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## [Asian Americans actors are missing on Broadway stages](#)

*February 17, 2012*

It's been over twenty years since Asian Americans rallied on Broadway against yellowface and "racebending" in *Miss Saigon*—the same protest that inspired our work against *The Last Airbender* here at Racebending.com—but Asian Americans are still not getting roles on Broadway. Enter the Asian American Performers Action Coalition (AAPAC), a group that has organized to help actors of color overcome obstacles to bring more inclusive casting to New York City stages. AAPAC is focused on changing Asian perceptions and opportunities within the New York theatre industry only. It was created by a group of Asian American performers in 2011 in response to what was perceived as a lack of access to opportunities within mainstream New York theatre.

On February 13th, the New York City based [AAPAC \(Asian American Performers Action Coalition\)](#) hosted an industry roundtable at Fordham University to dialogue on the representation of minority actors on Broadway. The three hour panel at the RepresentAsian conference was moderated by Tony Award-winning playwright David Henry Hwang.

At the event, AAPAC unveiled statistics of a survey they conducted on New York stages, over a five year period. This report is the first report on minority casting in New York theatre ever to be released publicly.

[\[Click here to download the report!\]](#)

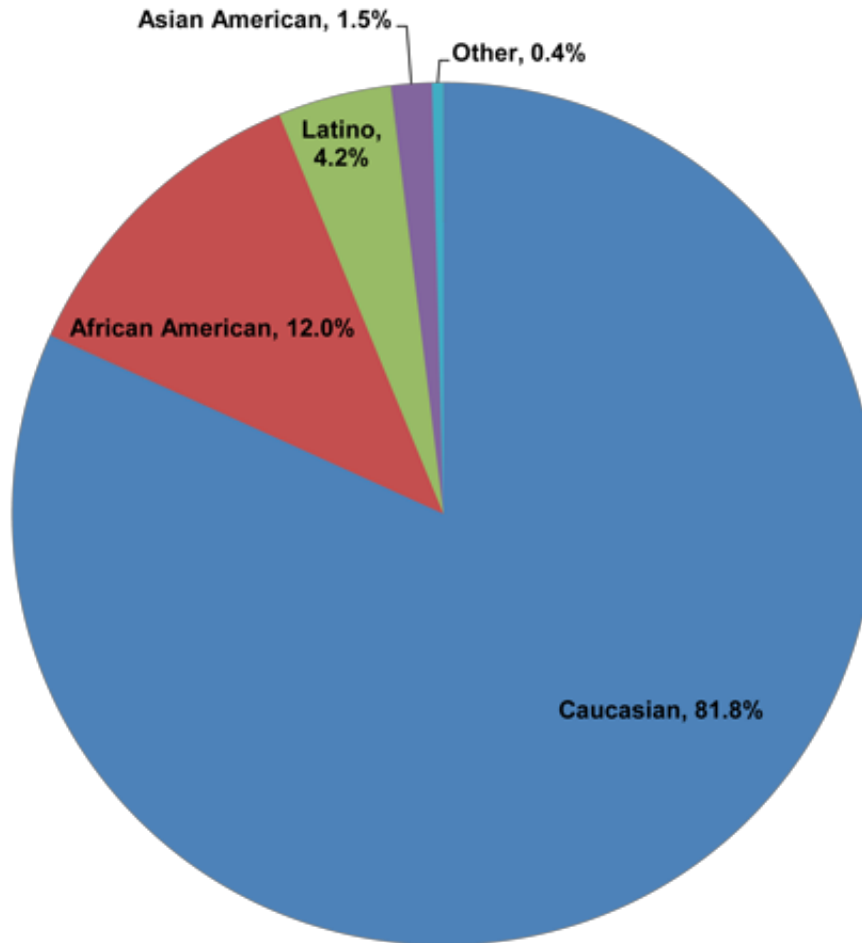
“The statistics were culled because there was a need for it,” said Pun Bandhu, an Asian-American actor who is currently performing in “Wit” on Broadway, and a member of AAPAC’s steering committee. “There are no publicly available statistics that track minority casting in theatre, while SAG-AFTRA has already taken on that

responsibility for Hollywood. Of course, as actors, we are involved in Hollywood too, especially TV shows and films that shoot in NY, and we often interact with casting directors who cast for both Film and Theatre. Our hope is that by focusing on the things we can reasonably change within one industry, we can have an impact on others as well.”



