

A photograph of a person's feet sitting on grass. The soles of the feet are painted with the words 'We Can Change the World' in a dark, hand-painted font. The words are arranged in three lines: 'We Can' on the top line, 'CHANGE' in the middle, and 'THE WORLD' on the bottom line. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green grass and some trees under a bright sky. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark grey filter.

# Accessible Inclusion

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A Changing Community-but Changing into What?

# Expectations



- This is going to be different than the last Masterclass. More broad and possibly sensitive subjects.
  - And a WHOLE lot more data heavy. There is no test. Don't worry.
- If anything I say is upsetting, please let me know. If you're not comfortable letting me know, please email Ms. Morris. I want to make sure that no one feels uncomfortable.
- This is a place and time for lots of questions and talking. Feel free to chime in at any point.
- We'll be talking about how to increase diversity and accessibility in theater-on stage, back stage, before stage and at the audience level.
- We'll also be talking about WHY that all matters.

BRAVE  
SPACE

# “An Invitation to Brave Space”

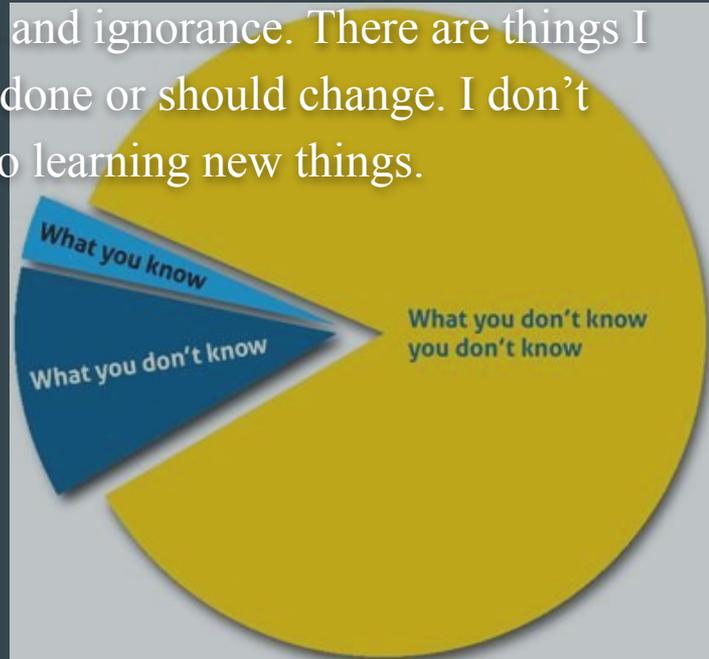
*Micky ScottBey Jones*

Together we will create brave space  
Because there is no such thing as “safe space”  
We exist in the real world  
We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds.  
In this space  
We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,  
We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,  
We call each other to more truth and love  
We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.  
We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know.  
We will not be perfect.  
This space will not be perfect.  
It will not always be what we wish it to be  
But  
It will be our brave space together,  
And  
We will work on it side by side.



# Who I Am

I've seen theater change in many ways since I started professionally working and I've seen well-intentioned missteps and willful ignorance, as well as some fantastic innovations. In this class, I'm going to talk about my experience and I need you to remember that this is all from my lens and that I carry within myself my own inherent bias and ignorance. There are things I will miss. Don't take this as the only things ever that can be done or should change. I don't know what I don't know and that's ok, just always be open to learning new things.



