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Netflix Has Done It Again: 'Orange Is the New Black' Has 'Astounded' the Critics

ESTHER ZUCKERMAN

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Netflix had enough confidence in their upcoming series, *Orange Is the New Black*, to have renewed it for a second season before it even debuted. Based on early reviews, their instincts were probably right: the streaming service's booming

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original-content wing has another critical hit on their hands.

Up until now, the show was something of an unknown. *Orange* didn't have the established (and rabid) fan base of *Arrested Development*, nor did it have the David Fincher-style prestige or Kevin Spacey-level star wattage of *House of Cards*. You couldn't even write it off as genre programming, as with Eli Roth's *Hemlock Grove*, the horror show that had its all-at-once debut on Netflix in April. No, *Orange Is the New Black*, based on a memoir by Piper Kerman, follows a yuppie woman who, because of some drug smuggling she did years ago, winds up in a minimum security prison. Fans of *Weeds* could take solace in known that that show's creator, Jenji Kohan, was on board for this one, and that *Orange* would be ready for yet another Netflix binge-watch, all in one summer-weekend sitting even, beginning on July 11.

Now *The Hollywood Reporter's* Tim Goodman explains in his review how wary he was of the show based on its premise, but goes onto say that the show "not only surprised but at various points astounded." He continues by saying that Kohan "has crafted a dramedy based on the popular memoir of the same name from Piper Kerman and infused it with an unpredictable flow of laughs, seriousness, an impressive and measured reveal of character backstories, and enormous potential."

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At the *New Yorker*, Emily Nussbaum also raves (and later goes on to pan Showtime's new success *Ray Donovan*). She calls *Orange* "smart, salty, and outrageous," and praises the show's treatment of women, writing that it is "also smarter and subtler about the entire range of female-female dynamics than almost anything on TV." Alison Wilmore of *Indiewire* also dolled out superlatives, calling the show Netflix's "best so far."

We still don't know how many people will actually stream the series, but by anticipating the good reviews and renewing immediately, Netflix appears to have presciently patted themselves on the back. If *Orange Is the New Black* remains a niche success among elite fans, then the company will have shown that they are committed to quality television regardless of the result, perhaps avoiding some of the criticism that, say, HBO faced when it canceled *Enlightened* after two seasons. And now Netflix has also shown that they don't need a Fincher-Spacey duo or an established property to make quality television.

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