

Creating Social Change Through Theater: Race and Gender Diversity

A Senior Thesis

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Whether or not diversity exists on the American stage has been a topic of contention for years. In the 80's and 90's, some regional theatres believed that having a single play written by August Wilson in a season would be enough to meet the "diversity quota" of a season. In modern seasons, however, an August Wilson play alone would be considered a bare minimum for reflecting diversity within a season and ultimately evidence that the diversity on stage has not expanded. In this paper, I would like to show how other playwrights and activists, through which representation has been expanded on the American stage. Playwrights such as Ayad Ahktar and David Henry Hwang have consistently created work for the past four decades that shed light on the struggles and hardships that Muslim and Asian communities have gone through. In the last three decades, it has largely been through playwrights like Ahktar and Hwang being produced that the industry has expanded representation. Recently, however, activist organizations have surged to the front of this conversation to take a leadership role in this effort. *We See You W.A.T* (White American Theater), as a conglomerate of theatre workers of color across the country, is just one of these organizations putting forth direct demands for representation and respect for BIPOC theater workers from theatre institutions across the nation. These playwrights and organizations are working towards a more equal and unbiased theatre industry and to create a forum to openly discuss insensitive practices such as misrepresentation of ethnicities and white washing. Although at face value, expanding diversity seems to be a fantastic idea, the question remains whether or not the diversity on stage is sustainable in a meaningful and impactful way. In this paper, theater workers and activists will be analyzed and critiqued to prove that sustainable growth in diversity on stage and off stage is possible, but not without the help of mainstream theaters stepping up as leaders and hiring people who create that diversity.

A Tony Award winner and three time nominee, a three time OBIE award winner and three time finalist for the Pulitzer prize, David Henry Hwang is an activist playwright and screenwriter who regularly writes about the fluidity of identity as well as the immigrant experience for Asians. His plays *Yellowface* and *Chinglish* which premiered in 2007 and 2011 respectively are prime examples of his philosophy. *Yellowface* is a comedic take on the problem with miscasting Asians and the white washing that occurs on the American stage. *Chinglish* deals with the complex international relationship between an American salesman and the Chinese business executives that he is trying to win over.

Yellowface, while a comedy, references the *Miss Saigon* controversy where the actor Johnathan Pryce joined the cast on stage during the premiere with eye prosthetics to make him look more Asian. The actor who was cast as a half Vietnamese pimp named "The Engineer" was apparently the only choice that the casting directors could find as, according to them, there were no Asian actors that were up to the professional standards of the play. The casting director of *Miss Saigon* was quoted saying "I can say with the greatest assurance that if there were an Asian actor of 45-50 years, with classical stage background and an international stature and reputation, we would have certainly sniffed him out by now."(ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu) The statement essentially rules out many potential actors with such strict requirements to play the role of Engineer, the point stands however, that the production was likely always going to cast Johnathan Pryce. The outrage that was sparked in the U.S was severe and created a protest and boycott of the play that were led by Asian American theater workers like David Henry Hwang and actor BD Wong.

Years after the initial American premiere of *Miss Saigon*, David Henry Hwang wrote *Yellowface*. The play follows Hwang or DHH and the rollercoaster of emotions that occur after he accidentally casts a white man in the lead role of his new play *Face Value*. The comedy exposes and deconstructs the ethics of white washing that then critiques the hiring practices of the modern theater productions. *Yellowface* provoked conversations (about what?) among those who attended or read the play. Through the awkward conversations that occur between DHH and Marcus G. Dahlman, the white man who was miscast as an Asian, to DHH's internal conflicts that question the validity of race blind casting, the world of *Yellowface* allows people to feel personally invested in the topic of diversity. Unfortunately, conversations can only go so far. What is truly exceptional about Hwang's work is the accolades that have come with them. *Yellowface* on its own won an Obie award for best Playwright and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. These accolades are able to give a voice and mainstream recognition to Asian Americans on stage. Hwang's plays feature characters that are traditionally underrepresented on stage.

However, Hwang's influence on the American stage does not stop there. The core aspect of Hwang's plays are based around the fluidity of identity and identity politics. A person's identity is not something that is rigid and the same across the board but rather flexible depending on their circumstances. Despite Hwang's plays being centered around the Asian communities, he believes that the politically charged messages that he is sending out are crucial to the growth and development of the world at large.