# Terms to Know

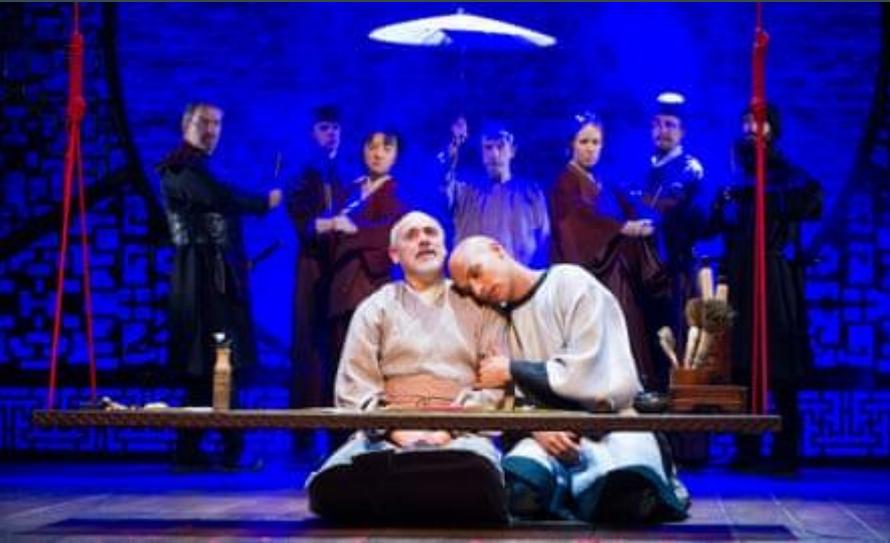


- **Colorblind Casting**-Selecting actors without taking ethnicity into account
- **Color Conscious/Inclusivity Casting**-casting with an understanding of how skin color/disability/gender conformity has an impact on both the story being told and overall current society.
  - I.E. While casting a Black hearing-impaired gender non-conforming actor as Cinderella might not have a strong impact on the actual story, it has a strong impact on modern day society and what the stage is telling the audience is “allowed” to be beautiful.
- **Principal in a play/musical:** a main role.
- **Accessibility:** Simply, doing our best to make theater in our case as accessible to EVERYONE as we can.
- **Remember:** Language is ever evolving. What we use now, might not always be right. New words and terms are always being made.



# How Big of a Problem is This?

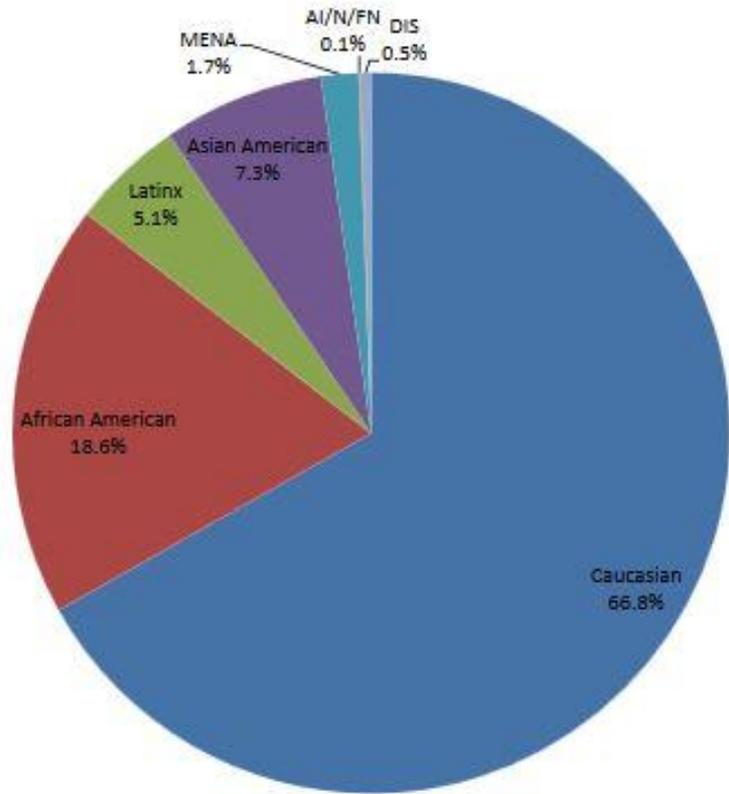
- A 2016/17 study showed that 86.8 % of all shows produced in the New York City 2016-2017 season were written by white playwrights and that roles filled by minority actors dropped from a record breaking 35% the previous season to just 33%.
  - In case you wondered, that's not representative of NYC's populace which is only 42% Caucasian.



Not seeing the problem is how you end up with a show set in Ancient china. With only white people on stage. And become the center of a national scandal.

- Don't put shows on you don't have the performers to put on.

# Exclusion On Stage

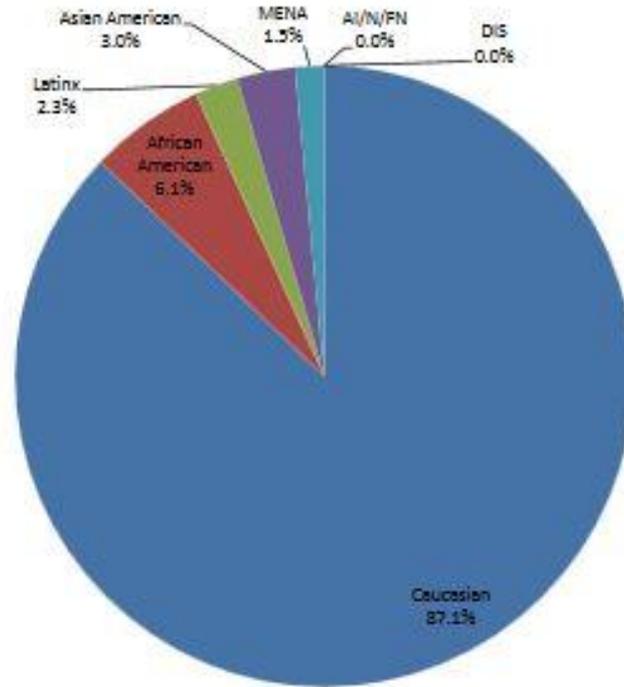


Broadway and Non-Profit Actors Combined

- Caucasian actors make up majority of ALL onstage contracts on Broadway (65% for plays, 66% for musicals, and 57% for chorus roles). Not only that, but on and off Broadway, Caucasian actors make more on their contracts than Black or other actors of color (ranging from an average of 10% to 16% difference according to 2017 Actor's Equity).
- Female-identifying actors (I could find no stats on gender-non conforming), make up only 35% of principal in a play and 42% principal in a musical on Broadway itself and only 39% of principal in plays off-Broadway. In both, women are paid less than their male counterparts.
- How often do you see actors with disabilities on stage?
  - Why not have an actor that signs instead or in addition to speaking?
  - Why does that character have to be able-bodied?
  - Can that character be played with someone with verbal tics with aid from sound?

