

# Marketing Tools and Strategies – Supplementary Reading

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## DEVELOPING YOUNG AUDIENCES

### “Older Audiences are Fine, but Theaters Need More Young People”

*Don Aucoin, The Boston Globe, 6/17/12*

Why don't more young people go to the theater? That question ought to be on the front burner this week as about 1,000 regional-theater professionals gather in Boston for the national conference of Theatre Communications Group, whose membership includes more than 500 theaters across the country. It's been a persistent problem for years, and the American theater needs to find a concrete solution pronto, because [it] is in danger of becoming a boutique business. "Theaters do need to be proactive in terms of engaging younger audiences," said TCG executive director Teresa Eyring. But she added a caveat. "I also think that theaters should love their audiences, whoever their audiences are. There's something wrong with the idea that there's something wrong with audiences that are older. Theater should be for everyone." Amen to that. But too often "everyone" does not include people under 30. Let's stipulate that some of the onus is on college students, who fail to avail themselves of steep discounts. [But] since twentysomethings and thirtysomethings [are] usually not eligible for student discounts, why not follow the lead of companies that aim beyond the student population -- [offering \$20 or \$25 tickets] to any show for those 35 and younger. Another part of the answer clearly lies in building a stronger presence in the schools. Social media and other marketing tools should also be used more imaginatively. Theaters could dive deeper into the talent pool of new playwrights and performers, which could lead to more work that young audiences would consider must-see material. It won't be easy, but the American theater has to find the missing piece of this puzzle. The alternative is long-term decline.

### “Introducing the Gershwins’ Music to a New Generation”

*Judith Miller, Tablet magazine, 6/8/12*

"It is particularly important to me that new generations experience and enjoy the rich, historical, and timeless music that my great-uncles left us all," said Jonathan Keidan, a 38-year-old founder of a digital media start-up called Insidehook.com, whose grandmother was George and Ira Gershwin's sister. Of course, enticing a new generation to Broadway for the Gershwins' music is a sine qua non of sustained profitability, and the Gershwin estates make between \$5 million and \$8 million a year. "We're keeping the brand alive," said Mike Strunsky, a trustee of the Ira Gershwin estate. "Do we make a buck? Yes, that's America." [But] the heirs' commitment to introducing the next generation to the Gershwins' music in user-friendly form was apparent on any Wednesday matinee [of *Porgy and Bess*] from March through May. Thanks to a \$100,000 grant from the estate, matched by roughly \$33,000 from NYC's Department of Education, some 2,000 high-school students had a chance to see the new production. Students paid \$15 [for] the best available seats. Scattered throughout the audience, most of the students seemed transfixed. After the performance, a show of hands revealed more than half of the students who lived less than 10 miles away from the Great White Way had never seen a Broadway play. Few had ever heard

a Gershwin song. Of those who had, most recognized only "Summertime." The winner of an early *American Idol* had performed it, one student volunteered. Broadway's aging audiences attest to the need to introduce a new generation of Americans to not just the Gershwins, but to the musical theater genre itself. In 1982, patrons under 30 comprised 27% of theater audiences throughout the nation, an NEA study showed; by 1997, they comprised just 16%.

## **“Aging Movie Stars Fail to Draw Younger Audiences to New Films”**

*Todd Cunningham, The Wrap, 6/18/12*

Box-office stars Tom Cruise and Adam Sandler both stepped out of their comfort zones in movies that opened this weekend -- "Rock of Ages" and "That's My Boy" -- and landed flat-footed. Warner Bros.' \$74-million "Rock of Ages," with Cruise as an aging rock icon, opened to a disappointing \$15 million. Sony's \$65 million "That's My Boy," with Sandler in his first R-rated comedy, did even worse with just \$13 million. Both are likely to lose money, say box office analysts. In the case of "Rock of Ages," exit polls indicated that young people just didn't show up. For Sandler, the comedian's first R-rated comedy drew an audience that was [only] 52% under 25, suggesting the rating may have cost it some young moviegoers. Going the R-rated route, in theory to connect with his aging audience, seems to have hurt rather than helped. "His audience is aging," said [a movie studio] executive, "and they've had kids, and they want to go with their kids to see an Adam Sandler movie." Meanwhile, "Rock of Ages" director Adam Shankman said in interviews [he was] hoping young men would go for the hard rock theme. "This is 'Mamma Mia' for dudes," Shankman [said] in an interview last week. One marketing executive didn't see the logic: "It's a musical, you've got Alec Baldwin running around in weird hair and it's filled with songs from the 1980s," he said. "How many young guys want to see that?"

## DIVERSITY

### “Reflections on the Coming Tide of US Demographic Changes”

*Ron Chew, GIA Reader from Grantmakers in the Arts. Fall 2011 issue*

I listened recently to a panel of experts speak about the swiftly changing demographics of the United States and how arts organizations might respond thoughtfully and sensitively to the altered landscape. Salvador Acevedo noted that in a single decade, the majority of Americans under age 18 will be nonwhite. How, for example, do museums -- whose audiences are now 88% white -- build participation among diverse populations? The Latino community is very interested in the arts, he said, but Latinos are a complex population, not a monolithic bloc. Cultural institutions need to identify and understand "subsegments," recognizing that "ethnic and cultural self-identification plays a crucial role in cultural participation, but it is not the only factor." Vivian Phillips echoed Acevedo's point. The experience of African Americans is very different from that of African immigrants, she said. She also pointed to a recalcitrant challenge: the lack of diversity in non-ethnic-specific cultural organizations, especially in management, and the unwillingness of large arts organizations to make long-term investments in supporting diverse productions. The forum was similar to many others I had participated in over the past twenty years. It was the recurring conversation among aging baby boomers agonizing over how they might strengthen their efforts to make their audiences reflect the increasing diversity of America in light of the habitual criticism that the arts are elite, unnecessary, and largely white. But while Acevedo, Phillips and others were thinking about ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity, I was ruminating about the generational divide. I wondered how the arts might come into sight for my kids -- 15 and 13. What does the younger generation consider the arts to be? Across generations, we sometimes don't share the same vocabulary, even though we might speak some of the same words.