I believe identity issues are more important now than ever... Issues of cultural identity define most of the world's major conflicts today, from migrants, to Brexit, to the Middle East. In China, cultural identity pops up in controversies from Xinjiang, to Tibet, to Hong

Kong, and Taiwan. This is the age of identity crisis; for better or worse, culture wars matter, and art necessarily reflects that reality. ([Sixth Tone, David Henry Hwang](#))

The message is plain and simple from Hwang. In order to see the growth and representation that is necessary on the stage, there needs to be a dynamic shift in how identity is represented across the nation and even possibly the globe.

Clearly Hwang focuses on the fluidity of identity in his plays and productions. In order to gain a first person perspective on the thought processes and goals that Hwang sets for diversity in his productions, I conducted an interview with designer Anita Yavich. Yavich is an accomplished costume designer who has worked extensively with David Henry Hwang and with the activist organizations that will be mentioned later. When asked what goals Hwang had set for diversity in a production Yavich mentions that in productions like *Silver River* the cast and crew were diverse in their own way. “The work has Asian opera singers, dancers and western musicians in the orchestra, it’s all diverse.” Anita Yavich also commented on the diversity in Hwang’s creative thoughts. Mentioning how in order to create an opera like *Silver River*, Hwang would need to have extensive knowledge on different cultures, beyond the scope of the Chinese culture that is often written by him. Yavich stated “Why would he know about Lorchas... why wouldn’t he know about them?” Yavich also mentions that Hwang’s ideology in the fluidity of identity does not necessarily have to do with race politics but rather the experiences that each person carries with them in life. Mentioning in the interview that members of the BIPOC communities also need to have conversations about diversity and how although people are the same in ethnicity, it does not mean that their experiences are the same.

Hwang's ideologies are shrouded in ambiguity, but that is the result of understanding that even with the same skin tone, ethnicity, or cultural background, each person has different experiences. The same experiences that allow for diversity within any given community and furthers the notion that identity is fluid like Hwang mentions.

Ayad Akhtar is similar to David Henry Hwang in terms of philosophy. Akhtar seeks to change the perception and misrepresentation of traditionally underrepresented people on stage, specifically people of Muslim faith. With multiple Pulitzer prize winning plays and novels, alongside three Tony nominations, Akhtar is a leader in his field and serves as a wonderful example to those who are looking to increase diversity and representation on stage and in our culture as a whole.

Akhtar's play *Disgraced* is a story about the confusion of identity and what it means to be American and a Muslim. A lawyer, Amir Kapoor has thrown away his Muslim faith in order to fit in as a typical American. Despite his differences in culture and personality. Amir had sacrificed his identity that he was raised with in order to become part of the American system. Despite his sacrifices, racial profiling is still prolific in a post 9/11 world and Amir is tired of trying his best to fit in and yet never meets the cut according to the validation of those around him. Akhtar brings a new level of inclusion with this play. In a post 9/11 world where the conflict in the middle east is still raging on, and people of the Muslim faith being subjected to racial discrimination, representation on stage is more important than ever.

Nissa Tzun a graduate student of the University of Nevada and immigrant from Hong Kong mentioned that the "root of western media is white supremacy and that's where implicit bias stems from.(*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*)" The student also mentions that the "idea of racial stereotypes are repeated, time and time again through the decades, shown on the television

of people depicting stereotypes that are perpetuated by the white community.”(*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*) The jab at the problem with modern media is exactly why having the realistic representation that Akhtar created is important to the awareness and public relations of people within the Muslim community.

As a son of Pakistani immigrants, Akhtar is very familiar with feeling like an outsider and the need to fit in. In an interview when Akhtar was asked to speak about the immigrant experience, he mentions about the divide that one can feel when living as a multicultural individual in the United States.