# Exclusion Backstage

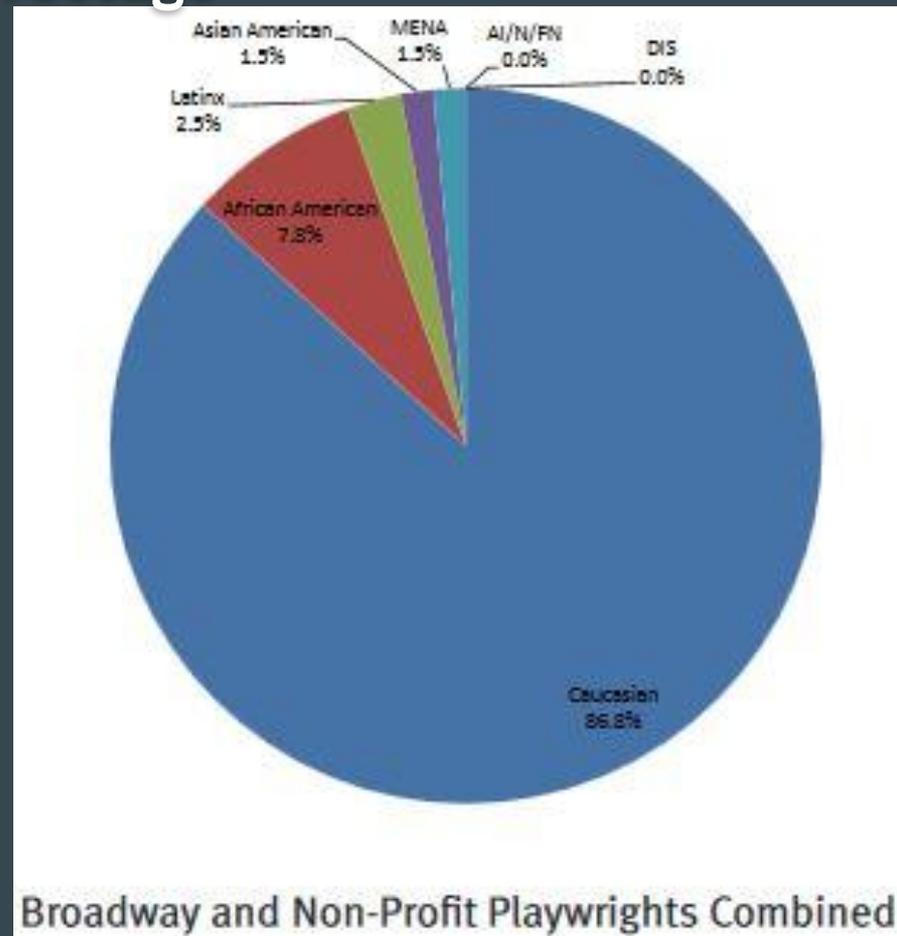
- 77% of stage Manager contracts on Broadway and tours went to caucasians. Over THREE years, only 6 were with stage managers that were Black.
- Off Broadway, 88% of stage manager contracts go to Caucasians.
- Female identifying stage managers made up a whopping 37% of contracts.
- In the 2016-2017 Season, over 87% of NYC directors were white.
- On Broadway alone there were about 95% of all plays and musicals were BOTH written AND directed by Caucasian artists.
- Of these directors, only just over 31% identified as female and 0.8% were non-binary.