### “Time to Stop ‘Parachuting in’ Arts to UK’s Diverse Communities”

*Jenny Williams, page 5 of Arts Professional magazine, 12/12/11*

You know the old adage, you wait for a bus and then three come along at the same time. It seems the same has happened in diversity. Only this time it is three diversity juggernauts - the Creative Case for Diversity, Arts Council England's new approach to diversity in the arts; the Equality Act 2010; and the newly instated Public Sector Duty. In [The Creative Case for Diversity](#), there are three inter-connected themes: equality (removing barriers), recognition (placing diverse artists at the heart of British art) and a new vision (re-imagining diversity away from the 'deficit model', meaning that diversity is seen as neither a negative nor a 'problem'). For too many years there has been an over-preoccupation with identifying problems within diverse communities and trying to solve them by 'parachuting in' arts projects. This need to 'educate' diverse communities is a top-down approach and serves as a barrier between communities and the work - so it is about time that the door is closed to that era. What will the new equality framework mean to the arts sector? It is less about what we do - the output - and more about how we do it, and to what measurable impact. Our collective work in diversity has produced little change in staff representation within arts institutions; within the funding system; within programming; and within the hierarchal debate of how we define quality. In fact, we could argue, that the sector's

diversity output has served society by reinforcing the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. Will the sector now be bold enough to start a new conversation around cultural inequality? Can it follow the lead of the Public Sector Duty to explore and measure collective outcomes? Can it identify how barriers operate and to what effect? Will it choose to harness the Creative Case? Or will it simply put together a diversity strategy and deliver more education programmes? It really is time for a new dialogue and sustainable change.

## **“The Business Case for Diversity”**

*Mark Robinson, page 6 of Arts Professional magazine, 12/12/11*

Tony Nwachukwu of burntprogress and I recently investigated a hunch that embracing creative diversity was not an extra burden but actually a potential source of strength, and we found this to be true. Creating a more diverse business provides multiple perspectives and can connect you to more people - or markets, if you prefer that language. This then encourages even more people from many different sources and backgrounds to join you, so audiences benefit from the best talent around. Commercial sectors increasingly accept this business case: our paper includes a case study of a large law firm. Embracing diversity is not a universal panacea. Organizations that serve particular 'identity-focused' audiences can find it difficult to build the broad audience base and organizational assets that create a range of reliable income streams. By serving 'the margins' and representing the under-represented, they invigorate the mainstream but risk remaining marginal themselves. The case studies suggest ways forward from this dilemma, and underline the business case. Developing physical and intellectual assets, and then partnering with others that have access to other audiences, as say Theatre Royal Stratford East has done with its musicals transferring to the West End, can be beneficial. Taking a flexible approach to company structures, as Watershed has done, can maximize financial, cultural and resilience returns. Heart and Soul and DaDa demonstrate the benefits of focusing on production and promotion of the artistic aspirations of diverse communities. Strategically building unique skills and networks can bring multiple benefits: new income streams, greater profile, staff development and, perhaps most importantly, breaking out of the 'diversity' pigeonhole.

## INCREASING COMMUNICATION

### “Wanna Sell More Tix? Leverage your Artists’ Social Media Networks”

*Eric Housh, TicketNews.com, 8/18/11*

This may be tough to admit, but very few people come to see a show at your venue strictly because of the venue. While engaging in social media as the venue is necessary, it is incomplete as a social media strategy because it fails to leverage the most important (and socially relevant) element of the show: the artist. The majority of artists aren't utilizing social media effectively enough to make it easier for fans to buy tickets. Very few artists ask their fans to come out to the show. Why is that? Sure, you'll see a lot of tweets and posts like, "Hey, Nashville rocked last night, thanks so much to our fans!" But you rarely see "Hey Nashville - I'm rockin' the Exit/In this Friday. Get your tix at [www.exitin.com](http://www.exitin.com), and meet me there!" I don't know why more artists don't do it. Maybe it just gets overlooked, maybe it's taboo, maybe it's just rarely asked for. Regardless, artists' social media networks are a great untapped resource for driving ticket sales. A mention of your venue, a link to your website, or an artist's direct promotion of the show will increase awareness, drive ticket sales, and expand your online audience. That's a win for everyone. To measure the effects, track website traffic and purchase conversions generated by these mentions. Track the increase in your Twitter followers and Facebook fans as well. The data will empower you going forward and hopefully convince any skeptical artist managers to fulfill your requests.

### “Wanna Reach More People? 31% of U.S. Adults Now Prefer Text Messaging”

*Mashable.com, 9/19/11*

Almost one-third of U.S. adults prefer to be reached by text message rather than a voice call on their mobile phone, according to a study by the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project. Three-quarters (73%) of U.S. adults text and 83% of U.S. adults are mobile phone owners. The [study](#) found that when it comes to a preferred method of contact, 31% of adults would choose a text message, 51% would choose a voice call and 14% say it depends on the situation. 55% of heavy texters -- those who exchange 50 messages or more a day -- prefer texting to talking. Young adults between 18-24 text most frequently, sending on average 109.5 messages each day or 3,200 texts each month. The average mobile phone user in that group sends or receives 50 texts each day or 1,500 texts each month. The findings also reveal that mobile usage has leveled off among the U.S. adult population. These statistics are very similar to 2010's results. The average adult sends or receives 10 texts each day. Cellphone users make or receive 12 calls on average each day.

