

To the faculty and staff of the Department of Theatre, the faculty, staff, and officers of the University of Utah, President Ruth Watkins, and the University of Utah Board of Trustees:

As our nation and industry begin a much needed conversation about structural racial inequality and discrimination, the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students of the Department of Theatre are looking to you as leaders, to lead and create concrete change. This is your call-in.

You have lost our trust.

We feel unsafe, exploited, belittled, and unwelcome in your classrooms, productions, department, and university. To our professors and peers: We are afraid to let you be our allies because we fear you will not acknowledge your own complicity in this problem. That is the lack of trust we are dealing with. We should not have to feel that way in the educational environment which we are paying to be a part of.

The University of Utah recently released their plans to begin an anti-racist approach to education by releasing a [Call to Action](#). Though we commend this action and look forward to the changes these committees will make, we do not believe enough has been done to support the safety and growth of the BIPOC student community in the Department of Theatre. Below we have enumerated our suggestions for how you can begin to dismantle our white-centric institutions and make positive change.

We implore you to consider the following:

1. **Publish a public statement from the Department of Theatre addressing and acknowledging the racism inherent in the department by committing to do better.**
2. **Anti-racist training for all faculty.**
 - a. This cannot be a one-size-fits-all program, but rather training that is specific to the needs of our department. It also cannot be a one-time event, but rather a continued commitment to learning. Bring in an outside specialist in this type of education with a history of working with arts organizations or consider the learning materials provided by Jane Elliott for purchase on her website.
 - b. Create a required reading list. Our suggestions for that list:
 - i. *Black Acting Methods* by Sharrell Lockett
 - ii. *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo
 - iii. *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo
 - iv. *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander
 - v. *A Collar in My Pocket* by Jane Elliott
 - vi. *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates

3. **A new approach to material and play selection in all Theatre classes. This includes the work studied in script analysis and history of theatre classes (for the fall: THEA 173, 1713, 3720, 3725), as well as, and perhaps more importantly, the scenes and shows studied in the acting classes, voice lessons, and directing (for the fall: THEA 133, 233, 1033, 1120, 1211, 1220, 2033, 2220, 2310, 3170, 3657, 4140, 4655, 2010, 2011, 4011, 3110). This also applies to the styles studied and cultures represented in design classes (for fall: THEA 123, 1050, 1223, 2161, 3261, 3910, 3911, 3914, 3915, 3916, 4310, 4460, 4500, 4700, 4910, 4911, 4914, 4915, 4916).**
4. **One or more productions per season that center the stories and voices of BIPOC writers *and* characters. Ambiguous or neutral is not enough anymore.**
5. **An explicit addendum to the Department of Theatre casting policy stating that white washing of any sort will not be allowed, coupled with a statement in all program handbooks outlining how students can report any concerns they have about this rule's execution. The Department Chair should be obligated to investigate any such concern.** If you do not have the actors to fill a role, that show is not appropriate for our institution.
6. **Commit to the color-conscious (*not* color-blind) casting policy the Department of Theatre released in 2016.** Faculty and students should continuously remain alert and sensitive during the play selection and auditioning process by acknowledging identities and diversity. Currently this policy is not widely known by most students and faculty, and this needs to change.
7. **A commitment and plan for the hiring of BIPOC educators at all levels of your institution with representation in *all* sections of our department (ATP, MTP, PADP, SM, Theatre Teaching, and Theatre Studies).**
8. **Action steps for recruiting more BIPOC students for the department.**
 - a. Lack of financial security is a huge deterrent for BIPOC students who would like to pursue the arts. **We urge you to create scholarship opportunities to recruit and support these students in particular during their time in the department.**
 - b. Create and fund **outreach programs** to local high schools and communities with large BIPOC populations to give them access to the programs offered by this department and knowledge of how to pursue this avenue of academia.
 - c. Allow **video auditions** for BIPOC potential students with equal weight and review criteria to an in-person audition.
9. **Change the language in our department vernacular to create an environment that no longer alienates non-White bodies**
 - a. **Ban** the use of the phrases “Utah Black,” “ethnically ambiguous,” or “urban” to refer to any students of color.
 - b. **No longer refer to ballet as the top of the dance hierarchy.**