Broadway and Non-Profit Directors Combined

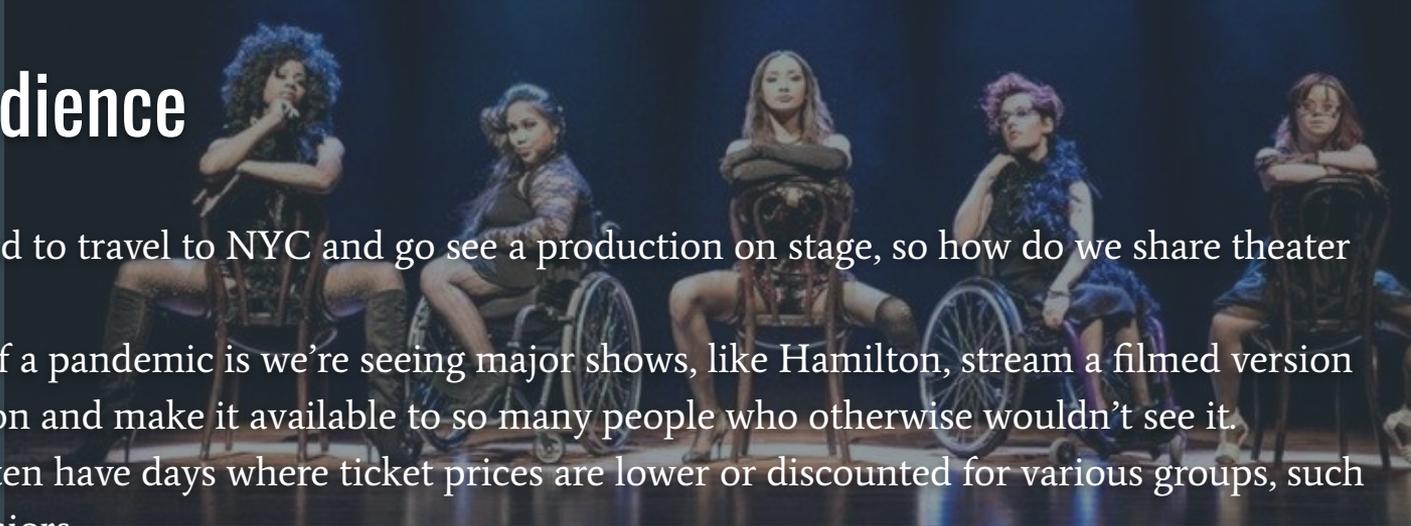
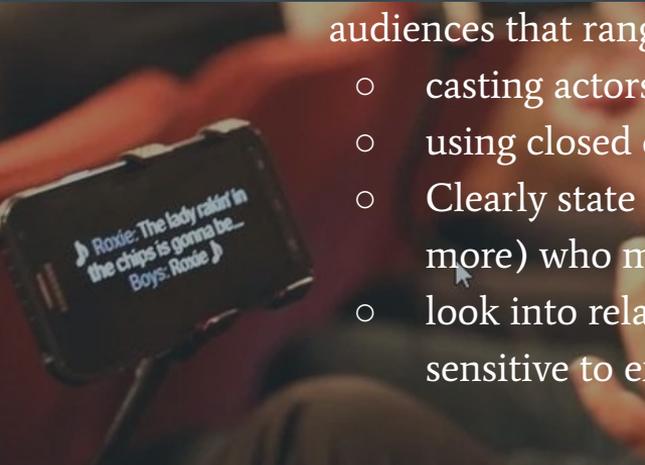
# Exclusion Prestige

- In the 2016/17 season, over 86% of ALL Broadway AND off-Broadway shows were from white playwrights.
  - The 2017/18 season the numbers did shift slightly – nearly 80% of Broadway and off-Broadway shows' writers were white, and 85.5% of directors.
  - So we are making progress, but we're making it by talking about it and being aware that it needs to happen.
- African-American playwrights were represented at 4.1 percent.
- MENA playwrights were only 1.4 percent.
- The 2016/17 Broadway season featured NO plays or musicals by Latinx, Asian-American, or American Indian/Native/First Nation playwrights, nor playwrights with disabilities.
- In terms of gender, 89% of playwrights identified as men and only 11% identified as female.



# Excluding the Audience

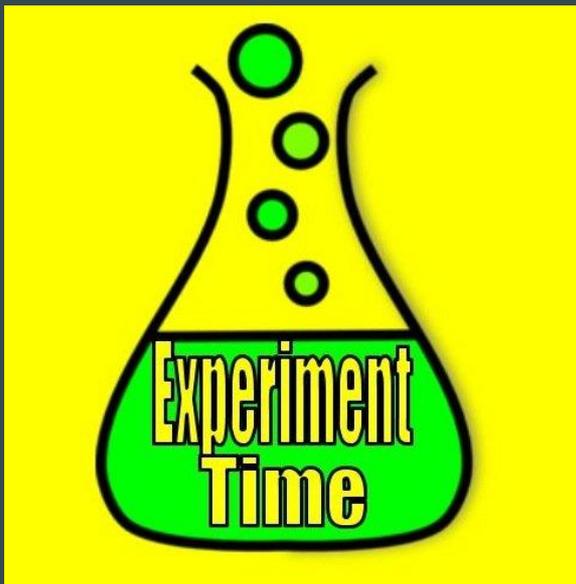
- Lots of folks can't afford to travel to NYC and go see a production on stage, so how do we share theater with them?
  - The bright side of a pandemic is we're seeing major shows, like Hamilton, stream a filmed version of their production and make it available to so many people who otherwise wouldn't see it.
  - Local theaters often have days where ticket prices are lower or discounted for various groups, such as students or seniors.
- Not only that, but we're seeing more and more companies focus on accessibility for audiences that range outside of monetary-
  - casting actors with disabilities to actually boost visibility
  - using closed captioning apps for hearing impaired audience members to follow along,
  - Clearly state you support using text to speech apps for audience (and even techs and more) who may be non-verbal.
  - look into relaxed performances to branch out to folks who need more guidance or are sensitive to extra stimulus



# Experiment Time

Pretend for a second that you're given a script where the character is walking home alone at night. What are you **FIRST** thoughts, just knowing that?