### “Wanna Reach More Affluents? Try Search Ads, Online Video”

*eMarketer.com, 9/19/11*

Most forecasters expect solid growth in online sales this holiday season, but there are also signs that consumer confidence is waning in the face of the continuing down economy. Luxury researcher Unity Marketing reports that Q2 2011 consumer confidence levels among the affluent were down, with the

firm's "Luxury Consumption Index" at its lowest point since Q2 2009. The share of affluent respondents who said they were currently spending less on luxury goods than a year ago was up to 27% in Q2 2011, from 25% in Q1 and 23% in Q4 2010. At the same time, 26% of respondents said they were spending more -- down from 33% in Q1, and the smallest number since 2009. Affluents were similarly cautious about their plans for future luxury spending. Most said they would be spending the same amount in the coming year as they have been for the past year. But in Q1 2011, they were more optimistic. Earlier this year, 30% planned to spend more, a response that dropped to 24% in Q2, while the proportion planning to spend less rose by 2 points. If affluent spending on high-ticket items is down, their media usage is up, especially on digital. According to the Ipsos Mendelsohn [Affluent Survey](#), US consumers with household income of at least \$100,000 annually increased the amount of time they spend on the internet each week by 5 hours between 2010 and 2011, to 30.3 hours. The average number of sites visited per person was also up slightly. Marketers looking to give a boost to affluent purchase intent on luxury and other products can try to reach them [via mobile and video](#), two channels they are highly engaged in, and should keep in mind that [video and search ads](#) drive the most action among this group.

## MULTICULTURALISM

### “Breaking Out of the Multicultural Ghetto”

*Richard Watts, Arts Hub [Australia], 9/11/13*

Multiculturalism is not a feel-good word to all the culturally diverse artists meeting at Brisbane Multicultural Art Centre this week. The Kultour Gathering 2013 provides artists and arts workers from across Australia with a unique opportunity to share their experiences – one of which is an apparent aversion to the term ‘multicultural’. Choreographer, dancer and actor Annalouise Paul, who has been creating intercultural dance theatre since 1988, agrees that ‘multicultural’ has become a loaded term. “...you don’t want to be labelled as this thing, you just want to do your work ... make work [that is] recognised as being good art, as opposed to multicultural art....All artists have to deal with this; all those labels and boxes and gymnastics around language that we have to do in order to get out work funded and seen, validated or whatever; it slows down the process of actually making the work, and that's what's coming out of these three days.” Kultour CEO Julie Tipene-O’Toole said “...we recognise that we can’t achieve the outcomes of greater representation for culturally diverse art and artists on our own... The partnerships we’re beginning to form... we are building relationships where we actually work alongside national networks; we help to educate and inform them about simple things like, where do you find artists...and how do you engage with them?” Previously the Acting Director of the Inter-Arts Office at the Australia Council, Ricardo Peach [added:] “We’re not naive; we know that external factors do influence the artistic world around us, but the best intervention we can make is by empowering artists to create really good work. And when there’s a good story, when there’s good work, when people have fantastic networks, when they’re empowered and engaged within a cultural environment that understands their work, then that’s what’s important.”

### “Being Broke Helped Actor Break Race and Gender Barriers”

*Emma Green, The Atlantic, 9/10/13*

Before she starred in hit TV shows and won fellowships like the MacArthur "genius grant," Anna Deavere Smith fit the stereotype of a starving artist. When she couldn't pay others to act in a play she wrote, she ended up performing all of the parts herself. That's how, almost by accident, she created what some have called a new form of theater: one which forces audience members to look beyond characters' appearances and confront unexpected perspectives. "I've been performing for all these years without regard to race and gender," she said in an interview for Atlantic Video's *Creative Breakthroughs* series. As she explains in [this video](#), this approach challenges traditional assumptions about art. Instead of performing identities, she performs characters -- and makes a distinction between the two. It's "a more humanitarian initiative than I had initially planned," she said.

## “Embracing the Beauty of Difference in the Ballet World”

*Royal Ballet’s Eric Underwood interviewed by Ben Beaumont-Thomas, The Guardian [UK], 9/8/13*

Right from the start of my career, I've noticed a lack of ethnic people in ballet. In a corps de ballet, the idea is to be identical: you're trying to move the same and not call attention to yourself. For someone who isn't white, that's difficult. You're left with a choice: you have to either become so great a dancer that you're not left in a chorus, or embrace your beauty and hope others do, too. It wasn't difficult for me to embrace myself, because I was born in Washington DC around lots of black people, so I grew up confident in the fact I was black. Only as a ballet dancer did I even notice I was black -- before that, I was just Eric. Ultimately, being black is an asset. If you're in a setting where you're different, celebrate that - it's a wonderful thing. Your upbringing, your culture, the things that have enriched you that maybe other people didn't have – you have to incorporate them into your dancing. Growing up in America in a black household, I danced at weekends, danced with my family -- it was a large part of our culture. I would even have little dance contests with my sister and our neighbours. I'm able to incorporate that into my dancing because, before I started classical training, I had learned how to move. I don't think it's anything bad to be exoticised; if you're exotic, embrace it and dance well. It's an extra something to shape you as a dancer. Denying your race isn't just bad for your mental health, it's also ultimately unachievable. Maybe one day there will be so many people from ethnic backgrounds dancing, none of this will even need to be thought about.