I grew up in between two mythologies. One was my parents’ experience and ideological understanding of where they came from—Pakistan, and the Muslim underpinnings of all of that. On the other side, there’s America and the alleged belief in equality and opportunity and all that nonsense, when in fact the country is really just about money and race. It’s seeing, on one hand, the gap between what my parents say Pakistan is about and what it really seems to be about, and, on the other hand, seeing the gap between what my cohorts at school and our textbooks say about America, and seeing what it really is. I think at its best, being an outsider can give you that kind of perspective. Obviously, there are some downsides. You feel like you don’t belong. But there are advantages to it as well. (Ayad Akhtar, interview magazine)

The advantages that Akhtar refers to are likely the different perspectives that a person is able to gain on both being an American and being someone who is outside of the traditional American standard. In the same interview Akhtar references a quote from the Italian philosopher and poet Giacomo Leopardi, “Would it be possible to have a voice today in which I could address my fellow Americans? Could I craft a narrative voice that would speak to America as he was

speaking to Italy?” Akhtar’s message in the interview is loud and clear. There are not enough people in the theater space that are able to properly represent and create a platform for people of color to step up to the plate and speak their truth. In an interview with Slant, Akhtar mentions the importance of representing the Muslim faith in his plays. When asked if he feels any qualms about approaching the hot subject of the Islamic faith Akhtar responded by talking about the core of the play itself.

I didn’t because I feel the outrage that people would feel is represented on stage... but I think that a lot of Muslims who’ve come to see the play feel that their own polarities are actually represented- that it’s not an attack on Muslim consciousness, but an exploration of these poles within the consciousness. (Gerard)

In the same interview Akhtar was also asked about his response if asked “Is it good for the Muslims?” Akhtar responded with “ I feel that self criticism and self-mockery-being able to laugh at yourself, being able to share your foibles and your humor with the culture at large- is a part of the larger process of becoming American.” Akhtar’s response to the question also ties into another form of fluid identity. Not all Americans have the same experience and not all Muslims have the same experiences. The fluidity of identity is ever present within the American identity, especially those who have multiple cultures and ethnicities they were raised in.

Although critically acclaimed, Akhtar’s approach to inclusiveness on stage takes on a different shape than Hwang’s. While Hwang likes to make parodies and create a comedic scene out of serious scenarios to emphasize the absurdity of the race problems at large, Akhtar creates a world where the audience is able to be captured by the problem and create a narrative around it.

As a form of media and entertainment, theater has a responsibility to be a leader in social change. Although playwrights like David Henry Hwang and Ayad Akhtar have created plays that

represent minority groups, creating a play that foregrounds these issues is a less direct way of changing the lack of inclusion and diversity within the theater industry. The organization, We See You W.A.T. have been at the forefront of this activism in the last year to promote inclusion and diversity within America institutional theater. We See You targets White American Theater and the racism and lack of inclusion that continues to occur in theater spaces. The main way We See You has stepped up to the plate is by issuing a list of demands and circumstances that will ultimately make the theater community more inclusive. We See You's demands range from cultural competency to the artistic and curatorial practices of a theater. The demands are targeted at the people who are directly involved in the hiring practices of theaters across the nation and looks to combat the lack of diversity that is present on stage. We See You comes from humble beginnings, starting with only 3 theatre makers as their original members and growing into 30 members and eventually 300+ members.

The cultural competency encapsulates the acknowledgment of BIPOC creatives and the cultural history that have been erased from mainstream history. In particular, the acknowledgement of indigenous land in which the theater stands, along with the acknowledgement of African slaves being subjected to free labor were of big note in the Cultural Competency section of the demands. Although acknowledging the cultural backgrounds of different BIPOC creators does not directly affect the theater, it does affect the people who consume and create theater. Increased diversity on stage will create more opportunities for BIPOC creators. However creating opportunities starts with theaters acknowledging and learning about different cultural backgrounds and understanding the importance of cultural diversity in an industry that has been dominantly homogenous for generations. With diversity in mind, We See You has made it a mission to not only create a space in which creatives feel included and safe but

also a space in which people outside of the theater industry can see what real inclusivity is. We See You's intention to transform the theater can be seen in their Artistic and Curatorial section of their demands. On the first bulletin, the organization demands theaters to "Develop, commission, program and produce a majority of BIPOC artists. (*We See You W.A.T.*)"

The demand, if implemented, would more accurately represent the percentage of minorities that are in the United States. Further into the cultural competency section of the demands, We See You also demands that the design teams be at least over 50% BIPOC and that the individual directors must make an effort to hire a team that is more than 50% BIPOC. This change specifically targets those who are behind the performance on stage. The creation of theater works by homogenous design teams ultimately lead to a less diverse and culturally representative production. The main issue that We See You will run into is the almost traditional way in which white producers, writers and directors dominate the productions of theaters. 79.1% of writers are white and 84.6% of directors are white in non-profit theaters (AAPAC demands). This statistic does not lighten up on Broadway either. On Broadway 80% of writers and 93.8% of directors were white. Such a lack of diversity in the management and creation of shows could and does lead to the lack of diversity in hires in theater productions.