- Go ahead. Write out some adjectives. You don't need to know anything else. Just a person walking alone towards their home. Take a few minutes. We're going to share in chat.



# Experiment Share

My first thought was that walking home alone is kind of scary. I'd costume this character a little tough. Someone who isn't scared to handle themselves and is confident that they can. How tough they need to be, that depends on the rest of what I know about them.



WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST THOUGHTS?

# Experiment Shift

What if the author is a white man and didn't grow up with a lifetime of "Don't walk home alone"s in his ears?

What if he's was a gay man in New York in the 1970s and for SURE knew not to walk home alone?

Or a Black woman that lived in a predominantly white area?

How do these life experiences alter how the AUTHOR might view the act of walking alone?

NOW add in what you know about the character. How do all of these things change your initial concept of what this character might look like?



- Let's say the author was a white man and that this character was also male identifying and throughout the rest of the play is shown to be rather mild-mannered and even a scaredy-cat. How might this affect your initial thoughts now?
  - You know we're about to talk about this. Discussion time!

# Experimenting Some More

- What if that same character, that mild mannered dude scaredy cat from before, was written by a woman with a history of living in areas where walking alone wasn't safe? You KNOW she knows that walking home alone is an act of danger and defiance in and of itself. Is she saying that this character is stronger and braver than we think? Or is it that even though he is scared, he has no other option but to walk home alone? How does this change your design?
  - I bet you know we're talking again!



# Time to Design!

- Research is important here. More than just what is appropriate to the era, clothing wise, but really delve into who the author was, who the character is, and how to empathize with them. What characteristics you want to bring out and how best to do so. That's true for every designer, tech and performer.
- When designing for Shakespeare or shows where certain characters have been traditionally cast as white: Ask if they have to be. Ask if they have to be perfectly able bodied. Ask if they have to be fit or thin or blankety blank. Ask the director to be open to different visions, and then design for someone who hasn't been in that role before.
  - Be prepared to change that design for whomever is actually cast. Your design was for a Black woman but a Latinx non-binary performer was cast? Great! You may need to alter a bit of the hair style or check in with the performer about their comfort level in wearing a dress versus shifting it to pants. Be open to change.



# Practical Applications

SOME BASIC OVERVIEWS THAT MOST CAUCASIAN TECHS DON'T LEARN ABOUT:

- How to design, prep or even talk about Black hair
  - Different curl types are more sensitive to heat. Don't use crazy amount of heat or design with styles that require lots of heat that will break hair.
  - Ask what kind of care they use so you can have in stock the same kind of extra supplies usually kept for white performers.
  - See their comfort level when it comes to types of wig prep or if they have natural or relaxed hair. Just ask. If you ask what their comfort level with their hair is and they say they get it chemically treated or they do braids, you can do a design with that in mind-if they don't, don't ask them to nix their natural hair.

● Did you know that it is hard to find leggings or character shoes that match non-white skin tones? Especially if you want non-convertible tights.

- Get a database on hand and be on look out for new companies.
- Learn how to paint character shoes.

● What about access for actors with disabilities?

- We've talked about designing, but how do we handle performers with mobility needs or visual or hearing impairments?
- We can ask them.
- And make use of apps. Our phones are amazing and there are some fantastic apps out there solely meant to help bridge these gaps of understanding.