## “South Africa’s ‘Theatre of Struggle’ Appoints First Black Artistic Director”

*David Smith, The Guardian, 9/5/13*

When he was cutting his teeth as an actor, the only place James Ngcobo knew equality was on stage. Two decades on, apartheid is dead and Ngcobo has landed the most prestigious job in South African theatre. The 44-year-old Zulu is the new artistic director of the Market Theatre in Johannesburg. Despite the venue's celebrated history of protest plays during white minority rule, when it was known as the "theatre of the struggle", Ngcobo is the first black person to fill the position full time. [His] plans are nothing if not diverse: Steven Berkoff performing his *Requiem for Ground Zero*; David Mamet's *Race*; a one-man show about Zulu identity, a Czech company's adaptation of *The Diary of Anne Frank* and a hip-hop act. He also aims to direct an opera and bring in a dance company from Zimbabwe. Ngcobo's favourite playwrights include Beckett and Pinter and he rejects the notion that Shakespeare is "colonial" literature that [no longer speaks to post-apartheid South Africans](#). "I always say that's rubbish. You can't look at Shakespeare in just that one dimension. I'm yet to meet a writer who says they're not inspired by Shakespeare. I'm yet to meet an actor who doesn't want to do a Shakespeare. I've always been of the belief that if theatre is done very well it doesn't matter where it comes from. When I was growing up, people loved Brecht in the township, people loved Shakespeare." But the endlessly energetic, fast-talking Ngcobo believes it is also vital for theatre to keep excavating his country's difficult history. It would be damaging, he believes, for South Africa to wish its past away. "One sits at dinner tables now and people say, 'We shouldn't tell our kids about apartheid.' I've got two boys and I tell my boys about

apartheid, because I just think otherwise it's taking away memory from them, and the most successful nations in the world are nations that walk with the memory of who they are.”

## OTHER

### **“PNC Foundation’s ‘Arts Alive’ Gives Over \$5 Million to Increase Arts Access”**

*Citybizlist.com, 5/1/13*

Family art making in underserved communities, a symphony for sports lovers and a Philadelphia film festival for children are among the innovative programs that were funded by the PNC Foundation through PNC Arts Alive. Including [this year's] recipients, PNC Arts Alive has awarded more than 120 grants totaling \$5 million to more than 55 arts organizations in the Greater Philadelphia/Southern New Jersey region [since 2009]. The 2013 grants support a wide range of disciplines, audiences and participatory experiences from arts groups large and small, city and suburban. "The creativity of Philadelphia's arts sector is clearly evident in the innovative programs by PNC Arts Alive grantees" said Bill Mills, PNC regional president. "We set out to make the arts more accessible and challenged arts groups to help people experience art in new ways -- to engage them now and in the future. The region's performing arts community has delivered." Results from the first and second year grant portfolios prove the effectiveness of Arts Alive in reaching new audiences. In year one, 73% of the projects increased attendance, while also attracting a new and more diverse audience to arts and cultural programs and events. In year two, 100 percent of the projects were effective in introducing the arts to audiences with limited access.

### **“Making Art Accessible to People in Poverty”**

*Sarah Anderson, The Star-Press [Indiana], 4/12/13*

We all love the story about the underdog kid pulling himself up by the bootstraps to become a successful adult and leaving his life of poverty. And it is a wonderful, heartwarming story. Unfortunately, reality can be quite different for so many children living in poverty. [According to U.S. data from 2010,] 15.1% of individuals [were] living in poverty and 22% of children under 18 [were] living in poverty. Children growing up in poverty are much less likely to receive the tools they need to succeed: good nutrition, great education, and a strong support system. Individuals, whether they are parents or single, living in poverty are also blocked by those same barriers. And, unfortunately, it can become a cycle. There are several agencies in Delaware County [that] have banded together in the Poverty Awareness Year partnership to provide tools to get out of poverty. I am happy to work at an organization that plays a small role in all the good work going on in our area. Here at Cornerstone Center for the Arts, we believe in art for all. We believe visual arts, dance, music, theater and more are integral parts of a person's education. We believe art helps one grow as a person, learn to express him or herself in new ways, and can even act as a stress reliever. One of our "cornerstones" is the idea that art should be accessible to everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status. We have a strong financial aid program that provides free classes to children and adults. When I hear that an acting class was "like walking into a room of friends on the first night" or that a child struggles at school but feels "like a rock star in his hip hop class," I know that we make a difference.

### **[Global Poverty Project uses concert tickets to promote anti-poverty activism](#)**

*James C. McKinley Jr, The New York Times, 5/1/13*

When the Global Poverty Project staged a benefit concert with Neil Young, the Black Keys and Foo Fighters in Central Park last fall, skeptics wondered if that nonprofit's attempt to generate pressure on world leaders to help the poor would fade as soon as the amplifiers and guitars were put away. But this week the charity proved it had won converts, at least within the music industry. More than 70 artists, among them Jay-Z, Beyoncé, Bruce Springsteen, Pearl Jam and Bruno Mars, have pledged to give the project two tickets from each of their concerts over the next year, creating a pool of more than 20,000 tickets. The tickets will be used as prizes to encourage people to become involved in causes like fighting poverty in the third world, eradicating polio, building schools and ending famine. To win the tickets, fans [are asked to earn points](#) by taking action through a related Web site, [globalcitizen.org](http://globalcitizen.org). They can sign petitions, pledge to volunteer their time as aid workers, write elected leaders or donate money to aid organizations. "It provides us with an opportunity to get really powerful activism worldwide," said Hugh Evans, the chief executive of the Global Poverty Project. [The idea] caught on quickly with artists and managers because giving up two tickets for each concert is a small sacrifice -- and because the causes the project supports tend not to generate controversy or alienate fans. One artist who signed on, Dierks Bentley, said, "As a country singer, I really do try to avoid any sort of political involvement" that might "throw my fans for a loop. But when it comes to poverty, man, shoot. There are so many people in this country who are struggling, and a whole other level of struggle outside our borders, and I've had a chance to see part of that."

## **"What we Talk About When we Talk About Race"**

*David Moss, [createquity.com](http://createquity.com), 11/19/13*

*Young whites poring over books, memorizin' but never learning  
And I wonder how the fuck they'll justify genocide.*

*"I...I was in the library, honest to God, I didn't even know."*

—From "[The Library](#)," by Felipe Luciano of The Original Last Poets

On March 7 of this year, my friend and I attended a [screening](#) of the film *Right On!*, a seminal creation of the [Harlem spoken word poetry movement](#) of the 1960s. Featuring 28 performances by a group called The Original Last Poets, *Right On!* is essentially a double-album-length music video that presaged MTV by over a decade. The film's monologues-with-a-beat offer a brutally honest window into black urban life and identity in the midst of the civil rights era. According to the movie's producer, as relayed by the marketing copy accompanying the event, it was "the first 'totally black film' making 'no concession in language and symbolism to white audiences.'" It was intense, confrontational, and not quite like anything I'd seen before. I loved it.

