

# 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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