

Los Angeles Anti-Racist Theatre Standards **(or “LA ARTS”)**

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CONTENTS

- Prologue
- Glossary
- THE STANDARDS
 - The Stories You Tell (And How You Tell Them)
 - The People You Work With (And How You Treat Them)
 - The Company Culture You Create (And How It Functions)
 - The Work Continues (Accountability And Transparency)

PROLOGUE

To begin, we acknowledge that we are living and working on the unceded territory of the Tongva, Chumash, Gabrieleño, and Kizh people who are the original stewards of this land. We understand that achieving healing and reconciliation will require a long and sustainable commitment; this land acknowledgment is only a first step, but we hope it will help to raise awareness about histories that are often suppressed or forgotten, though very present all around us. We encourage you to look up what land you work on and live on and continue to learn about the indigenous people who made their homes in and around the area we now call Los Angeles.

The Los Angeles Anti-Racist Theatre Standards were created by a diverse collective of LA theatre artists dedicated to true equity and looking to create lasting, systemic change in our institutions and community. Inspired and influenced by the work of [We See You White American Theatre](#), we drafted the following list of standards and practices that are specifically geared towards the Los Angeles theatre community, a community that has often had incredible leadership and contributions from our BIPOC theatres, and yet, as a whole, has failed to represent the diversity of Los Angeles. The LA theatre industry has a history of causing harm to marginalized people/communities without any accountability. Recognizing that these communities of color -- those most affected by anti-racism and equity work -- are so often left out of these industry-wide conversations, we solicited feedback from a large, intersectional cohort of LA's BIPOC theatre artists at multiple points in our writing process.

We have seen theatres release “racial solidarity statements” over and over again in response to current events (including the upheaval of 2020, hate crimes against various communities, and more). We have seen companies, over and over again, include the words “diversity” and “community” in their missions. **We are now calling upon all Los Angeles theatre institutions to live up to these promises of lasting, true, foundational change.** We recognize that different theatres have different budget sizes; while this document was originally written with smaller budget-companies in mind, we expect that mid-size and large theatres -- who already have the resources to meet these standards -- uphold this work as well. We also recognize that certain theatres may be further along in this work; as our hope is to effect as much change as possible across LA’s theatre landscape, we ask that you *all* look through this list for opportunities for growth. If your theatre does not have the resources to enact all of these standards immediately, work towards implementing them over time. However, do not claim you “do not have the resources” when you simply mean that you have not chosen to prioritize equity in your work. **No step is inconsequential, as long as you are moving forward.**

This document exists to ensure that long-standing theatre practices made to benefit white supremacist ideals are abolished. In their place, we are establishing standards that solidify the safety and equity of marginalized communities. We must uplift and center Black, Indigenous, Latinx/e, AAPI, and SWANA artists -- artists whose efforts and contributions have all too often been unrecognized and/or erased by an industry that disproportionately centers whiteness. We understand that all identities are intersectional, and we will not ignore instances of discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation, religious practices, classism, ableism, and/or ageism. These theatre practitioners and their work must be genuinely supported, rather than fetishized or tokenized. Our job is to spark empathy through a variety of experiences and perspectives, and this objective will no longer be lost or ignored due to prioritizing antiquated, white-normative notions of what might be “marketable” or “palatable.”

The following living document contains a list of the actionable changes that LA’s theatres must implement to rectify harm done and create a foundation of sustained and restorative equity. Anti-racism work is a continuous journey; there is no such thing as a completely anti-racist or decolonized organization, only those committed to the process of becoming one. The Accountability section of this document includes an outline for an annual EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) report card, as well as info on other *internal* methods of accountability and details on the organization we are partnering with for *external* audits/accountability (BLKLST). We also encourage you to hire your own external, unbiased EDI expert to help you audit your practices.

GLOSSARY

- **AAPI**

- AAPI is an acronym for Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders, sometimes used interchangeably with APA (Asians/Pacific Americans) or API (Asians/Pacific Islanders).