"The Library," quoted above, is not even close to the [angriest number in \*Right On!\*'s hit parade](#). But watching the images of what is now the [Stephen A. Schwarzman Building](#) at the New York Public Library pass by as Felipe Luciano's fellow Last Poets mockingly intoned "The Liiiiii-bra-ree," I couldn't help but revel in the irony of my location: [the Museum of Modern Art](#).

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As it turns out, *Right On!*'s run at MoMA was the world premiere of a digitally restored version of the film. Lost to the public for many years, *Right On!* had been little more than a fading memory until the

museum's [To Save and Project festival of film preservation](#) undertook the challenge of bringing it back to life with support from donors [Celeste Bartos](#) and Paul Newman.

The work of restoring and presenting *Right On!* to the public is the sort of thing that institutions like MoMA routinely cite in grant applications as proof of their commitment to diversity. Yet MoMA could hardly have been a more iconic symbol of the white establishment to serve as a setting for the Poets' time-lapsed performance. [Forged from Rockefeller privilege](#), MoMA was founded to promote the artistry of European modernism, and the [most famous works in its collection](#) are nearly all by dead white men. It has [\\$1 billion in net assets](#), pays its (white) director a [seven-figure salary](#) that places him among the best-paid nonprofit executives in New York, and [charges among the highest admission fees](#) in the country for an art museum. It was the [first target of Occupy Museums](#). The very room where the *Right On!* screening took place, [The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1](#), first gained notoriety within the filmmaking community for its [D. W. Griffith retrospective in 1940](#), which surely must have included the [racist and Ku-Klux-Klan-reviving \*Birth of A Nation\*](#).

Remarkably, the Poets themselves [made an appearance at the opening night of the run](#). I can only guess that it was a heart-warming spectacle of racial healing and harmony, as Luciano didn't respond to my request to interview him. All I know is that the following night, the night I was there, I counted two black people in the audience.

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Earlier this year, Talia Gibas [analyzed](#) Holly Sidford's manifesto "Fusing Arts, Culture, and Social Change" for Createquity. "Fusing" has become a rallying cry for cultural equity advocates who believe that philanthropic resources are unjustly concentrated in venerable institutions with white European roots like MoMA. The study analyzed the flow of philanthropic dollars to the arts using data from the Foundation Center, and found that less than 10% of arts grant dollars went to serve [marginalized communities](#), including African Americans.

Interestingly, the restoration of *Right On!*, undertaken by MoMA with the support of individual donors, not foundations, would not have registered as a project serving a marginalized community under Sidford's methodology. And by excavating a treasure of the black cultural canon from functional oblivion with (from all appearances) the full cooperation of the creative individuals involved, one could argue that MoMA is doing the African American community a wonderful service, fulfilling its role as custodian of heritage in a truly inclusive way. But it's also not hard to see the transfer in setting from underground movie theater in heady 1970 to establishment art museum in 2013 as a particularly insidious kind of cultural appropriation. It was a striking experience to watch *Right On!* from the comfort of MoMA, of all places. It was, in fact, like being in a museum, as if there were a glass wall between the movie and me allowing me to appreciate it as a cultural object while preventing me from truly entering its world. The raw, unfiltered power and emotion directed at the camera was boxed in and partially neutered by the time it reached me on the other side of the screen, sitting next to my white college friend and the many white people in the room who could have been my friends if I'd happened to come across them in a different context. As unmistakable as the film's point of view was, it was easy, too easy, to compartmentalize it as an artifact of a different era, a time when revolution was in the air and the evils of racism were upfront and obvious.

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I'm not sure there is anything that has claimed as high a brain-energy-expended-to-public-output-generated ratio for me as race this past year. Way back in February, some of you might recall, I [inserted myself](#) into a discussion about race and the arts that had been started by New Beans's Clayton Lord, then Director of Audience Development for Theatre Bay Area and now VP of Local Arts Advancement for Americans for the Arts. At the time, I noted that "virtually all of the recent discussion...in this particular corner of the blogosphere [was] happening among well-meaning white liberals who just can't help themselves from occupying public space with their opinions." I wasn't the only one who noticed. Roberto Bedoya, head of the Tucson Pima Arts Council in Arizona and a longtime follower of this blog, thanked me for pointing it out and [challenged me and five other bloggers](#)—pale pasties, all of us—to "share with us some of [our] good thinking and deep reflection on [our] understanding of how the White Racial Frame intersects with cultural policies and cultural practices." Piece of cake, right? You can read the responses from [Clay](#), [Doug](#), [Nina](#), [Barry](#), [Diane](#), and [Roberto himself](#) at the links provided. As eager as I was to participate (I promised I would, after all), extracting words from my brain these past months was like squeezing blood from a stone. The topic of race offers a white liberal like me a frustratingly narrow range of socially acceptable rhetoric. Like any self-respecting contrarian, I have no interest in saying what's already been said, but at the same time I felt woefully underprepared to confidently take the conversation in a new direction. It took a long time, a lot of background research, and many discussions with family, friends and social and professional acquaintances who consciously engage with issues around race before I finally felt comfortable airing my views in public. If there's one positive and concrete suggestion I can offer in the wake of that learning process, it's that we do what we can to create an open environment for talking honestly about race relations in all of their kaleidoscopic, maddening, shame-inducing complexity. The dialogue that Clay and Roberto have started is a great first step in that direction, but we need to keep it going if we truly want to achieve more than symbolic progress towards a more racially just sector. And the more I learn, the more strongly I suspect that in order to keep that dialogue going in an authentic way, we are going to need to take it into some very uncomfortable, challenging territory – for white people and non-white people alike, for anti-racism advocates and white privilege apologists both.

