

## THE DEUCE

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EVENT COVERAGE

## Considering New York, With the Cast and Crew of The Deuce

BY ASHLEY MORTON

*Maggie Gyllenhaal, James Franco and more shared readings and performances inspired by the city at a fundraising event for Housing Works.*

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*"No matter how long you have been here, you are a New Yorker the first time you say, 'That used to be Munsey's' or ... you got your shoes resoled in the mom-and-pop operation that used to be there. You are a New Yorker when what was there before is more real and solid than what is here now."*

So went actor Daniel Sauli, reading from Colson Whitehead's [New York Times piece, "The Way We Live Now: 11-11-01: Lost and Found,"](#) on stage at the [Housing Works](#) Bookstore Cafe. As someone who has been living in New York for about five years, I can refer to myself as a New Yorker by Whitehead's standards — though other rules require at least 10 years of residence in the city before you're on the positive end of the "If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere" equation.

Every city has its sense of identity, but New York is less like a destination than it is a character. It evolves and changes, hits highs and lows. In New York-based series like *Sex and the City*, *How to Make It in America*, *Girls*, to name a few — the city has never been *just* a location (Carrie Bradshaw even refers to it as her "boyfriend" in one episode.)

This is also true of *The Deuce*, a show that asks its viewers to take a hard look at the less glamorous (and yet somehow still intoxicating) side of NYC. Creators David Simon and George Pelecanos set Season 1 in 1972, Season 2 in 1978, and now, the upcoming Season 3 will lead its viewers through the mid-'80s, when the government was trying to "clean up" the streets of Times Square, and HIV and AIDS weren't openly discussed, but whispered terms, hidden or denied.

In connection with the upcoming season, HBO, *The Deuce*, and Housing Works came together for a night called "Cheers NYC" in which members of the cast shared "readings and reflections about the city that shaped the show" to raise funds for Housing Works. The event was hosted at their bookstore/cafe, which is funded entirely by donations, and run in part by volunteers. The evening was emceed by Sauli (Tommy Longo), who began by introducing himself as a native New Yorker, reflecting that Housing Works offers a look at some of "the best of what the city has to offer in terms of art, culture and advocacy," before launching into a reading of [E.B. White's New Yorker piece](#) from June 11, 1955.

"The brutal sound of demolition had stung the ear-from buildings that were being knocked down by the destroyers who have no sense of the past," read Sauli, highlighting one of the major themes of the night (and the show): The city is always changing, and that is a part of its identity.

Following Sauli was Sepidah Moafi (Loretta), with an emotional reading of ["Elegy in Times Square,"](#) a story about a former peep show girl, whose experience in the neighborhood shares

similarities to those featured within *The Deuce*. Chris Bauer (Bobby Dwyer) performed a monologue from *On the Waterfront*, and Maggie Gyllenhaal (Candy) had the entire audience singing along to [Suzanne Vega's "Tom's Diner."](#) Dominique Fishback (Darlene) presented her own spoken word piece called, "Ode to My Hood," in which she conversed with Brooklyn, and its expectations for her. "You made me exactly who I want to be," Fishback told her hometown, "If it wasn't for you, my truth wouldn't be so powerful."



James Franco reads from "The Wanderers"

The readings elicited noticeable responses from the crowd throughout the night. We nodded and chuckled, laughed or placed our heads down in memory, whether fond or pained. Sitting among the audience felt like being a part of a club — after all isn't that what "New Yorker" status is? You either get it or you don't.

James Franco (Vince and Frankie Martino) took the stage to read from *The Wanderers* by Richard Price (a frequent writer on the series). Also a native New Yorker, Emily Meade (Lori Madison) noted she tended not to look at the city with the same romanticism others did. "I obviously take it for granted," she said. "I'm glad I got a chance to ruminate on New York." Meade read Zadie Smith's "[Under the Banner of New York](#)" in which city connections are described as different — nameless, brief — but no less meaningful than those of the country. "And oh, God, those rising sirens" Meade read, just as, right on cue, a real-life siren sounded from the street outside the venue.

Rounding out the evening were Margarita Levieva (Abby Parker) sharing a 1965 letter from one artist to another, series co-creator Pelcanos reading from his latest book *The Man Who Came Uptown*, and finally Michael Rispoli (Rudy Pipilo) performing a monologue as legendary reporter Jimmy Breslin from the play *I'm No Good and I Can Prove It*.

The event ended more quietly than it began in some ways. The energy the audience had at the outset had transformed to thoughtfulness and appreciation for the moment. These readings, like the *The Deuce*, showed how much the city changes and shifts, and how rarely we stop to reflect on the here and now. As I stepped out of Housing Works and back onto the sidewalk, the words of Whitehead, Smith and White still in my head, I took a beat to smile at the way the sun hit the buildings and to notice the faces among the hustle and bustle of strangers I will forever share a small connection with — living in the city this year, this time — before disappearing among them and heading home.

Find out more about [Housing Works](#) and catch up now on the [The Deuce](#) before the Season 3 premiere.

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