## Broadway Casting Five Years Combined

Out of all Broadway productions that opened in the last five years, African American actors were 12% of all roles, Latino actors 4.2% and Asian Americans 1.5%.



**Of the 3530 roles cast in Broadway Theatres over the last 5 years only**

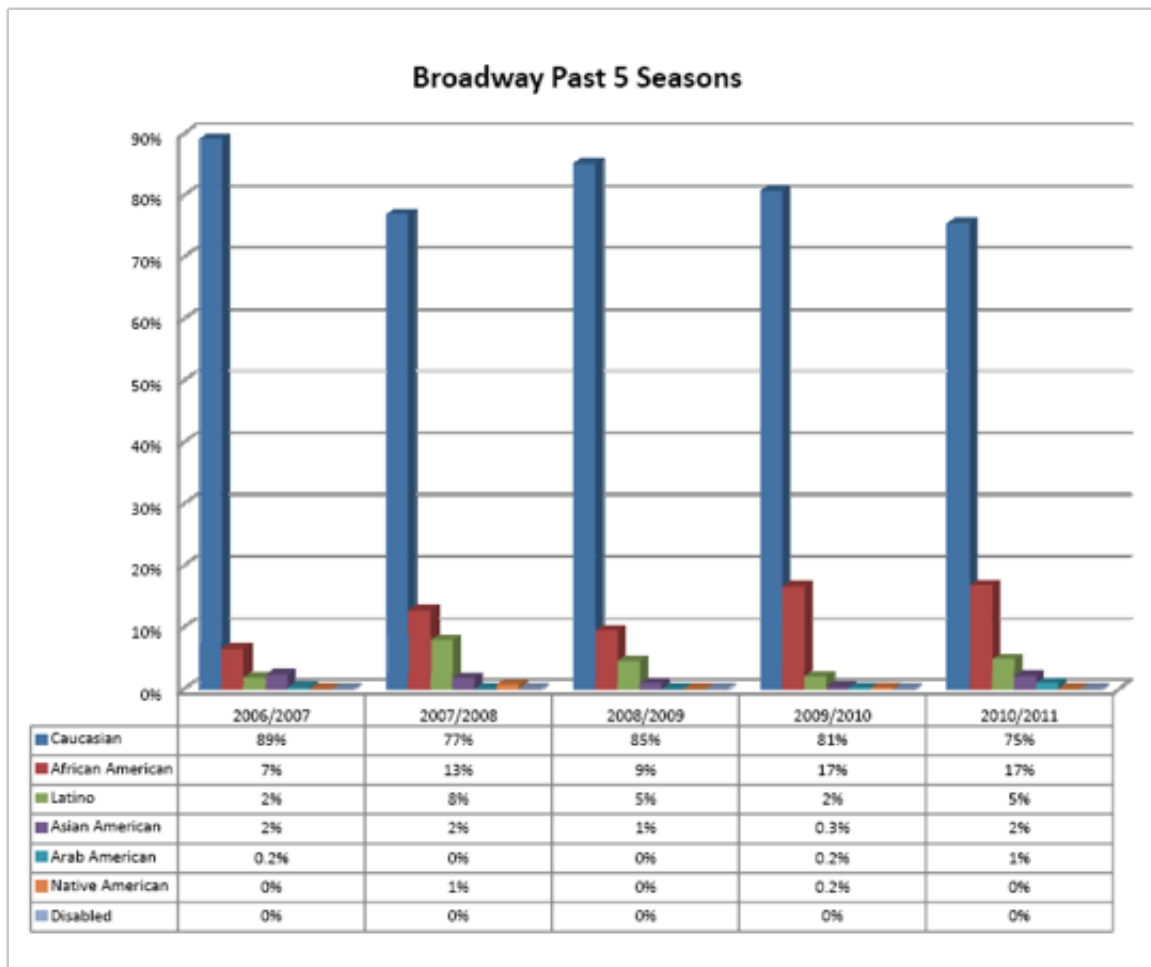
**54**

**Asian American actors were cast**

The good news is that in general, the ratio of minority actors to roles has increased. Five years ago, only 15% of roles went to actors of color; today, 22% of roles go to actors of color. This still means that nearly 80% of all roles go to actors who are white (the only racial/ethnic group to over-represent based on their demographics in the New York tri-state area), but it is definitely an improvement. African American actors (14%) and Latino actors (3%) saw increases in representation.