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Several of my fellow bloggers who responded to Roberto's prompt made valuable points about the need and opportunity to be more inclusive and welcoming in our institutions' programming and audience engagement practices. And certain artistic works undoubtedly have the power to hold a mirror up to ourselves and question the assumptions of our environment, as *Right On!* was able to do for me. But I feel that this conversation is missing something crucial if we neglect to expand the frame outward, to grapple with how our country and society's dysfunctional relationship with race informs and warps our lives more generally.

Art and arts organizations are not capable of solving racism on their own. It's not that the arts have nothing to say about race or that diverse cultural expressions aren't important, but in the absence of a clear and shared understanding of the [underlying factors that perpetuate racism](#), I fear that arts-centric interventions can all too often end up being little more than a band-aid – a way to reassure ourselves that we're doing something important and valuable when in reality we're really having very little impact at all. I believe that the sooner we as a field start framing our efforts not around "what can we do *as artists and arts administrators* to promote diversity?" but rather "how does racial injustice manifest

today, what are its root causes, and how can we *as human beings* most effectively be part of the solution?”, the sooner we’ll actually have something to be proud of.

For example, I’ve now been a part of several organizations that have struggled with the fact that their staffs are mostly white. One of the most visible commitments to diversity that an organization can make is to have strong representation of people of color among its staff, board, and leadership. Not surprisingly, then, managers typically have these considerations at back of mind when entering the hiring process, and sometimes even explicitly consider race as a factor in their decision. And yet they get frustrated when they are unable to find competitive candidates of color at a rate that would, as advocated by Robert Bush, make them [“look like the people \[they\] serve.”](#)

Simple statistics, however, quickly start to illuminate some of the reasons behind this frustration. Virtually every arts administration job I’ve ever seen *requires* a Bachelor’s degree as a minimum condition of employment. I’m willing to bet that most arts administrators don’t realize that [fewer than a third of American adults over the age of 25 have one](#). More to the point, however, black and Hispanic adults are *40 to 60 percent* less likely respectively to have graduated from college than whites. So if having a Bachelor’s truly is a requirement for doing the job well\*, then “success” as it relates to representativeness actually means matching the *proportion of people with college degrees*, not the general population.

Of course, if you have any conscience at all, the above rationalization is unsatisfying. It openly admits and does absolutely nothing about a basic racial equity issue: access to opportunities based on educational attainment. But therein lies the rub: if we *actually* care that the disparity in college graduation rates is causing our application pool to be less diverse, that is if we care enough to do something about it, our daily work may not be the most appropriate forum in which to take action. What’s needed to close that gap, in all likelihood, goes way beyond the arts.

*(\*This is, of course, an important question to examine in its own right, but in the interests of not biting off more than I can chew with one article, I’m going to sidestep it for now.)*

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The stark disparity in college graduation rates described above can be seen as one manifestation of the so-called [“achievement gap”](#) between white students and black and Hispanic students. This achievement gap is [present from a very early age](#), though not necessarily birth. One contributing factor to the achievement gap, though undoubtedly not the whole story, is the vast differential in the quality of the schools available to white students vs. students of color, especially in urban environments. America’s cities are highly segregated geographically, in part a vestige of [real estate redlining practices](#) and white flight following the [Second Great Migration](#) in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Even today, there is evidence that white homebuyers are [willing to pay more money](#) not to have to live in a neighborhood with lots of people of color. As a result, by some measures school systems in the United States are [even more segregated today](#) than they were when *Brown vs. Board of Education* was first implemented in the 1960s. Meanwhile, school systems are governed by local rules and jurisdictions and, crucially, paid for via local property taxes. Ever wonder why people move to the suburbs to send their kids to good schools? Well, that’s why. On a per-capita basis, [suburbs are much wealthier than urban cores](#) and therefore can afford schools that are less crowded and feature more amenities for their students. People who don’t follow the education field may not realize that public school systems are [struggling in large cities all across the country](#), not just where they live.

There is no magic bullet for fighting racial inequity; in the *Atlantic Cities* recently, for example, Emily Badger makes the case that establishing [universal preschool is the best single thing we could do](#), but even the rosier projections offered in that article make clear that such a measure would hardly erase the achievement gap. Nevertheless, as educated professionals, one action we could take that might actually make a difference is to locate ourselves in areas where our tax dollars will go to support these struggling school systems. And yet, many of my white peers are doing the exact opposite: explicitly shopping for real estate by school district, trying their best to ensure that their kid(s) will be less likely to end up in a bad situation – and, incidentally, a lot less likely to be surrounded by kids of color. It's awfully tough to ask someone to choose between fighting for racial equity and forgoing the best possible education for their child. I believe that sacrifice is a virtue, but I am not enough of a romantic to count on it as a large-scale strategy for social change. Perhaps the real enemy here, then, is not the racism-perpetuating behavior, but the system that sets up the incentives that encourage it. In this case, that system is the funding of public school systems based on local property taxes. If we really want to attack this part of the problem at its core, perhaps we should be advocating instead for a system that runs schools locally but funds them nationally, presumably through an expanded Department of Education. What can arts organizations do to push forward *that* outcome? And why is [hardly anyone else](#) talking about it?

Let's take a step back for a minute and remember how we got here. We were wondering how a hiring manager could get her staff to better reflect the diversity of her community. Now, 900-some-odd words later, we're talking about advocating for a giant expansion of the Department of Education, universal preschool, and in the meantime intentionally sending our kids to substandard schools. Does it make sense now why, despite all of our conversations about race and privilege, nothing ever seems to change?

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I like to think of myself as a technocrat – as I get older, I find myself becoming less and less interested in what sounds good and more and more interested in what works. On this blog and at my day job alike, I advocate for “evidence-based decision-making.” I champion [logic models and theories of change](#) as tools for taking apart complex systems. I push for a big-picture, strategic approach to everything, most of all to gigantic social clusterfucks that take lifetimes to unravel.