- **BIPOC**

- BIPOC is an acronym for “Black, Indigenous, and People of Color,” which gained popularity in 2020 as a way to center the unique experience of Black and Indigenous erasure within America’s history. While language is constantly evolving, and there is no one term that everyone agrees on -- for example, some prefer BIPOC, some prefer POC, some prefer People of the Global Majority, etc. -- we have chosen to use BIPOC throughout this document.

- **“Identity-Conscious” Casting (as opposed to “Color-Blind” or “Color-Conscious” Casting)**

- Identity-Conscious casting, to quote casting director Victor Vazquez, “is about making space and embracing how actors and artists can bring their whole identities or even parts of their identities to a process, to a character. We are not saying casting is **blind** to those parts, but we’re also not saying it’s only **color** that we’re conscious about. We can also be conscious about somebody’s rejection of gender as a construct, somebody’s queerness, somebody’s abilities, whether neurological or physical. That’s what ‘identity-conscious’ means to me, that we are inviting and welcoming, that we are actively and radically making space for all the different ways that actors exist in this world.” See our resources section for a Howlround article on the subject.

- **EDI**

- EDI is an acronym for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. You may see it elsewhere as EDIA (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility) or IDEA (same words, different order), or EDIB (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging).

- **Harm**

- “Harm: the suffering, loss, pain and impact that can occur both in conflict and in instances of abuse, as well as misunderstandings steeped in differences of life experience, opinion or needs. Harm is what needs healing...” -- adrienne maree brown (*We Will Not Cancel Us*)

- **Marginalized Community**

- A marginalized community is a group of people who are denied equitable political, economic, cultural, or social access due to their identities. This

marginalization could be based on race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical/mental disability, age, language, economic status, immigration status, religion, systems-impacted status, or a number of other factors. Marginalized communities are sometimes also referred to as “underrepresented communities.”

- **Producer**
 - Los Angeles has a unique theatre ecosystem, one in which many of our theatre producers are not “producers” in the typical sense of the word; LA has a strong history of artist-driven models (and other alternative creation techniques). At the end of the day, somebody -- or a team of people -- selects the project and is ultimately responsible for the success and well-being of the show, the artists, and the audience. Anywhere in this document we refer to a project’s “producers,” that’s who we mean.
- **PWI**
 - PWI is an acronym for Predominantly White Institution.
- **SWANA**
 - SWANA is an acronym for Southwest Asian/North African, to be used in place of “Middle Eastern” (which has colonial/Eurocentric origins).

THE STANDARDS

THE STORIES YOU TELL (AND HOW YOU TELL THEM)

- **Commit to reflecting the various communities of Los Angeles in your programming and honor the cultural specificity of the stories you tell.**
- Reach out to, investigate, welcome, and uplift a wide variety of voices and experiences -- not just those deemed acceptable, respectable, and profitable by White American Theatre.
 - Not every story from a marginalized community is the same; it is a service to your audiences to expose them to different stories, cultures, and voices. Investigate the biases that have kept you from engaging in more diverse work.
 - Beyond biases, consider how you and other theatre makers can work to break down SYSTEMS that create those barriers.
 - Avoid depicting damaging racial stereotypes, even within “classic” pieces.