We See You, is an organization that has been a leader in fighting for inclusiveness and diversity within the theater space but there are many additional organizations that have formed in order to tackle the inclusivity problem in other areas of theater. Design Action in particular is an organization that is fighting towards inclusivity for theatre designers.. With over 70 members part of the team, Design Action demands the inclusion and hiring practices of designers be changed. Their website cites that in the 2018/2019 season, 91% of Broadway designers and 73% of Off-Broadway designers were white. This is largely due to the way designers are hired on to

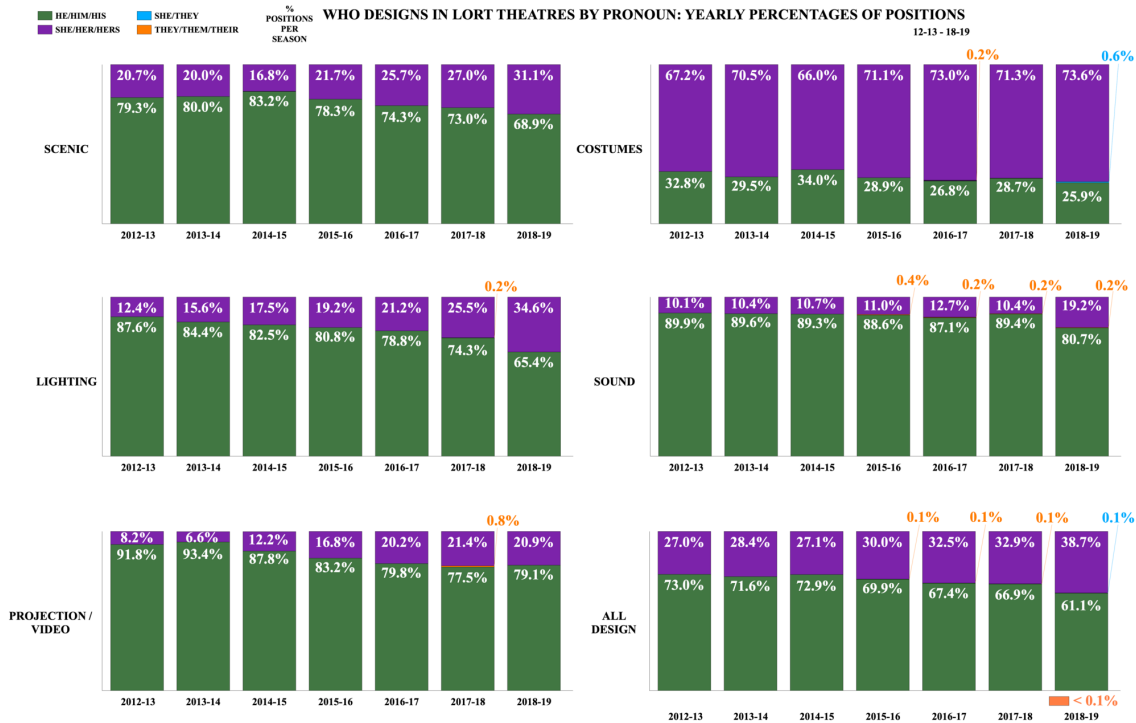
productions. Design Action states that designers are largely hired by different members of the production team such as directors, producers, agents, general managers and unions. In order to see an increase in diversity, designers must seek out help and support from those who work in those fields. As Porsche McGovern states in their *Design with Equity* report, most new hires in the design field or backstage roles need a reliable circle of people that can continuously work with the designer (McGovern). Inclusivity in theater is not only about stage representation but the accessibility to everyone to enter the industry.