I don't do these things for giggles or to increase my SEO ranking. I do them because I genuinely believe in the power of analytical thinking to help us make sense of the world. Using good research methodologies can tell us useful things like the fact that [even your mom smoking crack while she's pregnant with you](#) doesn't screw up your life anywhere near as much as [being born into poverty](#), or that [educating parents on how to parent better](#) might just be a way to fix some of these problems. In order to really be able to use research, you have to keep an open mind. You're not going to learn anything if you're not willing to let the research surprise you. And sometimes those surprises can be an unpleasant source of cognitive dissonance.

I think this is where I have the greatest difficulty with the “discourse” around race as I've most often experienced it in this country. Some months ago I wrote on this blog about the [phenomenon of “mood affiliation,”](#) a term coined by economist Tyler Cowen to refer (as I interpret it) to a tendency among participants in debates to ally themselves with a certain “side” and subordinate new facts or information

to the preferred interpretation of their “team.” A more widely recognized name for this sort of thing is [confirmation bias](#).

I feel like there’s a whole lot of mood affiliation that goes on in conversations about race. The population subgroups that are active in these conversations place a high value on coordinated action and messaging. That means that, if you consider yourself an anti-racist and would like for others to perceive you that way as well, there are very real social and even professional risks associated with taking certain positions on issues that [may not be clear-cut at all](#). Something like stop-and-frisk may not be good policy ([it’s not](#)), but we need to be able to ask the question of whether it actually works before dismissing it on moral grounds – and, more importantly, be prepared to answer the question of *what if it does?* Alas, stories about race become politicized so quickly that it becomes much more difficult to take an unbiased, critical look at the situation than it is to rely on whatever position one’s identity group has rallied behind.

For that reason, what I crave the most is to see conversations about race imbued with the complexity and nuance they deserve. I’m not talking about the throw-up-our-hands-and-declare-defeat kind of acknowledgement of complexity, but the okay-let’s-get-into-the-weeds-and-figure-this-shit-out kind. In order for that to happen, critiques that question conventional wisdom about race are going to have to play a bigger role. Critiques like these:

- **How important is race relative to other forms of difference?** Race gets a lot of attention, but is it the most relevant lens through which to view social justice in the present-day United States? I’ve noticed that the idea of comparing injustices to each other gets a lot of pushback from anti-racists; the phrase “[oppression Olympics](#)” gets thrown about a lot. And I understand how, from an advocacy perspective, this line of thinking is counterproductive and can be used as a rhetorical device to turn underprivileged groups against each other. But from a policy perspective, asking these kinds of questions is essential. Policy always involves making tradeoffs among finite alternatives – taking one approach can often mean not taking another, so you have to choose priorities and emphases carefully. There are lots of unearned inequities among different segments of people in this life, many of which have established places in national dialogue and many of which have not. Did you know, for example, that [height is significantly correlated with earning power](#)? On the strength of a study conducted for his book *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell even [claims](#) that “being short is probably as much, or more, of a handicap to corporate success as being a woman or an African-American.” I’m not sure I’d go that far, but I do think it makes sense to try to identify and target leverage points that trigger lots of injustices at once. One of those leverage points might be [socioeconomic class](#), given that economic security touches so many areas of life. In no small part due to the legacies of historical discrimination, race and class today are closely intertwined: white families are on average [an astounding six times wealthier](#) than black and Hispanic families. But this means that a strategy to address class inequities, which can benefit from some existing infrastructure in the form of progressive taxation, will have the benefit of addressing many (albeit not all) of the racial inequities as well.
- **Can we stop talking as if there are only two sides to this story?** Too many of the mainstream narratives about race in the United States are stuck in mid-twentieth-century paradigms of black vs. white. The classic archetypes of the oppressor and the oppressed make for good movies, but the racial groups that feature in conversations about race today are insanely reductive visions of reality.

Hispanic/Latino makes lots of sense as a language-based subculture (superculture?), but it's [not an actual race](#) even though we often talk about it as if it is. Arab Americans are [considered Caucasian](#) by the Census, but try talking to them about white privilege while they're going through US Customs. [Most African Americans are actually mixed race](#), and first-generation African immigrants often have [little in common](#) with descendents of American slaves beyond their skin color. There are Jewish Venezuelans and white Africans and black Dutch. People of color are not a monolithic group, and don't always like each other; there is a long and ugly history, for example, of [East Asian bigotry against black people](#). Nor do they face the same challenges: whereas the college graduation rates for African Americans and Hispanics are 20% and 14% respectively, Asians [have been north of 50% since 2005](#). We are prone to equate gentrification with "white people taking over the neighborhood" but ignore [the role that people of color play](#) in that process. Even within the arts, we oversimplify the racial identities of our institutions, casually applying the adjective "white" to orchestras for example, in spite of a huge influx of Korean, Chinese and Japanese instrumentalists in recent decades. The anti-racist movement is fond of pointing out that race is an [artificial social construct](#)—maybe we should all start treating it like one?