- If a character is written as BIPOC (or as a person with a disability, or as a trans person, or as a person from another marginalized community), take care to cast the role authentically.
- **Your creative process should be inclusive and collaborative, engaging diverse artists in decision-making roles starting with project selection and throughout the formation and generation of work.**
 - Recognize historical patterns of exclusion in American Theatre, and regularly audit your processes for more opportunities to be inclusive.
- Center, trust, and support BIPOC artists in the telling of BIPOC stories.
 - BIPOC art should not be limited to white artists' understanding of the vision, and marginalized artists should not have to spend time and energy defending the validity of their vision and experience.
 - If you are hiring BIPOC artists to reinterpret, adapt, and/or reimagine work originally written by white people, it is the producers' job to advocate for freedom of interpretation (on behalf of the institution) -- not the artists' job.
 - When seeking the rights to a culturally specific play, reach out to the companies in your area to ensure you are not taking the rights away from the communities represented in that play. Or better yet, seek out one of those companies to co-produce.
- BIPOC collaborators are held to [a double-standard of perfection](#) in which they are not given the same grace/forgiveness that their white counterparts are given. Seeking "perfection" denies equitable art-making. Art needs room to breathe, room to grow.
- Before each process, make decisions regarding the allocation of resources (including time, budget, space, and collaborators) that ensure the specific needs of that production are being met. If you are using a formula to produce, you are missing opportunities to be equitable.
- Your resources should reflect a genuine effort to include projects from various cultural backgrounds. Ensure that you have the resources needed to equitably include BIPOC artists within all aspects of your artmaking. Allocate your best resources to the creation of this work.
- PWIs: Do not rely solely on BIPOC communities to fund BIPOC projects.

THE PEOPLE YOU WORK WITH (AND HOW YOU TREAT THEM)

- **Throughout all programming, the majority of artists, production team, staff, and board will be BIPOC, with attention paid to intersectional identities such as gender, sexual orientation, disability, and those who are formerly**

incarcerated/systems-impacted.

- Remove mandatory financial minimum gifts for board membership; they are not the only meaningful way for board members to contribute. Look towards the many existing, successful Board models that prioritize community engagement and collective fundraising to reach their goals.
- Conduct leadership hires through an equitable process (and be transparent in advance about what that process will look like).
 - This includes committing to a truly diverse pool of BIPOC candidates, looking at both internal and external hires for all positions, and striving for 50% BIPOC representation in each level of the company.
- Regularly investigate implicit bias within your contract language, job descriptions, and casting notices, and work to reduce the barrier to hiring BIPOC artists and production staff.
 - For example, adding “or equivalent experience” after an education or years of experience requirement offers more equitable hiring opportunities.
 - Another type of biased language would be using the phrase “favored nations” (or anything else that carries undertones of colonization). Find another way to describe what you mean.
- **All work will be compensated.**
 - Your budget is a reflection of your values. Prioritize paying people ahead of other budgetary requirements.
 - Paying artists is one of the best ways to uplift their work.
 - Scope of work should be defined clearly and in advance (through a contract). Artists and staff will receive equitable pay and will not work beyond what is agreed upon in their contract.
 - Failure to prioritize paying your artists when you have the resources to do so is asking them to subsidize your work; without their sacrifice, you wouldn't be able to produce.
 - Commit to pay transparency, which includes listing salary range and benefits when jobs are posted.
 - Legally, internships require compensation or college credit (and must have an end date).
 - Volunteers have always been a critical part of the theatre ecosystem. Though they aren't paid, you should always look for ways to recognize, appreciate, and otherwise care for your volunteers.
- If you provide hair and makeup resources, they must reflect the needs of your BIPOC artists. Artists will be reimbursed for any expenses incurred.
- Hire culturally competent intimacy specialists. Not only are they necessary for physically intimate material, but they can be incredibly useful in helping a cast

and creative team navigate material that is racially charged or otherwise emotionally traumatic.

- Hire dramaturgs (and for post-show conversations, moderators) who are culturally specific to the work in question and trained in EDI/anti-racism best practices.
- Commit to the leadership development of your BIPOC artists, staff, and board. By investing in BIPOC individuals at all levels, you promote upward mobility for leaders of color.
 - Put BIPOC leaders in positions to succeed, in positions with decision-making power. Don't second-guess them more than you would a white counterpart in their position.
- Ensure that any arts education programs (including content, methodologies, and teaching artists) are reflective of the communities you are trying to serve.
- **Commit to implementing (and publicizing) accessible, affordable ticket price initiatives to ensure marginalized audiences -- including BIPOC, formerly incarcerated and systems-impacted individuals, and children (for age-appropriate shows) -- can see your work.**
- Focus on audience engagement strategies to build authentic relationships with BIPOC communities and include BIPOC individuals in your marketing efforts -- not just to promote culturally specific shows.
 - Ensure that the communities being represented on your stages are being reached by your marketing efforts.
 - Include BIPOC reviewers and outlets on your press list.
 - Do not expect artists to market your shows for you just because they are BIPOC; marketing efforts are the responsibility of the producers.
 - 38% of LA County residents speak Spanish in their household, and 11% speak an Asian or Pacific Islander language/dialect. If you are doing work by/for/about these communities, what are you doing to reach audiences who don't have English as their first language?
- Develop intervention and disruption protocols to ensure BIPOC audience members feel protected from potentially harmful situations caused by other audience members, volunteers, and/or representatives of your theatre.
- Commit to abolishing the elitist and suppressive forms of theatre etiquette that tone-police audience members, such as dress codes or discouraging culturally specific responses to theatre (i.e. call & response audience participation).

