



EDITED BY KATHERINE ANN ROWLANDS / PHOTOGRAPHY BY MITCH TOBIAS / ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHANTAL BENNETT

# **the** GAME

MEET SEVEN WOMEN WHO ARE REWRITING THE RULES.

# CHANGERS

Educated, accomplished, and prominent women abound in the East Bay. From Alamo, to Pleasanton, to Oakland, our region is filled with female influencers, but the ones spotlighted here are truly altering the national landscape. Whether entrepreneurs or filmmakers, activists or educators, these women use their positions to inspire change, and to move their industries and causes forward. Read on to find your own inspiration in their drive, ideas, and passion for making the world a better place. >>



## >> The Cultural Translator

MARCELA DAVISON AVILÉS

LEAD CULTURAL CONSULTANT FOR DISNEY/PIXAR'S *COCO*

FOUNDER AND PRINCIPAL OF THE CHAPULTEPEC GROUP

LIVES: ALAMO

WORKS: ALAMO/EMERYVILLE



Bringing a cast of skeletons to life was not the only challenge for Pixar Animation Studios while creating its 2017 blockbuster, *Coco*. To tell the story of a Mexican boy searching to find his great-great-grandfather in the Land of the Dead, the filmmakers leaned on cultural advisors to ensure the authenticity of the film's vibrant Mexican setting, colorful characters, and traditional celebration of *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead).

They called on Marcela Davison Avilés.

"I'm a translator of culture—of my culture, of the culture of Latin America," says Avilés, a cultural consultant who also works on the Disney animated television series *Elena of Avalor*.

Drawing on her upbringing by Mexican immigrant parents (as well as extensive research), Avilés produces everything from academic conferences to music festivals through her Alamo-based agency, The Chapultepec Group. For *Coco*, her work consisted of reading scripts, consulting with Pixar's art and music departments, screening early versions of the film to gain feedback from audiences, and working with Pixar's marketing team to present a story that's both culturally accurate and accessible to non-Latino audiences.

With the national immigration debate ever intensifying, Avilés says *Coco* couldn't have come out at a better time.

"This little boy's quest to follow his dream, and his struggle to understand his place in his family and his place in his world—those are big questions that everyone's asking right now," she says.

Avilés has spent nearly two decades finding her own place in the film industry as a Latina woman. She struggled getting studios to bite on Latino programming in the late '90s, but they are gradually changing their tune.

What's more, Avilés—who draws inspiration from her daily walks in the hills near her Alamo home—figured out how to work for Hollywood without being in Hollywood.

The East Bay, she says, "is almost a magical place in terms of its beauty and the community." —Andrea Vasquez

## A CINEMATIC FORCE



NIJLA MU'MIN

FILMMAKER

LIVES/WORKS: OAKLAND

East Bay native Nijla Mu'min began her artistic journey as a photographer and poet. During her junior year at UC Berkeley, she was inspired to merge those two passions and become a filmmaker.

Her first feature film, *Jinn*—which helped land Mu'min on *Filmmaker Magazine's* 2017 list of 25 New Faces of Independent Film—had its world premiere in March in Austin, Texas, at the South by Southwest Film Festival, where it received special jury recognition for its writing. Mu'min wrote and co-produced *Jinn*, in addition to directing it.

The movie follows an African American teenager named Summer whose mother converts to Islam, causing Summer to redefine herself. Per the *Los Angeles Times*, "Nothing quite like *Jinn* has been seen before."

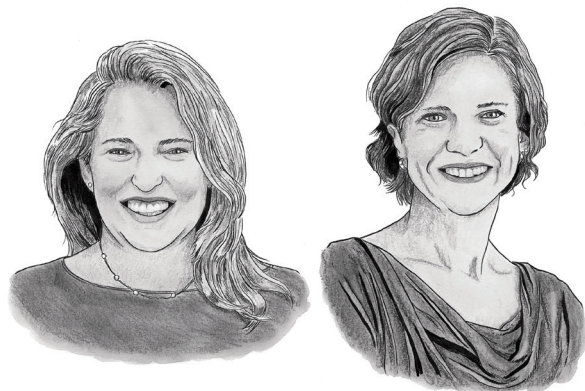
"It's about family, love, Islam, friendship, and what happens when you don't fit into one box," says Mu'min, who is a Muslim and drew on her own experiences of growing up with a religious father and a more secular mother.

Up next for the rising filmmaker: *Mosswood Park*, a multigenerational love story based on one of her favorite Oakland haunts.

Mu'min says, "I want to continue telling stories I've never seen in the cinematic realm." —Caitlin McCulloch



## THE REVOLUTION STARTERS



KRISTIN GROOS RICHMOND AND KIRSTEN SAENZ TOBEY

FOUNDERS OF REVOLUTION FOODS

WORK: OAKLAND

Learning starts with lunch, according to Revolution Foods, which showcases vegetables, fruits, and whole grains in school meals that kids actually want to eat.