- **What is the role of assimilation in defining racial power structures?** White people are not a monolithic group either. In the United States alone, there used to be [bitter hatred towards ethnic Germans](#), [rampant discrimination against Jews](#), and [immigration restrictions erected against Italians](#), to name a few. What we think of as "white privilege" today was WASP privilege 100 years ago. What lessons can we learn from the dramatic cultural shift that has taken place in the meantime? And how much of a role has intermarriage between white ethnic groups (see below for more) had in making that shift possible? Moreover, does talking about white people as one group – since no white ethnic group would constitute a majority on its own – serve only to solidify the sense of whiteness as the majority default? In a [long piece for the Grantmakers in the Arts Reader](#), Heinz Foundation arts program officer Justin Laing criticizes "the normativeness of White people's arts and culture experience that is often implied when ALANA [African, Latino/a, Asian, and Native American] work is referred to as 'culturally specific' or 'ethnic arts' or 'folk arts,' as though White artists' and arts organizations' work is less specific, ethnic, or folksy." Laing goes on to write, "This false idea, Whiteness, is maybe the most damaging of all of the race-based fallacies because it plants deep within us the idea that White people are both separate and the standard; it's a particularly harmful idea in our field that treats the best of White culture as classical not only for Europeans but also for the world." To what extent does the diversity conversation in the arts perpetuate the very inequities we're trying to dismantle?
- **How is demographic change going to affect the way we think about race?** The United States will be a majority-minority country [within 30 years](#). [Four states](#) – California, Texas, New Mexico, and Hawaii – along with the District of Columbia already hold this status. The vast splits between racial and ethnic groups in recent presidential elections remind us that in a democracy, having a baby is not just a personal decision, it's also a political act. Of course, just increasing the numbers of brown people won't necessarily lead to the end of white hegemony – see the [early-20<sup>th</sup>-century South](#) or [mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century South Africa](#) for proof of that. Perhaps more important, then, is the [increasing trend toward multiracial families](#) via adoption (especially by increasingly visible gay parents) and widespread intermarriage, both of which are and will continue to be facilitated by the growing

numbers of non-white individuals in the U.S. Could this blurring of racial categories smooth over old tensions to the point that no one cares about them anymore? I wouldn't discount the possibility, especially when you consider how much the drive towards acceptance of gay marriage [has been driven by loved ones coming out as gay](#). The elevation of a mixed-race President may not signal a society that has moved beyond race, as [some have over-optimistically claimed](#), but it may yet be a harbinger of America's post-racial future.

- **How committed are anti-racist white people to ending white privilege?** This is an important point that I *really* don't think we ever talk about. Merely recognizing that white privilege exists and feeling bad about it is not a recipe for change. Real change, all else being equal, must involve actual sacrifices on the part of those in power, with the white majority being the party in power when it comes to white privilege. Power is not necessarily a zero-sum game, but *relative power* is – and the privileged position in which white people find themselves in the United States is a result of the exercise of asymmetric power dynamics in the past. My questions for those who fancy that they would like to end white privilege are as follows: why don't we ever talk about giving large swaths of land back to the [Indian tribes who once occupied them](#), and whose value system is so rooted in the land itself? Why don't we ever talk seriously anymore about reparations for slavery, the reverberations of which are still very much being felt today? (Such reparations would be [hardly unprecedented](#), by the way.) Wouldn't such things represent much more meaningful change than reminding oneself to make eye contact when one sees a person of color coming the other way?
- **Would we be better off as a society if we were actually *less* conscious of race, not more?** Even if that's not the right or a realistic goal for the short term, is it what we should be working towards in the end? If so, how would that change how we approach conversations about race? In a [60 Minutes interview](#) with Mike Wallace eight years ago, Morgan Freeman famously called Black History Month "ridiculous" and called for its dissolution. Wallace asked how we can get rid of racism otherwise, and Freeman responded, "Stop talking about it! I'm going to stop calling you a white man, and I'm going to ask you to stop calling me a black man. I know you as Mike Wallace, you know me as Morgan Freeman." I imagine that many people reading this are familiar with the concept of [priming](#) in psychology – the idea that subtle stimuli can (often unconsciously) affect our behaviors and performance. There's even a [significant literature](#) exploring the racial dimensions of priming; for example, one study found that simply identifying their race on a pretest questionnaire [cut black students' performance on GRE questions in half](#). Well, what happens when we continually prime white people to believe that they're racist, and people of color that they are victims of racism? Does that in any way exacerbate the problem?

Introducing this sort of complexity into the equation may come off as an invitation to chaos. But think about it this way: would we be satisfied with a map of the world that just had the seven continents on it and a vague notation of which direction they are relative to each other? No, we do what we need to as a society to have hyper-specific geographic markers down to a few hundred feet, all connected, continually updated, existing within an ecosystem of other information like traffic patterns and mountain heights and vote totals.

I believe that the frame for our discussion must be both that large and that fine-grained in order to make real progress. On the large end of the scale, what do we care about most? Is containing racism, rather than ending it, acceptable? And if ending it is paramount, then is equality of opportunity

sufficient for ending racism, or is equality of outcomes necessary? At the micro scale, who benefits and who suffers from racial constructs, to what extent and in what ways? In each case, down to the individual level, how much of that benefit or suffering is the product of socially-constructed and mutable *ideas* of race and how much is tethered to immutable *realities* of race? And what of those inequities are solely attributable to race rather than tied up in other kinds of disadvantage/privilege?

What can I say, it turns out that understanding and dealing with race is really hard! But I truly believe that only the hard work of identifying what our true values are and articulating how we resolve dilemmas when they come into conflict with other values can help us resolve the large-scale questions. And only the hard work of mapping out all of these intimidating complexities as they play out in individual lives will enable us to make the changes to our societal rules and behaviors that will end up serving the most people the most fairly. In fact, I don't see how anything other than hard work, strategically focused, will make any difference at all. So let's get to work.

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Further reading:

- Andy Horwitz, [Whites Only \(Or, WTF is the Deal with Diversity in the Arts?\)](#)
- Maria Vlachou, [The beginning and ending of a b&w week in Vienna](#)
- Maria Vlachou, [The new year](#)
- Linda Essig, [Diversity, Equality, Bus Lanes, and the Arts](#)
- John L. Moore, III, [Equity/Diversity/Change](#)
- [The Untenable Whiteness of Theater Audiences](#), discussion thread at MetaFilter
- Clayton Lord, [Yes/And – tackling racial diversity by looking to things adjacent](#)
- Clayton Lord, [Carrying Forward, Clumsily](#) (if you read one piece by Clay, I recommend this one)
- Jesse Rosen, [Doing More About Diversity in America's Orchestras](#)
- Tiffany Wilhelm has [put together a Google Document](#) with lots of links to additional resources