention—he had previously worked with lead singer Sandy Denny earlier in his career. He also played in the band Pentangle alongside his wife Jacqui McShee.

Conway left Fairport Convention due to the early stages of Motor Neurone Disease. He passed away in England on March 29, 2024. He was survived by his wife Jacqui.

See *Current Biography* 2005

Roger Corman

Born: Detroit, Michigan; April 5, 1926

Died: Santa Monica, California; May 9, 2024

Occupation: American filmmaker and screenwriter

Roger William Corman was born in Detroit, Michigan, on April 5, 1926, to William and Ann Corman. He grew up in California and after high school, Corman enlisted in the US Navy and served in World War II. Corman then enrolled at Stanford University as an engineering major. He received his BS in industrial engineering in 1947. He worked for US Electric Motors for four days before quitting to join the film industry.

Corman began his career working with American International Pictures, producing movies with low budgets and quick timelines.

Corman's first critical success was *Machine Gun Kelly* (1958), a gangster movie starring Charles Bronson in the title role. Corman's first larger-budget film was an adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*. (1959). The film was so successful that Corman made seven more films based on Poe's works, most notably *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964) and *The Tomb of Ligeia* (1964).

The Intruder (1962) was a grim study of racial prejudice and social injustice. Denied the industry's Production Code Seal for its realistic use of a pejorative term for African Americans, *The Intruder* was refused by all but a few movie houses, and it was Corman's first financial failure.

Corman made *The Wild Angels* (1966), a graphically violent account of a motorcycle gang on a rampage, with Peter Fonda in his first leading role, for just \$360,000 that eventually grossed over \$25,000,000. Corman's next notable film was *The St. Valentine's Day Massacre* (1967), which is widely considered one of his best as a director.

In 1970, Corman stepped back from active directing to form the production company New World Pictures. As other companies moved away from foreign arthouse films, New World Pictures filled the void and won more Academy Awards for Best Foreign Film than all other studios combined in the 1980s. Corman sold New World Pictures for \$16.9 million in 1983. Corman's next company was eventually known as Concorde-New Horizons, which produced films from 1985 to 2000.

In the twenty-first century, Corman's projects were largely made for the Syfy television network, including creature films like *Dimocroc* (2004) and *Sharktopus* (2010).

Corman was known for discovering young talent before they became famous, such as actors Jack Nicholson, Ellen Burstyn, and Robert De Niro, as well as filmmakers Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese.

In 1970, Corman married Julie Halloran; and they had three children, Catherine Ann, Roger, and Brian. Corman passed away in Santa Monica, on May 9, 2024, at the age of ninety-eight.

See *Current Biography* 1983

CLASSIFICATION BY PROFESSION

ACTIVISM

Jennifer Finney Boylan
Demian DinéYazhi'
Sarah Kate Ellis
Sarah Mardini
Francia Márquez
Wanjira Mathai
Yasmeen Mjalli
Elizabeth Mrema
Greta Thunberg
Victoria Vasques

ANTHROPOLOGY

Amber Wutich

ARCHAEOLOGY

Elizabeth Fentress
Dana Lepofsky

ARCHITECTURE

Sou Fujimoto
Bjarke Ingels

ART

El Anatsui
Melissa Cody
Demian DinéYazhi'
Jeffrey Gibson
Oliver Jeffers
Isaac Julien
Josh Kline
Gene Luen Yang
Tony Matelli
Alyssa Monks
Beto Pérez
Jacolby Satterwhite
Suzanne Shank
Clarissa Tossin
Haegue Yang

BUSINESS

Tope Awotona
Daniela Blanco
Émilie Castonguay
Shou Zi Chew
Sarah Kate Ellis
Tony Gemignani
Mary Lou Jepsen

Danita Johnson
Alex Karp
Kelly Krauskopf
Wendy McMahon
Arthur Mensch
Neal Mohan
Emad Mostaque
José Muñoz
Marta Ortega Pérez
Pita Limjaroenrat
Vivek Ramaswamy
Carol Tomé
Chris Urmson
Victoria Vasques
Rechie Valdez
Sandy Ran Xu

COMEDY

Adam Devine
Jordan Klepper
Taylor Tomlinson

COMPUTER SCIENCE

Kate Crawford
Demis Hassabis

DANCE

Ariane Labeled
Beto Pérez
Olga Smirnova
Sofiane Sylve
Teyana Taylor

ECONOMICS

Raj Chetty

EDUCATION

Elizabeth Alexander
Mahogany L. Browne
Gary Marcus
Andrew McMillan
Dimie Ogoina
Christina Sharpe
Mark Welsh

ENGINEERING

Daniela Blanco

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