

Non-Traditional Academic Casting: Issues and Questions

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Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

AEA Presentation, 1986



Anna Deavere Smith

Smith at the First Symposium on Non-Traditional Casting, 1988

“ I hate that term non-traditional casting. I believe that the kind of casting we are talking about is traditional casting. Casting that comes out of the great traditions of this country. I would propose a change of terms. I would prefer to isolate what 90 percent of our theatres are doing as non-traditional casting since it does not represent what America is-- the American people.”



August Wilson

Wilson on an all-black production of *Death of a Salesman*, 1996.

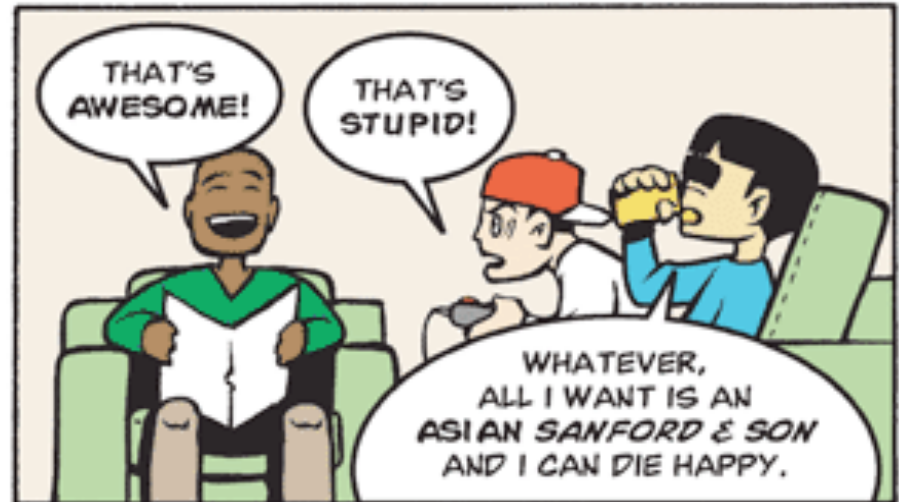
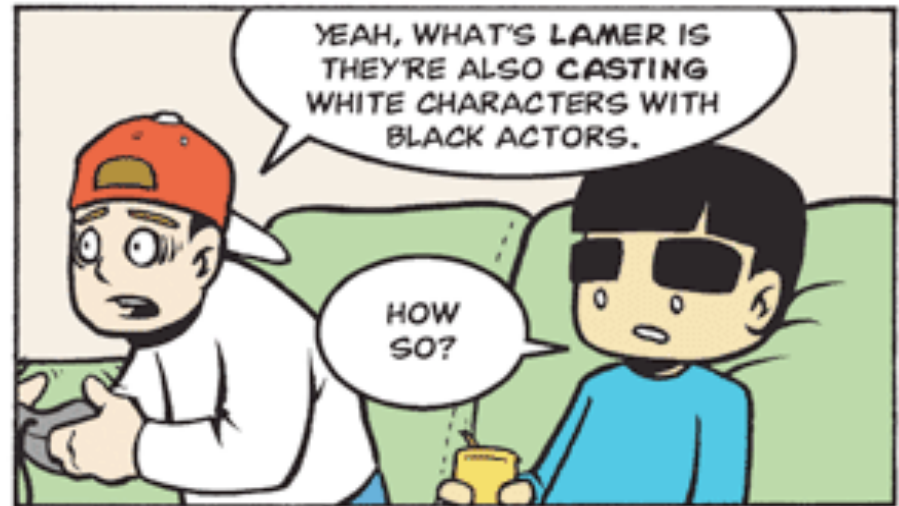
“it is an assault on our presence, an insult to our intelligence. We reject any attempt to blot us out, to reinvent history and ignore our presence, we want you to see us. We are black and beautiful. We have an honorable history in the world of men, We do not need colorblind casting.”



