

AAPAC's 'Ethnic Representation' Report Indicates Record High in the Season of Hamilton

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Lin-Manuel Miranda and the company of *Hamilton* Joan Marcus

The Asian American Performers Action Coalition's recently released "Ethnic Representation on New York City Stages" study for the 2015–2016 season reports a new record of 35 percent of all roles on New York City stages played by actors of color.

The season that brought such shows as *Hamilton* and *The Color Purple* to Broadway led to the most diverse season on Broadway (for performers, at least) and first time all four musical performance categories at the Tony Awards were won by people of color (all four were black).

However, the report indicates clear areas of the industry that require attention and improvement, particularly in plays and with non-profit companies with a history of underrepresentation.

The study takes into account not just minority representation, but also the roles in which they were cast: whether they were "race-specific" or considered "non-traditional." The former potentially points to the representation of works by and about people of color, ensuring a full range of stories being told on New York City stages, while the latter indicates, according to AAPAC, the most effective way to provide equal opportunities through roles that carry less of a risk of racial stereotypes.

According to the report, 13.9 percent of all available roles on Broadway were cast without regard to race or ability, with shows like *Hamilton* and Deaf West's *Spring Awakening*—as well as the James Earl Jones- and Cicely Tyson-led *The Gin Game* pointing to a rise in non-traditional casting. The non-profit sector showed a slightly higher rate in non-traditional casting at 16.9 percent.

While these percentages signify a significant jump over AAPAC's previous decade of studies, representation ranged drastically between plays and musicals. Broadway musicals hired 43 percent minority actors in the 2015–2016 season (with several productions casting predominantly people of color, including *Hamilton*, *On Your Feet!* *The Color Purple*, *Allegiance*, and *Shuffle Along*). Meanwhile, plays hired only 16 percent, with virtually no Latinx performers and one Asian actor.

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Despite the record high of minority casting, Caucasians continue to be the only ethnicity over-represented compared to New York City population size with white actors in 65 percent of all roles on New York stages.

New York's non-profit theatre companies maintained the industry-wide average with 35 percent of roles filled with minority actors. Though a four-point drop from the year before, it was once again above the ten-year average for the non-profit sector (25.9 percent).

AAPAC's annual report looks at the 16 major non-profit theatre companies in the city (including the three that produce in part on Broadway: Lincoln Center Theater, Manhattan Theatre Club, and Roundabout Theatre Company). It categorizes the companies through both overall diversity and representation in non-traditional roles.

Classic Stage Company topped the list of companies as "Most Diverse" with 58 percent of roles played by actors of color—they also ranked among the top five in non-traditional casting, with 86 percent of those 22 actors in roles not tied specifically to their race. Second Stage Theater and the Public Theater joined CSC as the three companies to hire minorities in at least 50 percent of available roles (though AAPAC notes Second Stage hired only 26 percent of those actors in non-traditionally cast roles).

Atlantic Theater Company and Roundabout appeared in both the "Least Diverse" and "Lower Non-Traditional Casting" companies, with the latter tying with MCC Theater with the lowest percentage of minority actors (five percent) for the 2015–2016 season.

The American Theatre Wing released a statement shortly after the publication of the AAPAC report, noting that "much more needs to be done."

"In the coming months," wrote American Theatre Wing President and CEO Heather Hitchens, "the American Theatre Wing's Diversity Committee, led by our chairman, David Henry Hwang, will reflect on this data and work on expanding the study to include offstage vocations, gender diversity, and other similarly important topics of inclusion. By the close of 2018, we hope to

announce new partnerships, programs, and strategies that will help us continue to move the needle. We urge our colleagues in the theatre to do the same. It is not only a matter of doing what is fair and just; it is absolutely critical to the vitality of our field.”

[Click here](#) for to view AAPAC's full report.