THE COMPANY CULTURE YOU CREATE (AND HOW IT FUNCTIONS)

- Commit to building safe, inclusive spaces for your community. This requires open, honest, and generous communication; it also requires having difficult conversations, implementing accountability practices for harm done, and dedicating company resources to sustained, substantive actions.
 - **Respect your artists' time and boundaries, and prioritize their physical and mental well-being.**
 - The theatre industry perpetuates a toxic culture of self-sacrifice, placing art above physical, mental, and emotional wellness. You must respect your collaborators' cares, responsibilities, jobs, and needs outside the theatre, and not retaliate against them when they prioritize those over the work.
 - Respect the boundaries of rehearsal & appropriate working hours, even when not required to by a union.
 - Maintain reasonable expectations with regards to response times for communications and other requests; communicate those expectations in advance.
 - Provide for your collaborators' access needs (i.e., wheelchair accessibility, ASL interpretation, time/space for breastfeeding parents to pump, etc.) so they can participate fully in the work.
 - Analyze your classes, membership policies, rehearsal rooms, and more for implicit bias and harmful practices. Look towards equitable industry standards -- such as affinity spaces, community agreements, and exit surveys for staff and artists -- for guidance.
 - Antiracism education is ongoing; as such, commit to regular professionally facilitated EDI/anti-racism trainings with your staff, board, and artists.
- Hold space for collaborators to share their pronouns if they feel comfortable doing so.
- **Institute a land acknowledgment practice that recognizes the land, history, and marginalized peoples of the area in which you work.**
 - These acknowledgments could recognize Indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, those subjugated to internment camps and/or prison labor, exploitative Latinx/e and Asian immigrant labor, and other communities you discover in your research who have been harmed.
 - It is important that this acknowledgment comes with an explicit commitment to action and is seen as a jumping off point for further conversations and deeper engagement with Indigenous artists, vendors, employees, executives, funders, and audiences.

- Use local vendors and small businesses whenever possible as you work to represent, support, and invest in the neighborhoods in which you work.
- **PWIs: Seek out and amplify the work of BIPOC companies, don't just co-opt their work to make a profit or earn recognition.**
 - See productions (as ticketed audience members) from BIPOC companies.
 - Share access to resources with BIPOC theatre companies when possible.
 - Examples: venue, marketing, fundraising infrastructure, etc.
 - Authentic engagement comes from showing up for others like we do for ourselves.

THE WORK CONTINUES (ACCOUNTABILITY & TRANSPARENCY)

- **Create your own company-specific anti-racism policy, which will be publicly visible on your website.**
 - Among other things, your company policy should acknowledge that our nation and industry are both built on white supremacist patriarchal structures. It should then identify how your organization has caused harm (even unintentionally -- consider experiences of racism, colorism, and anti-blackness, as well as ableism, ageism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, etc.), how you may benefit from these power structures, and/or what, specifically, you are doing to dismantle them through your policies and practices.
 - Identify what protocols are in place to address grievances at all levels of the organization (including Board and Executive Leadership):
 - Who should be contacted, when, and how?
 - How will grievances (and responses) be documented?
 - What is the process for adjudication/resolution?
 - What are the protections against retaliation?
 - This anti-racism policy will be included in contracts for artists and staff, Board welcome packets, and first rehearsals. Don't just read the words; be thoughtful as you embed it into the fabric of your work.
- **Prioritize transparency: your actions should match your policies, and you should be publicly accountable for that.**
 - Release an annual, public EDI "Report Card," designed to share your progress towards creating an equitable and anti-racist organization. **This Report Card will include:**
 - A response to the question, "How are we in service to our community -- and specifically, to the BIPOC members of our community?"
 - The previous year's itemized organizational budget

