

Ayad Akhtar, Andrew Yang, and Other Alumni in the News

Winter 2020-21



Ayad Akhtar (PEN America)

Ayad Akhtar '02SOA was named the next president of PEN America, the nonprofit organization dedicated to championing freedom of expression in literature. Akhtar is the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright of *Junk*, as well as a filmmaker and novelist.

Several Columbians have been named or will be nominated to positions in president-elect Joe Biden's administration. **Antony Blinken '88LAW**, a former deputy secretary of state, is expected to be nominated as Biden's secretary of state.

Karine Jean-Pierre '03SIPA, who served as vice president-elect Kamala Harris's chief of staff during the campaign, will be Biden's deputy press secretary.

Julissa Reynoso Pantaleón '01LAW

, a Columbia trustee, was named chief of staff to soon-to-be First Lady Jill Biden. Reynoso served in President Obama's state department and later as the ambassador to Uruguay.

Interior Chinatown, a novel by **Charles Yu '01LAW**, won the 2020 National Book Award for fiction. Additionally, the National Book Foundation named **Naima Coster '15SOA** to its 2020 "5 Under 35" cohort. Coster is the author of the 2018 novel Halsey Street and the forthcoming novel What's Mine and Yours.

Former Democratic presidential candidate **Andrew Yang '99LAW** won the Vilcek Prize for Excellence in Public Service. Yang is the founder of two nonprofits — Venture for America, a fellowship program in entrepreneurship, and Humanity Forward, an organization dedicated to the ideas that Yang espoused during his presidential run, such as a universal basic income.

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