Similar to the playwrights mentioned earlier, there are individual activist artists like Porsche McGovern whose activism goes beyond working on diverse projects. McGovern has written a series of essays that showcase the gender diversity and equality within the League of Resident Theaters (LORT) every year. LORT represents regional theatres across the country. The study itself is made to update and inspire theaters involved with LORT of the statistics of theater workers in regards to gender. Through reporting the statistics of gender and hiring practices of theaters across the nation, people may make a larger effort to better the diversity of designers in theaters. 2020 will be the seventh year in which McGovern will be studying the gender diversity within the LORT system. It is worth mentioning that the statistics are not representative of the entirety of the United States theater industry. McGovern thoroughly collects the data from various websites and theater reviews such as broadwayworld.com and playbill.com and then contacts the theaters individually for confirmation. Despite the simplicity of the data, over the seven years McGovern has conducted this research, 92.9% of the data has been confirmed by the 77 theaters associated with the LORT. The data shows that in recent years there has been an influx of female designers and directors in comparison to the 2012-2013 season, with the ratio of

female identifying to male identifying directors being approximately 40:60. However, the close ratio only applies to the directing positions. While positions such as scenic, lighting, sound, and projection were male dominated with 68.9%, 65.4%, 80.7%, and 79.1% of designers being male respectively, the costume design position was dominantly female with 73.6% of designers using she/her pronouns. In total female designers made up 38.7% of the designers while 61.1% of designers were male in the 2018-2019 seasons. Although the graph shows that there is still a long way to go until gender equity and diversity in LORT theaters stabilize, the graph also shows that there have been significant improvements over the past seven years. Designers identifying with she/her pronouns have become more prominent in all fields with the most percentage increase being seen in lighting design with a 22.2 percentage point increase. This may be due in part to the theory that McGovern mentioned earlier in the 2020 essay; the correlation between directors pronouns and designer pronouns. McGovern mentions that “when there are she directors directing, more she designers will be designing.” Although the theory itself isn’t wrong in the case of LORT theaters, the percentage difference is not as dramatic as the story suggests.

Female-identifying directors filled design positions with 9.5 percentage point increase in scenic design, 3.3 percentage points in projection/video, 4.3 percentage points in costume design, 8.7 percentage points in lighting design and 6.3 percentage points in sound design.

These differences are not significant, but the data suggests that the gender disparity is slowly dissipating as theaters start to make an effort to hire she/her identifying designers. However, Porsche McGovern’s research is also a reminder that diversity and equity is not a conversation exclusive to race. If the goal is to achieve diversity within the theater space, the conversation must also include people with different gender identities, sexualities, religious beliefs, disabilities, and race.



Although much of the research that Porsche McGovern has done has been within the realm of gender equity, McGovern has also talked publicly about the state of inclusiveness within the theater space for designers. In a collaborative essay with filmmaker Katherine Freer, McGovern and Freer mention “We have before us an opportunity for drastic and sustainable change. The pandemic and calls for racial justice have ignited fieldwide revolution and hopefully serious reformation. Theatre Makers are being presented with a chance to reimagine the way our art form is made, both within and without the systems that are supposed to support the people and the work.” (McGovern, Freer) McGovern and Freer believe that despite the pandemic threatening the well being of many theater workers, there is a silver lining. This pandemic has given theater workers an opportunity to create a space where equity is no longer a concern. The two activists believe that at the center of the change are designers. According to McGovern and Freer, the change comes in four parts, leadership, communication, progress, and culture. McGovern mentions that in theater, designers are often not given a leadership position outside of

their own teams. This leads to a lack of power and visibility for designers and their contributions to any given production. In order to combat this, McGovern and Freer suggest dismantling the hierarchical structure that has been normalized since the inception of theater. By dismantling the hierarchy, designers will be able to share their ideas freely without fear of retaliation, work on and be directly involved in decision-making such as hiring, season planning, scheduling, resource allocation and artistic direction. McGovern also states that by getting rid of the Leadership positions on productions, people will be able to work under a collaborative lens which will cultivate a community that lasts longer than a single production. This simple shift in leadership and collaborative mindset may allow designers to find more work because of the relationships cultivated in a production ([McGovern, Freer](#)).