- Demographic breakdowns of your artists, staff, and Board
 - Progress on the goals laid out in your anti-racism policy
 - And any other pertinent info
- Conduct an annual review process for executive leadership that includes collecting feedback from BIPOC artists, staff, and members of your community. The only way to get an accurate picture of how your leadership team is doing in terms of EDI work is to solicit feedback from those most affected by it.
- Recognize feedback as an important part of the process. Never retaliate against staff, artists, and/or your community for providing feedback; it is an opportunity for you to do better.
- **In terms of external accountability, theatres will be audited for their adherence to these Standards by BLKLST, an anti-racist coalition created and run by BIPOC theatremakers from the greater Los Angeles area.**
 - For questions or more information about this coalition, please email blkstla@gmail.com.

RESOURCES

- [List of BIPOC Theatre Artists in the Greater Los Angeles Area](#)
- [List of Suggested Action Items](#)
- Recommended EDI Trainers (*pending*)
- Recommended EDI experts companies can hire to audit their practices (*pending*)
- [Land Acknowledgment Best Practices](#)
- [We See You, White American Theatre](#)
- [Identity-Conscious Casting](#)

EPILOGUE

These Standards were drafted by a diverse collective of LA theatre artists. The group is majority BIPOC, majority female, intersectional, intergenerational, and contains representation from the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized populations. We recognize that this document is by no means an exhaustive list, nor does it represent every BIPOC stakeholder; it is a living document that will continue to evolve as we learn new and better ways to build an equitable, sustainable, and anti-racist theatrical ecosystem.

The LA Anti-Racist Theatre Standards were drafted by:

- **A'raelle Flynn-Bolden (she/her)**, Actress, Chaos Facilitator, Playwright, BLKLST Founding Member // Black, Queer

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- **Daniel Shoeman (he/him)**, Artistic Director of The Inkwell Theater // cishet, white, able-bodied
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- **Graham Wetterhahn (he/him)**, Founding Artistic Director of After Hours Theatre Company // white, cishet, Jewish, invisibly disabled man
- **Herb Hall (he/him)**, Actor, Director, Educator, BOD Victory Theatre Center // Caribbean-black, military BRAT, bilingual (English/German)
- **Kendall Johnson (he/him)**, Associate Artistic Director of Coin & Ghost // Black man
- **Michaela Bulkley (she/her)**, Executive Director of Unnamed Theatre Project // cisgendered, able-bodied, white, queer woman
- **Nancy Renee (she/her)**, Co-Founder & Co-Producing Director of Towne Street Theatre, actor-director-producer-costume designer // black, female, 35-year theatre professional
- **Rachel Berney Needleman (she/her)**, director, producer // Jewish, white, cishet woman
- **Sean Cawelti (he/they)**, Artistic Director of Rogue Artists Ensemble // white, queer
- **Tiana Randall-Quant (she/her)**, Actor, Writer, Certified Intimacy Captain, BKLST Founding Member // Black, able-bodied, cis-gendered queer woman
- **Zach Davidson (he/him)**, Artistic Director of Coin & Ghost // cishet male, white, able-bodied, very Jewish

...with additional insight, guidance, and support from over 140 local artists, including: members of the Black, Indigenous, Latinx/e, AAPI (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Indian), and white communities, with intersectionality with the LGBTQ+ community (including trans and nonbinary artists), immigrants, people with disabilities, artists of two or more races, and many, many more. We are incredibly grateful to all who helped create and shape this document.