

When Studios and Production Companies say "Black Lives Matter", what I believe they mean is that police brutally ending a heartbeat that belongs to a Black person matters. We are hopes and dreams, fair access, fair treatment and fair pay. We are more than a heartbeat. I am more than a heartbeat.

- Cheryl L. Bedford, WOCU Founder and Creator of The JTC List

REIMAGINE CASTING

A NON-WHITE PAPER



Women of Color Unite
a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit
wocunite.org

Casting Society of America
castingsociety.com

WOCU Founder, Cheryl L. Bedford, and Director of Events, Jazmine Nichelle. Photo by Carlynn De Joya



ABOUT WOCU

WOCU MISSION STATEMENT

Women of Color Unite (WOCU) is a social action organization focusing on **fair access, fair treatment and fair pay** for women of color in all aspects of the entertainment and media industries. This organization works towards these goals by creating self-sustaining long-term programs:

- (1) Facilitating Fair Hiring Practices;
- (2) Fostering a More Inclusive Workplace Environment;
- (3) Promoting Access for Excluded Content Creators;
- (4) Expanding Audiences represented by those excluded content creators;
- (5) Raise Funds for WOCU to produce their own content;
- (6) Hold Events & Workshops to get more Women of Color Hired, Fund their Projects and Distribute their Content;

- (7) Work with additional organizations to develop analytics of under-represented groups to better identify their needs; and,
- (8) Help companies incubate talent and integrate them into their work force.

wocunite.org

THIS NON-WHITE PAPER WAS COMPILED BY WOCU'S ACTOR'S COMMITTEE

Nikki Bailey
Schantelle Cason
Zelie Dember-Slack
Marisilda Garcia
Stacie Hawkins
Diana Elizabeth Jordan
Mia Kalei
Lidiya Korotko
Tatiana Lee

THE PROBLEM

SOME STATISTICS



FILMS STARRING MORE PEOPLE OF COLOR PERFORM BETTER

Films with a predominantly white cast posted the lowest median global grosses in 2019, whereas films with a cast between 41% to 50% people of color performed the best in 2019 ([source](#)).

Women of Color are more likely to leave the entertainment industry because they simply cannot afford to stay in. They are forced to choose between securing sustainable, financial livelihoods over pursuing their dreams. ([source: internal WOCU study, 2020](#))

LIGHT-SKINNED ACTORS GET CAST MORE THAN DARK-SKINNED ACTORS

When Black people were cast, lighter skinned actors were preferred for more prominent roles. Roles for darker skinned individuals generally played on or amplified racist stereotypes ([source](#)).

<3% FEMALE VOICES IN ADS

18% of ads feature only male voices, while less than 3% of ads featuring female voices only ([source](#)).

3.1% DISABLED CHARACTERS

While people with disabilities account for nearly 20% of the U.S. population, only 3.1% of regular primetime broadcast TV characters are disabled. Of those, 95% are played by non-disabled actors ([source and source](#)).

<2% TRANSGENDER CHARACTERS

Of the 901 characters in scripted broadcast primetime shows, only 17 - that's 1.9% - were transgender ([source](#)).

<2% PLUS-SIZE WOMEN

67% of women in America are defined as plus size — size 14 and up — yet are consistently absent in the media, making up less than 2% of the images seen daily in top media consumed by a female audience. ([source](#)).



Lidiya Korotko

THE STEREOTYPES

A stereotype is a mistaken idea or belief many people have about a thing or group that is based upon how they look on the outside, which may be untrue or only partly true. Stereotyping people is a type of prejudice because what is on the outside is a small part of who a person is.

WE ARE

- Black.**
- Dark.**
- Disabled.**
- Auditory.**
- MENA/SWANA.**
- Fat.**
- LGBTQ+.**
- American.**
- LatinX.**
- Native/Indigenous.**
- Asian.**
- Moms.**
- Over 40.**

- Union.**
- Non-Union.**
- Unrepresented.**
- SAG Eligible.**
- Trained.**
- Experienced.**
- Professional.**
- Storytellers.**
- Media Makers.**

WE ARE NOT

- Angry.**
- Ghetto.**
- Submissive.**
- Drug Dealers.**
- Addicts.**
- Terrorists.**
- Dangerous.**
- Fiery.**
- Indian Princesses.**
- Non-English speakers.**
- Spicy.**
- Poor.**
- Super Crip.**
- The Help.**
- Incapable.**
- Past Tense.**
- Poverty Porn.**
- Inspiration Porn.**
- Trauma Porn.**
- Mascots.**
- Gang Bangers.**
- Uneducated.**

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES



"The politicization of my hair as a Black woman in the industry, is like being a circus animal jumping thru hoops. I'm cool wearing wigs to protect my hair; I want the same considerations for the hair that grows out of my head without the micro-aggressions.

The gaps in my resume are from raising my daughter, don't discredit my abilities. I may not have a ton of recent network credits; I take my craft seriously and I train. Taking time off to live my life, has deepened my well."

- Schantelle Cason, Actor, Voiceover, Writer



"I was told early on that I should change my name because it would allow my reps to submit me for caucasian roles since I am 'white passing', 'ethnically ambiguous' and don't have an accent. Additionally, I was also told by my agent early on that I was talented and aspirational but not pretty enough to be the leading lady along with the idea that leading ladies are never of Latino background unless they look and sound like Salma Hayek. Another manager of mine told me, 'You know. I think we're good on the diversity programs, don't you think? I think there are enough parts for everyone. Don't you?' It's time we acknowledge that Latinos come in all shades and backgrounds. We have a wealth of stories and experiences to bring to the table."