In terms of communication, a shift in values are considered to be top priority. McGovern mentions that thoughtlessly designing a production has “the potential to reinforce white supremacy norms, appropriate cultures, and perpetuate racism and many other oppressive systems, like heterosexism and ableism.(McGovern, Freer)” In order to avoid such an event, people’s experiences and backgrounds must be valued. Theater and it’s production are not and should not be homogenous, this means that a person’s level of education or work experience should not be considered the end all be all of someone’s credibility. McGovern and Freer suggest that a person’s experience and skills are not defined by their position. The growth of designers should be valued higher than getting a production up and running as quickly as possible or in the same manner as it has always been done. Furthermore, a designer of color should not be hired simply because of a diversity quota but for their experiences and unique skill sets.

McGovern also mentions the intricacies of theater design. “Understand there is no right way to conceive of and execute a design...(McGovern, *“Design with an Equity Lens”*)” The

statement is potentially a response to traditionalists within the theater space who believe that certain roles and jobs must be completed in a specific way. The same traditionalists believe that a leading force that can approve or disapprove of a design or performance this sort of mindset that a single person's thoughts and ideas reign supreme among a team of designers is flawed. The only thing that is provided by the traditional hierarchical structure of theater productions is an egocentric production that was built on decisions made by the few rather than a collaborative project that encompasses the diverse abilities and experiences of a given cast and crew.

Although the changes that were mentioned are already progressive, there is still room for progress when it comes to creating a space where equity and sustainability are a priority.

Through creating schedules and deadlines that support the needs of everyone involved, people will feel more included and acknowledged. The scheduling change on top of creating a space in which conversations about race and other topics can be shared could lead to a production where people can create theater that is unique to that of the production team and allow for more inclusiveness within the community. At the end of the progress section, productions are bound to have mistakes and work that is lacking in quality. In situations like this, production teams should be mindful of the individual and critique the work not the person. The perfectionist mindset breaks down any collaborative bridges that were formed during the production process and ultimately leads to lower quality.

The culture of theater productions need to be changed. The mindset of one production one team does not allow for the growth of certain developers and diminishes the value of certain bridges that are created during a production. McGovern calls this the “Transactional Relationships” of a theater production. In order to change the transactional relationship into a transformational relationship, the production teams and their members must make an effort to

know the designers as people and create a space that promotes excellence and accountability rather than solely focussing on meeting the deadline. The creation of a space in which design teams can take care of themselves will promote the earlier mentioned space of excellence and accountability.

The overworking mentality of theaters needs to be changed. Many theaters nowadays run within a set schedule and budget, these limitations although necessary promote a culture where people work hours and hours on end in order to meet those expectations. However, there is an underlying problem that may be able to solve the problem of overworking, better pay. Anita Yavich mentions how design work is not her primary source of income and how it is not sustainable to work for theaters alone. Yavich is a professor at Purchase College alongside her production work. Yavich mentions that there is a tricky grey area of deciding whether or not to overwork.

Some people who are at the top of their field do 20 shows [a year] so you can imagine how much time that takes. So yeah they work a lot but it is somewhere between a choice and not a choice. It is very tricky. Of course you want to dedicate your life to art.

Yavich also mentions that a designer is like an independent contractor who works for multiple theaters and shows in any given season. However, each show may only pay you anywhere between \$ 2000-5000 per show which post tax, especially in a city like New York where the average rent is anywhere from \$1800 to \$3000. So the overworking mentality, although important to address, comes with an additional problem in pay. Unfortunately for theater workers, having to work extra hours also comes with the lack of care for each person.

Without being able to take proper care of oneself, the quality of work will decrease and people will be less motivated and likely to create work that is meaningful. By implementing periodic breaks and a space in which people consider each other's physical and emotional space, the quality of work and life can be increased.

Lastly, the production leaders should be more representative of communities that are most affected by inequity. McGovern mentions that the current leadership in traditional theater spaces are dominantly white and are not representative of the POC communities that are prominent in the theater space. In order to achieve this, McGovern believes that it is of utmost importance that productions "look for guidance from social justice movements, indigenous communities and organizations led by people of the global majority." This is all in an effort to create a space that is more equitable and continues to be equitable for future productions and the careers of the designers involved.