## Most Common Hair Types Found in Black Hair

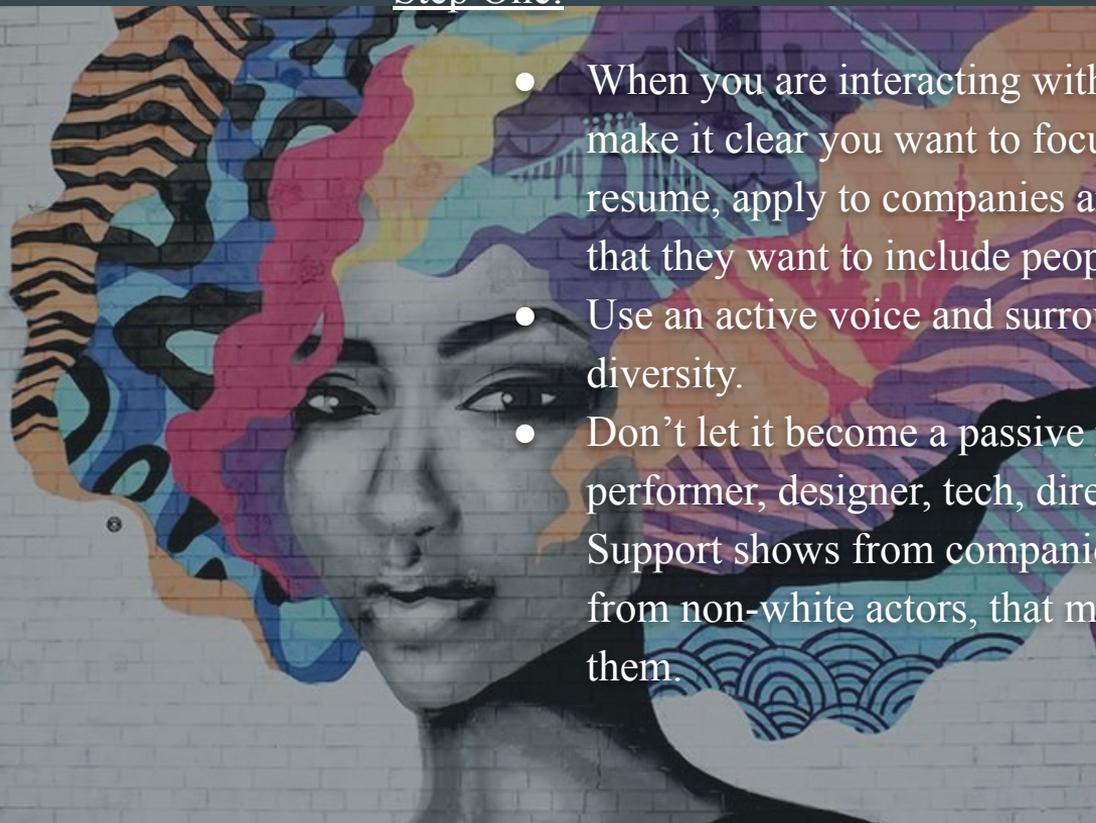


# Inclusion: Step by Step

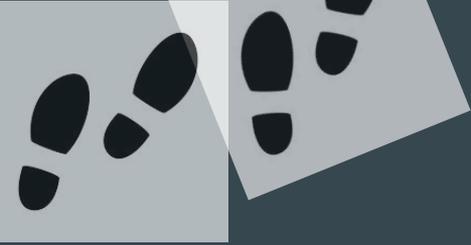


## Step One:

- When you are interacting with the theater community in any capacity, make it clear you want to focus on inclusionary work. Put it in your resume, apply to companies and schools that fundamentally spell that out that they want to include people of all races, genders and bodies.
- Use an active voice and surround yourself with active voices about diversity.
- Don't let it become a passive part of your theater life-either as a performer, designer, tech, director, board member, or audience member. Support shows from companies that have a diverse cast, that put on plays from non-white actors, that more accurately represent the people around them.



# Inclusion: Step by Step



## Step Two:

- Expand your network.
  - Sounds obvious, but the best way to diversify theater is to diversify who you know.
  - The upside of a pandemic is that we're seeing some real interesting digital theater. See if you can get involved with something over winter break. Doesn't have to be with local high schoolers. Could be with teens in Seattle, Austin, or even Birmingham Alabama.
    - Maybe it's just a play reading group. Maybe it's a digital sewing club. Maybe it's a full on mini production of a show. Maybe it's a disaster. Either way, it's a way to meet people you probably wouldn't have had a chance to meet and certainly not have had a chance to be part of theater with.



# Inclusion: Step by Step

## Step Three:

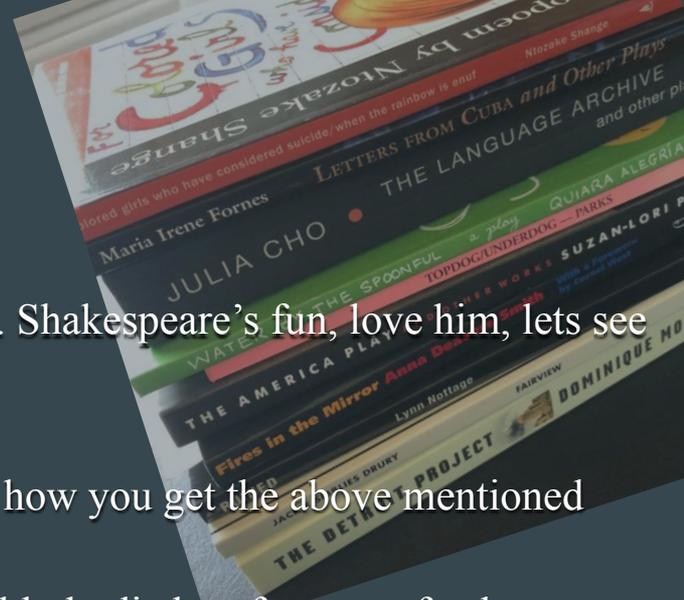
- Do. Not. Put. On. A. Show. You. Don't. Have. The. Actors. For.
  - Yes, Raisin in the Sun is a great show BUT if you're in a mostly white area and struggling to get anyone of color into auditions, start with shows that don't depend on an all or near all Black cast.
  - If you don't, you won't get the people you need and will need to cancel to show OR end up white washing it. That's how we get the long history of white actors taking roles specifically not meant for them.



