

Hulu's 'Little Fires Everywhere' Sums up Oppression in One Sentence

'You didn't make good choices, you had good choices'



"Little Fires Everywhere" Photo: Erin Simkin/Hulu

"You didn't *make* good choices, you *had* good choices."

That's a quote from *Little Fires Everywhere*, when Kerry Washington's character spits verbal fire at Reese Witherspoon's character in the Hulu hit based on Celeste Ng's bestselling book. That particular line was not in the novel, though. Screenwriter and novelist Attica Locke

wrote it after months of being in the writers room and translating the book into a TV show.

Though uttered by a fictional character, the line holds true for reality — especially when it comes to understanding the impacts of systemic racism and how to fight it. When all your choices have negative roots, or are deadly, what does one do? If you have a choice between tainted water, underwhelming schools filled with asbestos, or living across the street from the city incinerator, what do you select? Are those even choices at all?

This conversation has a long lead. A while ago I wrote a story about Locke for my [alumni magazine](#) (go 'Cats!) and for that piece, Ng gave a beautiful quote about working with Locke and the creation of that particular line. In recent days the quote has resurfaced on social media and a number of people are once again remarking on the accuracy of the statement given how 2020 has gone for all of us.

False choices aren't really choices at all. And that's why for 2021, I hope we as a nation can begin to unravel and unpack and redirect bad options into situations where all of the options are positive and healthy. Black people should not have to choose between schools run by racist teachers, no grocery stores for miles, and lead-filled tap water. None of it is good.

Sometimes fiction is a good way to reach the masses. If the line resonates, good. Now all we need to do is find a way to decrease or remove all those false choices that are sitting on the platter.