Secret Asian Man in: Color-Blind Casting

SECRET ASIAN MAN By Tak

secretasianman@weekydig.com • www.BlackLava.net/sam • ©2005 Tak Toyoshima



Neil LaBute

Los Angeles Times May 7, 2007

“Just think about it for a moment, though: Why do we barely bat an eye at an all-black version of "Long Day's Journey Into Night" or when Denzel Washington wants to play the title role in "Richard III" (did they really think this is what was meant by the "black prince"?) or Brutus in "Julius Caesar"? Mind you, I'm not complaining a great work has come from these brave and adventurous ideas, but why shouldn't it cut both ways? Isn't it simple prejudice to suggest that we should think otherwise?”



Peter Brook's *Hamlet*, 2000



Our Town

Intiman Theatre, Seattle, 2004



The Glass Menagerie

Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, 2007

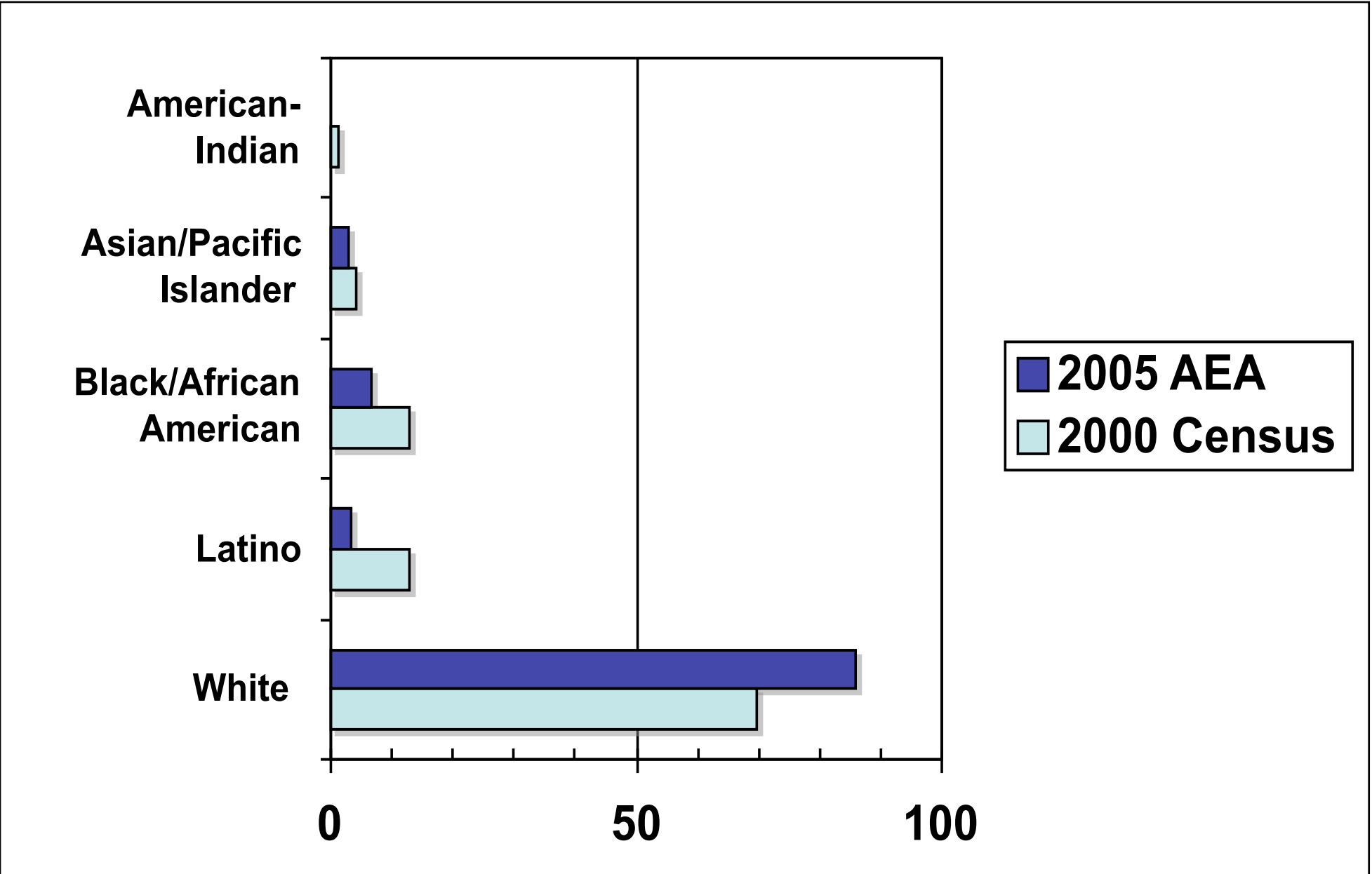


Death of a Salesman

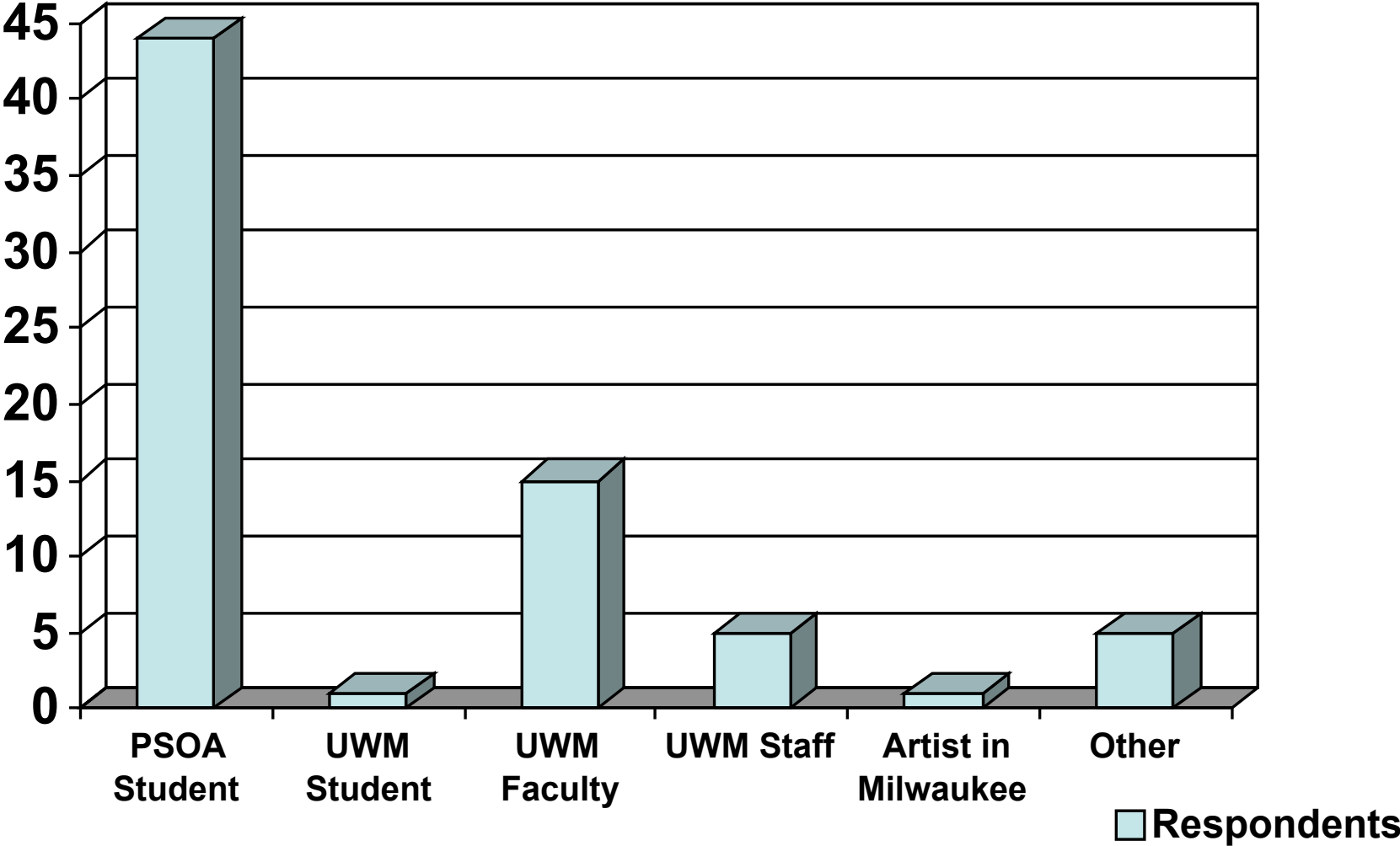
Langston Hughes Performing Arts Center, 2005