# Inclusion: Step by Step

## Step Four:

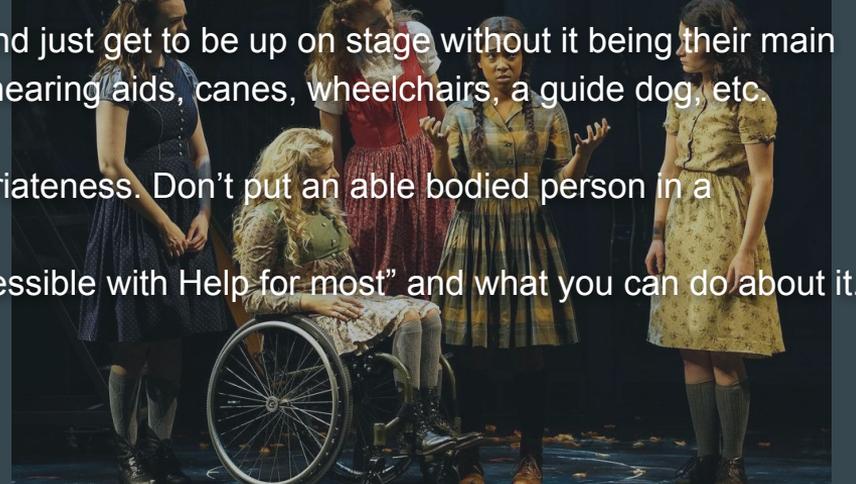
- Don't forget behind the scenes!
  - Pick a script from an author that isn't an old dead white guy. Shakespeare's fun, love him, lets see who else is out there.
  - Get a diverse creative team together. Designers and techies.
  - Promote, cast and hire outside your normal network! (that's how you get the above mentioned team!)
  - Cast "Traditionally" white roles with some non cis-gender able-bodied performers of color.
    - Really ask if that character HAS to be Blankety Blank (able-bodied, white, male) or if allowing that to be flexible or even intentionally altered still serves the story you and the author was telling.
      - This gets complicated once you get into author rights. For any show that requires specific casting, if you change it, you will need permission from the author. That is usually not a problem. Sometimes (Albee's estate with "Who's Afraid...") it is. Don't know till you try.



# Actual Accessibility

Man, there's a whole lot of things that aren't really friendly for our hearing/visual/moving/otherwise impaired loved ones! What can I do about THAT?!

- Push for it!
  - See if you can make a character in the play fluent in ASL. Not someone just off to the side translating (though they are lovely) but an actual representation of someone with hearing impairment and it's not even their main feature. It's just a character that's been slightly shifted to also Sign.
- Representation really truly matters
  - we don't see a lot of people with disabilities of any kind just get to be up on stage without it being their main characteristic. You can even design characters with hearing aids, canes, wheelchairs, a guide dog, etc.
  - Possibilities are endless. Embrace some.
  - Don't forget about authenticity in casting and appropriateness. Don't put an able bodied person in a wheelchair
- Think and ASK if your theatre is accessible for ALL or "Accessible with Help for most" and what you can do about it.