These initiatives that are being proposed by McGovern and Freer are just the building blocks for a more sustainable, equitable future. The changes only target a few of the problems with the lack of diversity in the theater space and more actions are required to create sustainable long term growth and change.

Other organizations that are fighting for equity and diversity on and off stage include AAPAC, an organization that looks to fight for equity in the theater space for BIPOC people with a focus on Asians. The organization has a visibility report available to the public with data of the current state of New York City stages and showcases the diversity statistics from non-profits to Broadway productions. The main statistic to look at in the visibility report is the visibility of people on stage. Using the visibility matrix, you can see that white actors on stage are the most visible and 61.5% of actors given a role were white, while BIPOC actors

given a role went for a combined 38.5%. In New York City the population is divided fairly evenly, with white, non hispanic or latino people making up 32.1% hispanic or latino people making up 29.1%, black or african americans making up 24.3%, asians making up 13.9% and native people making up the remaining .5%. However the visibility on stage still remains non representative of what the population actually is in New York City. The visibility reports

NYC POPULATION DATA:

- 32.1%** WHITE ALONE, NOT HISPANIC OR LATINO
- 29.1%** HISPANIC OR LATINO
- 24.3%** BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN
- 13.9%** ASIAN
- 0.4%** AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE
- 0.1%** NATIVE HAWAIIAN AND OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER

Data Source: 2019 Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

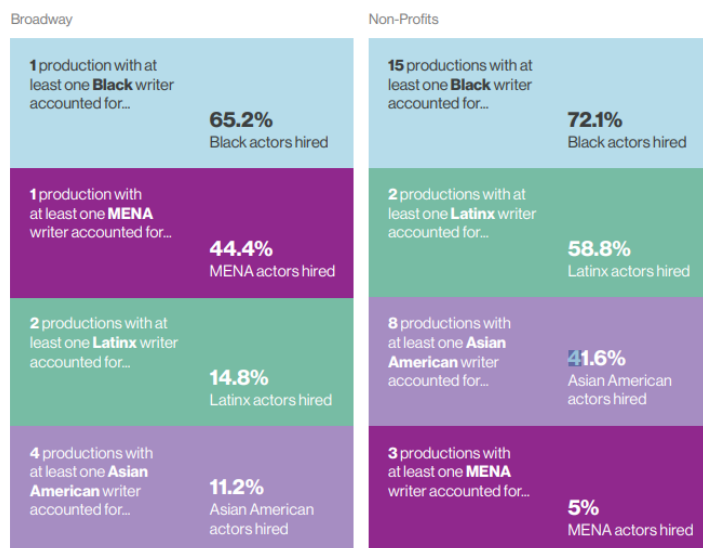
statistics on racial breakdowns in NYC go as follows.

32.1% White alone, not hispanic or latino, 29.1% Hispanic or Latino, 24.3% Black or African American, 13.9% Asian, 0.4% American Indian and Alaskan Native, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian and other pacific

islander. Despite this disparity, the percentage of BIPOC actors in the 2017-2018 season saw a 5 point increase. However, it does not change the fact that BIPOC actors and people remain invisible in comparison to white actors. In fact, Asian Americans were the only group to see a drop from previous seasons due to the lack of inclusive stories being told on stage.

Unfortunately, the problems with diverse casting does not stop there. Inclusive casting seems to pose a threat to diversity on the stage with only 20% of available roles that do not have a designated race going to BIPOC

actors. Granted, inclusive casting was initially intended to fit BIPOC actors into traditionally white roles or in roles that do not have any set race attached to it. Inclusive casting also allows for different



perspectives that transcend racial stereotypes while addressing the issue of inequity in theater. Despite such a low number of BIPOC actors being cast through inclusive casting, 20% is the highest recorded percentage over the past twelve years.

The inequity does not end at on stage appearances. In New York City specifically, the majority of stories being told on stage were white at 79.1% meaning that 79.1% of writers in New York were white. This statistic correlates and explains the lack of diverse casting on stage as well. With so many white stories being told on stage, it is no wonder that there have been so many white actors being cast as well. The question becomes, how can we solve the issue of this massive bias towards white stories? Luckily, the answer is simple, hire more BIPOC writers and produce more shows that were written by BIPOC creatives. Similar to the theory written by Porsche McGovern in her diversity report, there seems to be a correlation between BIPOC actors hired and BIPOC writers involved in productions. This is evident in the amount of productions involving BIPOC writers in the non-profit sector vs. the productions involving a BIPOC writer on Broadway. While Broadway produced 8 shows that involved a BIPOC writer, the non-profit sector produced 28. The chart listed above makes it very clear that BIPOC people being involved with a production leads to an increased number of BIPOC actors on stage.

