

# Broadway is becoming more diverse, but some areas still lag behind

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The 2016 Tony Awards marked the first time all four musical acting awards were won by black actors. (Photo by Walter McBride/WireImage)

The Broadway season that sparked the hashtag #TonysSoDiverse was the most diverse season in a decade.

The 2015-2016 Broadway season, which included the opening of “Hamilton,” saw 36% of all Broadway roles going to minority actors, according to a newly released report from the Asian American Performers Coalition. However, while Broadway saw a more diverse season, including an upswing in nontraditional casting, there are still large disparities, particularly with Broadway plays and Asian-American representation.

In the past several years, New York stages, which includes Off Broadway and Broadway, have been growing increasingly diverse, with the number of minority actors hitting a new high of 35% in the 2015-2016 season.

“After four years in a row of exceeding the 10-season average of 23.7%, it seems safe to say that there is a definite upward trend in the casting of minority actors,” the report says.

Part of this may come from an increase in nontraditional casting, in which 13.9% of all roles on Broadway in the 2015-2016 season were cast “without regard to race,” compared to the 9% that had been seen both on Broadway and Off-Broadway for the previous nine years of the study.

The study, conducted by the volunteer-driven coalition, included every show that opened that season, with the data largely compiled from visual observation, rather than self-reported data. The study would include self-reported data if declarations were made in interviews or in online bios.

While nontraditional casting may be on the upswing, plays on Broadway remain largely Caucasian, with the 2015-2016 plays at 85% Caucasian compared to 57% in Broadway musicals.

And in some cases, one or two shows accounted for most of the representation of that demographic.

On Broadway, African-American actors were cast in 21% of all roles, the same number as the 2013-2014 season. Shows such as “The Color Purple,” “Eclipsed” and “Shuffle Along” were large contributors to those numbers, as well as nontraditional casting in “The Gin Game” and “The Crucible,” the report states.

However, while Latino performers were cast in 8% of all Broadway roles in the 2015-2016 season, a jump from 2% in the prior season and above the 10-year average of 3.8%, the study notes this was “largely due” to “Hamilton” and “On Your Feet!”

The number of Asian-American performers on Broadway fell to 5%, a drop of six points from the previous season, during which “The King and I” had hired “almost half” of all Asian actors on Broadway that season.

Because these musicals only account for a few of the 40-plus shows in a Broadway season, the study says nontraditional casting is the best way to create a more diverse environment.