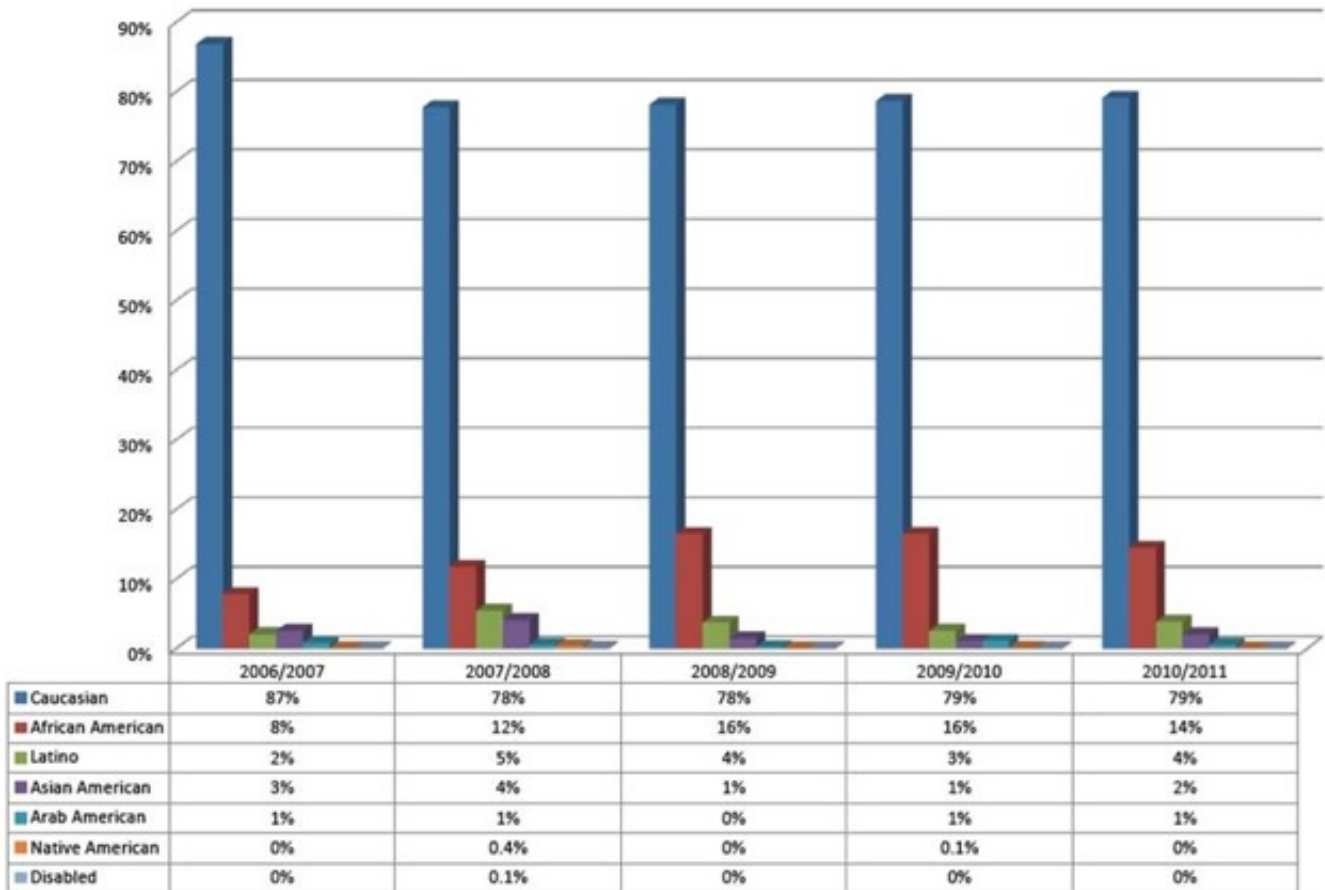
In addition, the number of minority actors cast in roles that are not “race-specific” continues to rise. The report suggests that this is an “indicator of creativity within the casting process and, possibly, the breaking down of traditional racial stereotypes.” The study also notes that only 9% of roles in New York City are cast without regard to race, and very few minority actors were seen in leading roles.