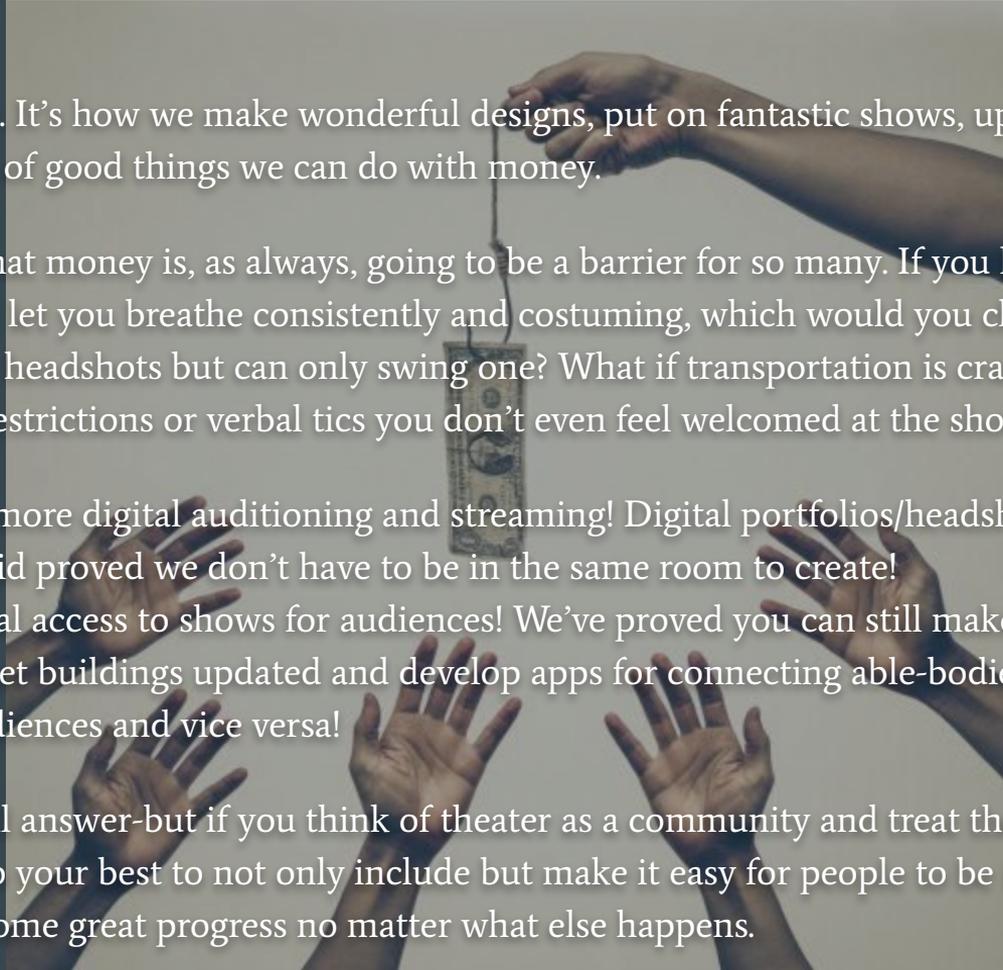
# Money!

Money is great for theater. It's how we make wonderful designs, put on fantastic shows, update our buildings to be accessible! There's lots of good things we can do with money.

We also HAVE to know that money is, as always, going to be a barrier for so many. If you had to choose between medications that let you breathe consistently and costuming, which would you choose? Or you needed a new prosthetic and new headshots but can only swing one? What if transportation is crazy expensive for you and because of mobility restrictions or verbal tics you don't even feel welcomed at the show?

- Push for more and more digital auditioning and streaming! Digital portfolios/headshots! Long distance creative teams! Covid proved we don't have to be in the same room to create!
- Push for more digital access to shows for audiences! We've proved you can still make a profit that way.
- Push for grants to get buildings updated and develop apps for connecting able-bodied performers and disabled bodied audiences and vice versa!

There is no one size fits all answer-but if you think of theater as a community and treat those around you as part of that community and do your best to not only include but make it easy for people to be included into your community you'll make some great progress no matter what else happens.



# There's A LOT That Needs To Change

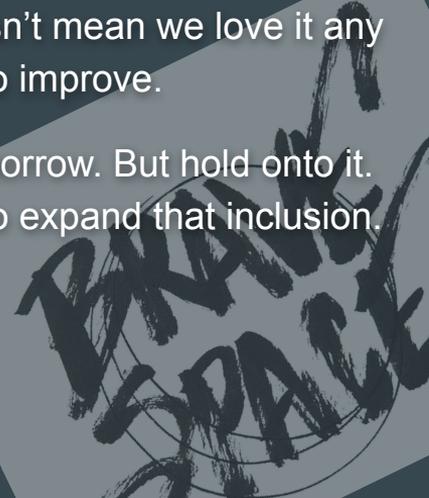
A person is seen from behind, painting the words "TIME FOR CHANGE" in large, bold, white letters on a dark, textured wall. The person is wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and light-colored pants. The wall has a rough, cracked appearance.

TIME  
FOR  
CHANGE

Theatre is wonderful. I love it. It means a lot. But it has issues. Acknowledging them doesn't mean we love it any less or that loving it makes us bad. Acknowledging there are flaws are how we are able to improve.

It's ok that it's not perfect. It won't ever be perfect. No one is expecting you to fix it all tomorrow. But hold onto it. Keep your eyes open and think about these issues and inclusivity and what you can do to expand that inclusion.

Remember Brave Space and strive to make every theater you're part of become one.



# Question Time

- What issues have you seen in Theatre that I haven't thought of?
- Any ideas on how we can use this digital space that the pandemic is thrown us into to help with this inclusion?
  - Broadway has livestreamed some musicals and that's opened up a lot of traditional shows to folks who would never have been able to travel and go see them. Thoughts?
- What changes do you want to see in the future?



## Links to check out:

- <https://www.americantheatre.org/2019/07/03/how-to-solve-designs-diversity-problem/>
- <https://www.theatreartlife.com/acting-singing/inclusive-casting-best-practices/>
- <https://blog.scope.org.uk/2017/12/11/poor-accessibility-can-lead-to-isolation-but-this-theatre-company-is-changing-that/>
- <https://howlround.com/you-want-diverse-theatre-prove-it>