- c. **Return agency to BIPOC students** in whether or not to perform material “typical” to their race and ethnicity. We should not be forced or guilted into performing *The King and I*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *West Side Story*, or any other similar pieces. Please understand that these parts of the theatre canon can be extremely traumatic for students of color to work on, and that you cannot understand the pain such work might unearth.
10. **Create a streamlined, transparent, and safe manner in which to report and record racist behavior**

Our industry and the world is moving forward. It is up to you to catch up. We will no longer hide our stories and ourselves because they make you uncomfortable or scared. That is our right. We write this statement not out of hatred, but out of a deep and enduring love for this art form and our community. We want to create. We want to create here with you. But we can no longer feel afraid every day. It is your obligation as educators to educate yourselves. We will hold you accountable. We look forward to your response and to continuing this conversation.

Signed,

The BIPOC students of the Department of Theatre, past and present, and their allies

Cameron Aragon
Class of 2020

Jayna Balzer
Class of 2022

Danny Borba
Class of 2022

Favour Bright-Agindotan
Class of 2021

Kimberly Brown
Class of 2020

Barbara Camara
Class of 2019

Sammy Daoud
Class of 2020

Amona Faatau
Class of 2022

Helena Goei
Class of 2023

Langley Hayman
Class of 2023

Christian A. Harvey
Class of 2023

Talia Heiss
Class of 2020

Ethan Hernandez
Class of 2022

Francesca Hsieh
Class of 2021

Micki Martinez
Class of 2020

Yasamin Marashi
Class of 2023

Eva Merrill
Class of 2022

Mitchell Mosley
Class of 2023

Jonathan Onyango
Class of 2022

Niki Rahimi
Class of 2022

Nadia Sine
Class of 2020

Macarena Subiabre
Class of 2018

Aathaven Tharmarajah
Class of 2022

Tahra Veasley
Class of 2020

Benjamin Young
Class of 2020

Ayana Amechi
*ASUU VP of Univ.
Relations, College of
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Cameron Arkin
*School of Medicine, Class
of 2024*

Shelly Baltazar
*President of Asian
American Student
Association*

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*ASUU Director of
Finance, Class of 2022*

David DeCarolis
Class of 2018

Ermiya Fanaeian
*ASUU Director Of
Diversity, Class of 2022*

Taylor French
*School of Medicine, Class
of 2024*

Adrienne Gailey
*MSO President, School of
Biology, Class of 2023*

Brandt Garber
Class of 2018

Monica Goff
Class of 2018

Sophia Grazian
*School of Medicine, Class
of 2024*

Wilson Hicken
Class of 2018

Louis Hillegass IV
Class of 2019

Yein Ji
Class of 2022

Lilly Kanishka
*School of Medicine, Class
of 2024*

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External VP of AASA

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Former ATP Student 2018

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*ASUU Director of Campus
Relations, MD 2023, U of
U 2019*

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*ASUU CFA Rep, ASUU
Fine Arts Committee
Chair, Class of 2021*

Olaoluwa Omotowa
*MPH MD candidate, Class
of 2024*

Cece Otto
*SAC President Dept of
Theatre, Class of 2018*

Ash Patlan
Class of 2018

Mary Peng
Class of 2024

Courtney Rada
*School of Medicine, Class
of 2024*

Terryn Shigg
Class of 2018

Andrew Stender
*ASUU Directory of
Campus Events, Class of
2022*

Michelle Valdes
*ASUU VP of Student
Relations, Class of 2021*

PJ Volk
Class of 2018

Gavin Yehle
Class of 2019

Dominic Zappala
Class of 2018

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Cindy Fierros
*Assistant Professor,
Gender Studies*

Annie Isabel Fukushima
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Alborz Ghandehari
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Studies*

Martine Kei Green-Rogers
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