Adequate representation on stage becomes even more challenging when including directors into the mix. Out of all of the directors in NYC, 85.5% of the directors are white. On Broadway the percentage increases to 93.8% and at non-profit organizations the number decreases by .9 percentage points to 84.6%. These numbers are concerning for a multitude of reasons. First, the stories that are being written by BIPOC writers are ultimately being staged by someone who is not. Secondly, BIPOC actors on stage that are supposed to be telling their own story may be directed by someone who does not have first hand knowledge of the experiences of

BIPOC people. Out of the 34 productions written by at least one BIPOC writer in the 2017-2018 season, 22 of the productions were directed by a white director. Nearly 64.6% of BIPOC productions were influenced and molded by a white director. The prominence of white directors is a cause for concern and in some cases a road block for a more diverse cast and crew on productions. As mentioned in the statistics above, the more BIPOC directors on a production, the more BIPOC actors there are. This statistic also applies to designers as well who, as mentioned by Porsche McGovern in her diversity report, when a she directors works on a production, they are more likely to hire other she designers in the process.

Without a doubt in mind, the hiring practices of theaters in upper level management positions such as a director and artistic directors hinders the possibilities of diverse productions. The visibility report from AAPAC refers to these positions as gatekeepers (*AAPAC*). The correlation between the lack of diversity and the lack of BIPOC actors and designers being hired onto productions, shows that there is an innate bias that many producers, theater owners, directors etc. have. According to AAPAC, many of these high ranking positions within a theater have been occupied by the same person for over 20 years. If a leader that naturally has a bias against BIPOC creators maintains their position of power for an extended period of time, it is unlikely their theatre will improve in creating a more diverse, safe space for BIPOC creatives. This is similar to the case of *Miss Saigon* that was mentioned earlier. The controversy that sparked with the casting of Johnathan Pryce, ultimately is the fault of no other than the casting director, producer and director for *Miss Saigon*. There needs to be a big shift within the mainstream theaters of Broadway and other major areas in order to see more diverse casts and crew.

Victory Gardens Theater in Chicago is a wonderful example of that shift. Although a leader and advocate of diversity, the Victory Gardens theater is no stranger to controversy. In 2001, after being a recipient to the Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theater, Chay Yew took the mantle of artistic director, a big win for diversity as Yew was one of the rare artistic directors of color. After bringing on diverse playwrights in each season and in the resident playwright program, Yew declared his departure from the theater after a nine year tenure of creating social change through hiring a diverse cast and writers. In May of 2020, the board of the Victory Gardens decided to name their executive director, Erica Daniels to the position of artistic director. This caused the ensemble of playwrights that Yew had brought in to leave the theater and in response to the board not consulting their own artist's or conducting a national search. The change in power created tensions between the public and the theater's top brass. During the height of protests for Black Lives Matter, many other theaters in Chicago and New York were opening their doors to protestors as a sign of solidarity with the movement. However, Victory Gardens instead boarded up their front. This act inflamed tensions and created a protest against the theater,

“Black Lives Matter. But do they matter to this theater?”(Mark Caro) Two days later Daniels resigned alongside the board chair Steve Miller. During the search for a new artistic director, Ken-Matt Martin was brought up as a potential candidate and was ultimately selected. The selection of Martin allows for a dynamic shift in diversity since Victory Gardens theater is a critically acclaimed regional theater.

There are many ways in which theaters and activist groups go about combating the diversity issue in the theater industry. However, one thing stands true, there needs to be a shift within the mainstream theaters first. Non-profit or for profit aside, larger theaters must make an

effort to cast and hire a more diverse array of personnel so that people of all genders, races, and cultural identities. Further, if more playwrights and directors produce shows that showcase different cultural identities, this change would ultimately create a more sustainable and equitable change for all theater workers and allow for those who have been ignored or looked over an opportunity to prove themselves.

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