- Marisilda Garcia - Actor, Singer, Songwriter, Voiceover



"During my first year in Hollywood, I got so discouraged by the negativity I encountered in both casting breakdowns and the completely unveiled disinterest in me from auditions, led me to get weight loss surgery. There were complications and I almost died. I almost died trying to be more acceptable to this industry. The pressure to lose weight is enormous."

- **Nikki Bailey, Actor, Comedic, Writer & Host**



"I felt unimaginable pain when my dear friend D.C. took his life two years ago and felt overwhelming joy when both my nephews were born. Neither of those moments has anything to do with my disability cerebral palsy which mildly affects my speech and gait. I chose to be an actor (my life long dream) in my REAL life so I could play diverse characters in my REEL lives and ensure that diverse images of disability are an inclusive and visible part of stories that celebrate the rich emotional tapestry of human experience"

- **Diana Elizabeth Jordan, Actor (SAG-AFTRA), Filmmaker & Disability Inclusion Activist**



"I was told that I wasn't Black enough, nor Indian enough. I was considered an exotic type but they didn't know where to put me. They suggested that I get a boob job and a nose job to appear more European so I could work more; I passed. There was a manager who was excited about representing me. He shared that I was the flavor of the month for producers. He arranged for me to have an audition at 9:45 pm at a mansion. I declined the offer and left."

- **Zelig Dember-Slack, Actor, Director, Writer, Producer**



"Being Indigenous, among other things, my culture is rooted in storytelling. It is embedded within me to do what I do. 'Local food' is a beautiful combination of food from all the ethnicities that now make up Hawaii. It's time for what's on screen to reflect something similar and have people of all different backgrounds coming together to celebrate and share their stories."

- **Mia Kalei, Actress, Filmmaker**



"I want to play roles that honors who I am as a person not what people see, I don't spend my life wishing to suddenly no longer be disabled, or feel my life is so miserable I no longer want to live. I think about what I'm wearing, what I'm doing with friends, which guy I'm dating, and where am I spending my money that I work hard to make, and yes the occasional 'I can't get in because it isn't wheelchair accessible'. Those are some of the things that define me not my wheelchair itself. So, do not put me in a box of just being 'woman in wheelchair'."

- Tatiana Lee, Actor, Model, Disability Inclusion Consultant



"We come in all skin colors: from beige to chocolate. We are not Religious Extremists. We are Muslim, Christians and Jews. We speak various languages and have a multitude of accents from the lightest to the strongest. There shouldn't be one stereotypical accent. And again a strong accent does not mean we are uneducated, it means we speak at least two languages!"

- Lidiya Korotko, MENA Actor

"I was told that because I have an accent, I can play a nurse but never a doctor and that I can play a teacher but never a professor. Yet within the community I'm often told I'm too aspirational to play a maid but I sound too ethnic to play educated roles...which is very disheartening. Within my own community I'm told I don't look LatinX enough so I find myself creating my own content many times. The biggest stereotypes: Latinas are either illegal immigrants with no education, very sexy women, wives/girlfriends of gang members and drug lords or very, very angry."

Anonymous Actor



Tatiana Lee

SOLUTIONS

WHAT CAN CASTING DO?

These are some of the steps you can take to contribute to change:

- Commit to being a part of the shift that includes equality for all.
- Encourage studios and production companies to sign the WOCU Seal. [More information](#)
- Practice accountability and transparency within the industry and among colleagues by becoming more informed about the varied cultural narratives within marginalized communities by committing to conversations with marginalized groups.
- Champion authentic representation and cultural specificity that reflects our global society.
- Embrace body positivity for all roles - with a focus on leading & series regular roles.
- Support a more diverse community including casting directors, associate casting directors, casting assistants, etc.
- Address "exclusion by familiarity" by expanding & diversifying your internal and external landscape .
- Address Ethnic Fraud by promoting authentic casting practices.
- Promote awareness of anti-discrimination fair hiring practices that prohibit employers from asking about ethnicity, race, color, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, etc.
- Ensure visible signage and access at casting sessions for all actors including elevators, ramps and wheelchair access.
- Provide reasonable accommodations for deaf/hearing impaired and blind/low vision at all casting sessions.
- Advocate for, and when possible designate, a gender neutral bathroom.
- Create a safe and accessible environment for all actors.
- Advocate for Narrative Sovereignty, "Nothing About Us Without Us"

SIGN TO
COMMIT

Women of Color Unite would like to thank the Equity in Entertainment Committee of the Casting Society of America for engaging and partnering to make the Entertainment Industry more inclusive. This won't address every inequity in casting but it's a damn good start.

As Dr. Maya Angelou says, "When you know better, you do better".

Click below to go to our website, sign and join the movement.

[Sign](#)

STANDING IN SOLIDARITY

Dr. Joely Proudfit of Native Media Strategies

Dr. Donna Walton of Divas With Disabilities

Lauren Appelbaum of RespectAbility

Nia Malika Dixon of Black Muslim Girl Fly

Marisilda Garcia of Cineladies

Melanna Gray & Gianni Amber North of IndieFemme

Thuc Nguyen of The Bitch Pack

Kayden Phoenix of Chicana Director's Initiative

Bhavani Rao of South Asian Women in Entertainment