

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER AJIT PAI**

Re: *Promoting the Availability of Diverse and Independent Sources of Video Programming*, MB Docket No. 16-42.

When I was growing up, I didn't see many people on the small screen who looked like me. One of the few such characters I remember was on the cartoon "Jonny Quest," which occasionally was rerun in the late 1970s. The cartoon featured Hadji, Jonny's sidekick, who "picked up his smarts on the streets of Calcutta" and had "mystic powers."¹ The only real-life, recurring Indian-American character I can recall from the 1980s was Jawaharlal Choudhury, one of a classroom full of gifted students on the ABC sitcom *Head of the Class*. And then, in the early 1990s, there was the famed Kwik-E-Mart owner Apu Nahasapeemapetilon from *The Simpsons*, who was voiced by noted Indian-American Hank Azaria.

Things are different today. Netflix now carries *Master of None*, a series starring Aziz Ansari, who is also its co-creator and co-writer. The show focuses on the American-born son of Indian immigrants living in New York City, and it tells stories I've never before seen on American television. As an American-born son of Indian immigrants myself, Episode 2 really hit home—it examines the relationship between Asians who came to this country in the 1960s and 1970s and their American children. It's also notable that two of Ansari's closest friends on the show are a Chinese-American and an African-American lesbian. Needless to say, the show is a far cry from *Leave It to Beaver*.

The stark contrast between the way things were and the way things are informs my approach to this *Notice of Inquiry (NOI)*. There are now more outlets through which creators of video content can distribute their programming than ever before. Over-the-top video in particular has been a game changer: It's given diverse voices a new way to be heard, and it has given Americans novel content they might never previously have seen.

Consider the YouTube sensation Issa Rae and her hit series, *The Mis-Adventures of Awkward Black Girl*. When asked why she created the series, Rae said "I felt like my voice was missing, and the voices of other people that I really respect and admire and wanna see in the mainstream are missing."² The first part of her series, which she filmed with some friends, quickly got attention on YouTube. Thanks to a successful Kickstarter campaign, Rae was able to raise over \$56,000 through almost 2,000 donations and could complete the rest of the first season. To date, Rae has over 208,000 subscribers on her YouTube channel, and her shows have amassed over 20 million views. Last year, she published a collection of short stories, and late last year HBO picked up her new series *Insecure*.

Diversity isn't limited to the production side of the video ledger; consumers, too, are responding to the wide variety of content available through over-the-top services. As one researcher put it, "Multicultural viewers . . . are more likely to have made over-the-top (OTT) an integral part of their viewing lifestyle. 45% of [African-American] viewers, 46% of [Asian-American] viewers, and 51% of Hispanic viewers in the study report spending more than 20% of their total TV viewing time watching OTT," as compared to 39% of white viewers.³

To be sure, there still may be some challenges in the brave new world of video. For instance, the *NOI* states that "[s]ome independent programmers have expressed concern that certain carriage practices

¹ Hadji from Jonny Quest, <http://bit.ly/1RPttsA>.

² Emma Gray, "Issa Rae, Creator Of 'Awkward Black Girl', Felt Like Her Voice Was Missing From Pop Culture—So Here's What She Did," *Huffpost Women*, <http://huff.to/1KsdLIL> (Nov. 5, 2013).

³ Horowitz Research, *Multicultural Viewers Driving Consumption as Streaming Goes Mainstream*, <http://bit.ly/219VptI> (June 23, 2015).

of cable operators and other [multichannel video programming distributors] may limit their ability to reach viewers.”⁴ I have heard these concerns firsthand in my own meetings with independent programmers like RFD-TV, and I am therefore pleased that the Commission is giving all stakeholders the chance to provide feedback on the issues we tee up in this *NOI*.

As I have said many times, however, we are currently living in a Golden Age of television. One of the reasons for that is the amazing range of diverse content available to Americans today with the push of a button, the click of a cursor, or the connection of a dongle. It is important to remember that programs like *Master of None* and *The Mis-Adventures of Awkward Black Girl* have not been the product of government regulation. Instead, they are thriving because of a free market, one in which creativity and technological innovation are recognized and rewarded. As the Commission moves forward in this and other proceedings, we should be careful not to hold back this video revolution.

⁴ *Notice* at para. 1.