

COLOR CONSCIOUS CASTING

DECEMBER 2020

What is Color Conscious Casting?

The practice of color-conscious casting intends to bring the entirety of an actor's identity to a role and change a story's narrative for the better. Color-conscious casting includes recognizing an individual's identity as integral to their storytelling and actively taking the opportunity to showcase all of them within the art. We, as artists, must first select and create stories that are inclusive and diverse. Then, it is our obligation to fill those roles and leadership positions with BIPOC voices that can tell the stories accurately. Color-conscious casting creates a more inclusive production, and is but one opportunity to create a more holistic and representative theatrical landscape.

Establishing color-conscious casting as a norm contributes to a more far-reaching theatre industry reflective of the world's artists. This type of casting applies to shows that deal with race directly but also can affect shows that don't. For instance, casting BIPOC actors reshapes characters' relationships, giving representation to bi-racial couples or multi-racial families. Racially-conscious casting can give power to BIPOC voices, reframe a play's message, and even bring a story into the modern era.

It is imperative that we stop casting non-BIPOC actors in BIPOC roles. It directly takes opportunities away from marginalized groups, and erases all significance behind those BIPOC stories. White should never be the default, especially when stories do not specify race.

SIGNIFICANCE & EVOLUTION

The theatre industry has historically discriminated against BIPOC artists by excluding them from stories and productions. The practice of "colorblind" casting has grown popular in recent years. "Colorblind" casting, while sometimes well-intentioned, is incredibly problematic as it negates the identity of actors and can easily lead to tokenization. By pretending to not see race, you miss seeing the whole actor and opportunities to evolve shows based on BIPOC stories. Additionally, the color-conscious casting of Eurocentric shows cannot be a replacement for producing stories written for and by BIPOC.

Despite the industry's growing movement towards color-conscious casting, many educational institutions still select shows whose needs they cannot fulfill because of inadequate diversity within their departments. It is important that, as emerging theatre creators, we hold our institutions accountable for their actions and demand that misrepresentation and offensive productions are removed from curriculums. Our theatres, especially those at USC, can and will ensure that equitable spaces are created for all artists.

This work is not over and must continue to build upon the progress of our leaders and roles models who have made strides in this movement. A few organizations that have spearheaded the push for color-conscious casting are HowlRound Theatre Commons, Theater Folx of Color, Black Theatre United, and Latinx Theatre Commons. These organization's Facebook groups can be found in the links below.

PERSONAL INSIGHT

"As a current USC School of Dramatic Arts Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Student Liaison, I have been able to learn much more about the restructuring that is currently underway in SDA from the administration and faculty. In a recent Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) training session, Associate Dean of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Co-Head of Undergraduate Acting, Anita Dashiell- Sparks, Professor Rena M. Heinrich, and Jennifer Franco shared the many central principles and initiatives that our school's new shift in EDI is focused on. One of these initiatives is the passionate advocacy for color-conscious casting in SDA and in the theatre industry. It's reassuring that the EDI leadership recognizes how important holistic representation and substantive casting is for theatre artists. The fact that they are hiring student liaisons for SDA EDI to create channels of communication and feedback shows their passion and commitment to reshaping our community. All of this mirrors what we at MTR are hoping to do with our current restructuring, and I'm very hopeful for future progress in SDA and MTR."

-Eric Renna



DIVERSIFY YOUR FEED

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Theater Folx of Color
Facebook Group

[https://
www.facebook.com/
groups/thecrewrevolution/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/thecrewrevolution/)



Latinx Theatre Commons
(LTC) Facebook Group

[https://
www.facebook.com/
groups/
latinxtheatrecommons/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/latinxtheatrecommons/)



Black Theatre United
Facebook Page

[https://
www.facebook.com/
BlackTheatreUnited](https://www.facebook.com/BlackTheatreUnited)



HowlRound Theatre
Commons Facebook Page

[https://
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ACTION ITEMS

WEBSITES

weseeyouwat.com

VIDEOS

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utm_source=ig_web_copy
_link](https://www.instagram.com/tv/CA58YRRDREi/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

ARTICLES

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[https://
www.americantheatre.org/
2018/10/23/cast-with-
diverse-approaches/](https://www.americantheatre.org/2018/10/23/cast-with-diverse-approaches/)

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Think about the theatre spaces you are active in. What is that environment like? What are the racial implications of that environment, and how can you personally take steps in that space toward true equity and inclusivity?

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Who Does Your
Theatre Serve?