The bad news is that the increase in minority acting roles did not benefit Asian American actors. Asian Americans were the only minority group to see their numbers go down. Asian Americans comprise 12.6% of New York City and is the city’s fastest growing major minority group, yet, last year, Asian actors accounted for only 1.6% of all available roles in new shows on Broadway and 3.3% of all roles produced by New York City’s top non-profit theatre companies in the last five years. There were only 18 Principal Broadway contracts for Asian American actors in the last five years.

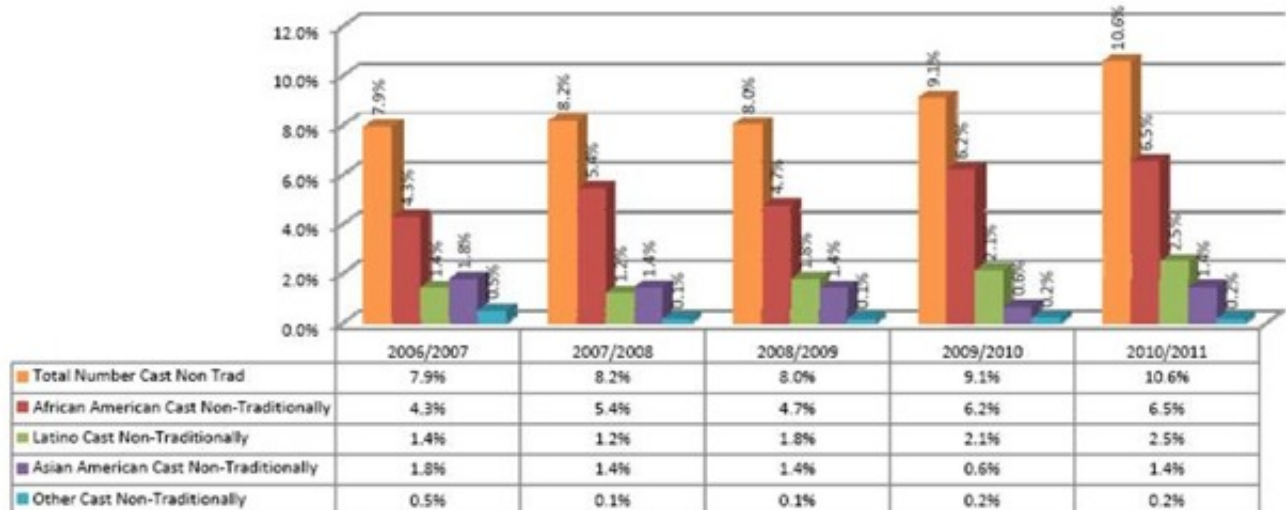


“There are no publicly available statistics that track minority casting in theatre, while SAG-AFTRA has already taken on that responsibility for Hollywood. Of course, as actors, we are involved in Hollywood too, especially TV shows and films that shoot in NY, and we often interact with casting directors who cast for both Film and Theatre. Our hope is that by focusing on the things we can reasonably change within one industry, we can have an impact on others as well.” – *Pun Bandhu, Asian American actor and AAPAC Steering Committee member*

## Broadway & Non Profit Past 5 Seasons



## Roles Non-Traditionally Cast Year to Year By Ethnic Group



Asian Americans comprise **12.6%** of New York City and is the city's fastest growing major minority group, yet, last year, Asian actors accounted for **only 1.6%** of all available roles in new shows on Broadway.

[Backstage Magazine](#), [National Public Radio](#), [Huffington Post](#), and the [New York Times](#) all covered the events

of the roundtable.

To support the work of Asian American Performers Action Coalition (AAPAC), be sure to follow them on their [Facebook page](#)!

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## About the Author



Marissa Lee is one of the co-founders of Racebending.com

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