After meeting at UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business, Kristin Groos Richmond and Kirsten Saenz Tobey started Revolution Foods in 2006, working out of a tiny space in Oakland to create school lunches without the usual preservatives and processed additives. Today, the company serves more than 2.5 million freshly prepared meals each week to children—mostly from low-income families—in more than 30 cities across the country. Popular regional foods, like rice

bowls in California and jambalaya in Louisiana, are often on the menu.

Appealing, affordable, and healthy—that's a tall order when the government allots schools a mere \$3.25 per reduced-rate lunch, including the cost of serving. But it makes sense that the Bay Area, with our culinary inventiveness and eat-local ideals, proved fertile ground for Richmond and Tobey's innovative recipe for school meals.

After receiving recent high-profile investments, the founders are expanding beyond lunch. Richmond says, "We want to be perceived as a community wellness provider that addresses families' needs for fresh, healthy foods throughout the day." —*Tam Putnam*

## » The Catalyst for Racial Justice

ALICIA GARZA

COFOUNDER OF  
BLACK LIVES MATTER  
GLOBAL NETWORK

LIVES/WORKS: OAKLAND



On July 13, 2013, upon hearing that George Zimmerman was acquitted in the shooting death of black teen Trayvon Martin, Alicia Garza took to Facebook. Capping a series of posts, she wrote: "Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter." Patrisse Cullors, a friend and activist based in Los Angeles, shared Garza's sentiment, adding a hashtag: #blacklivesmatter. A movement was born.

"I think it's an idea whose time has come," says Garza. "The United States professes to be a place where there is liberty and justice for all, but in fact, that is not actually true. Black Lives Matter is exposing the contradiction and offering the opportunity to change it."

Garza and Cullors, along with New York-based activist Opal Tometi, created an online community to connect people who share these concerns. When another black teen, Michael Brown, was killed in August 2014, every major news channel featured images of protest signs reading "Black Lives Matter," and support swelled. Today, the group has 40 chapters in four countries.

After serving as a spokesperson for Black Lives Matter for nearly five years, Garza—who became an activist at age 12, fighting for contraception in school nurses' offices, and works for the National Domestic Workers Alliance—is shifting her focus. In February, she announced a new project: the Black Futures Lab, which works to transform black communities into constituencies that build progressive political power.

"There is still a fight ahead of us, and it's a good one," says Garza. "It's a righteous one. And I am more hopeful that change can happen now." —*LeeAnne Jones*

## » The Green-Team Captain

JILL BUCK

FOUNDER OF THE GO  
GREEN INITIATIVE

LIVES/WORKS:  
PLEASANTON



To bring about change, begin with the kids. That's the approach taken by Jill Buck, founder of the Pleasanton-based Go Green Initiative, which works with schools to reshape their approach to sustainability. Buck understands the roadblocks schools encounter when they try to change institutional habits. In 2002, as PTA president at the Pleasanton school one of her children attended, she suggested adding an environmental program to the curriculum. She looked for a model that spanned all aspects of teaching and stewardship, but came up short—so she devised one herself. Key to the project was involving students, who joined with faculty to form a Green Team.

Buck then launched Go Green as a way to pass along her know-how to other schools. The Go Green website provides a planning guide for educators and administrators, and schools from all 50 states—as well as from around the world—have registered to access resources on the site. Buck also consults with schools individually, offering recommendations to help them achieve their environmental goals. She starts by asking them to create their own Green Team of students and staff, then works with them to draft a plan. That could involve expanding recycling and composting facilities, increasing water conservation efforts, buying green cleaning products, or planting a garden.

"Over the last 15 years, we've developed nationwide partnerships in subcategories—waste, water, food," says Buck. "We can help a school find local answers to global questions."

Go Green recently started a program called Local Leaders of the 21st Century, which introduces Pleasanton high school students to the process of enacting public policy. Buck plans to implement Local Leaders coursework in other regions next fall. "It's exciting," she says, "to see the students blossom into engaged citizens." —*T.P.*

## THE MEDIA RISK TAKER



FRANCES DINKELSPIEL

COFOUNDER OF BERKELEYSIDE

LIVES/WORKS: BERKELEY

"Local journalism matters," says Frances Dinkelspiel of Berkeleyside, a news website she cofounded in 2009. "If you don't have journalists working as watchdogs, who knows what's happening?"

As newsrooms at many papers shrink, Berkeleyside is in growth mode: It averages 250,000-plus unique visitors each month, boasts a rare full-time education reporter, and is closing in on \$1 million raised in a groundbreaking direct public offering (DPO), wherein members of the public can buy shares of the media outlet directly, without going through the stock market. As the first media company to undertake a DPO, Berkeleyside is—literally—writing the book for others, using grant funds to put together a how-to manual addressing the legal issues and rules of creating DPOs.

Dinkelspiel herself wears many hats. The former *San Jose Mercury News* reporter and author of *The New York Times* best-seller *Tangled Vines* solicits funding, records podcasts, and experiments with new approaches to storytelling—such as an oral history of the Milo Yiannopoulos protests that erupted at UC Berkeley last year.

"By being untethered from a traditional news organization, we can be as innovative and risk taking as we want," says Dinkelspiel. "Journalists have to take charge of their own future." —*L.J.* ■