Does our stage reflect our society today?

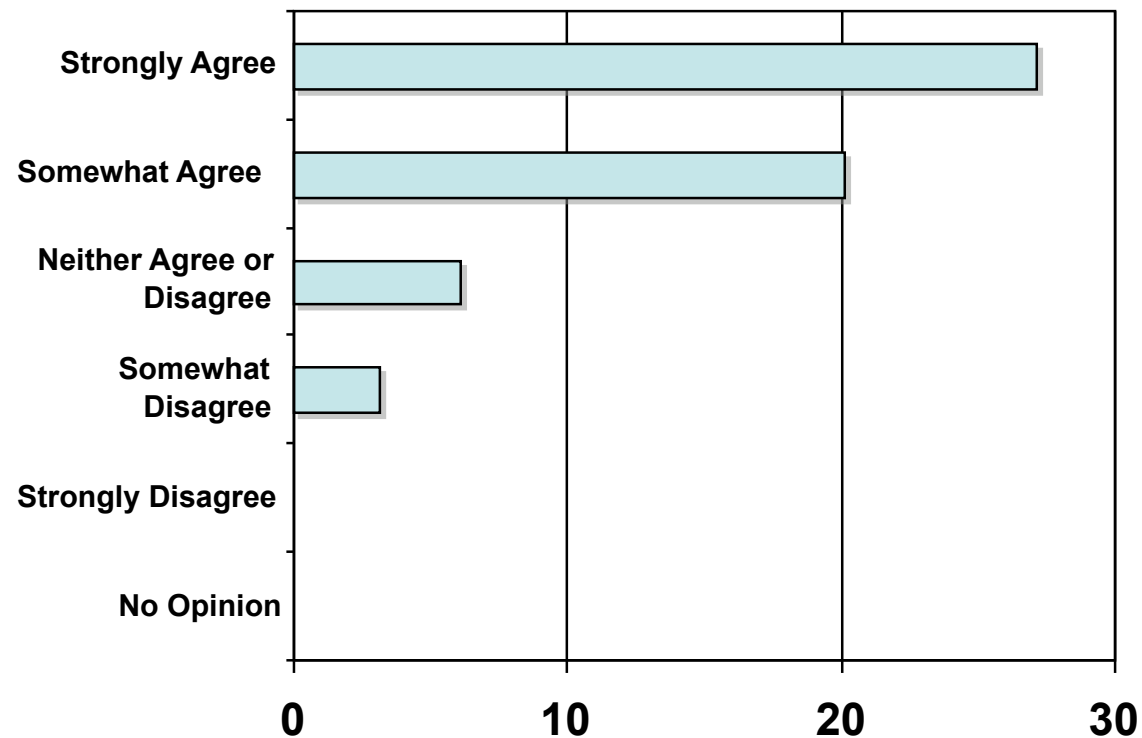


Who Responded?



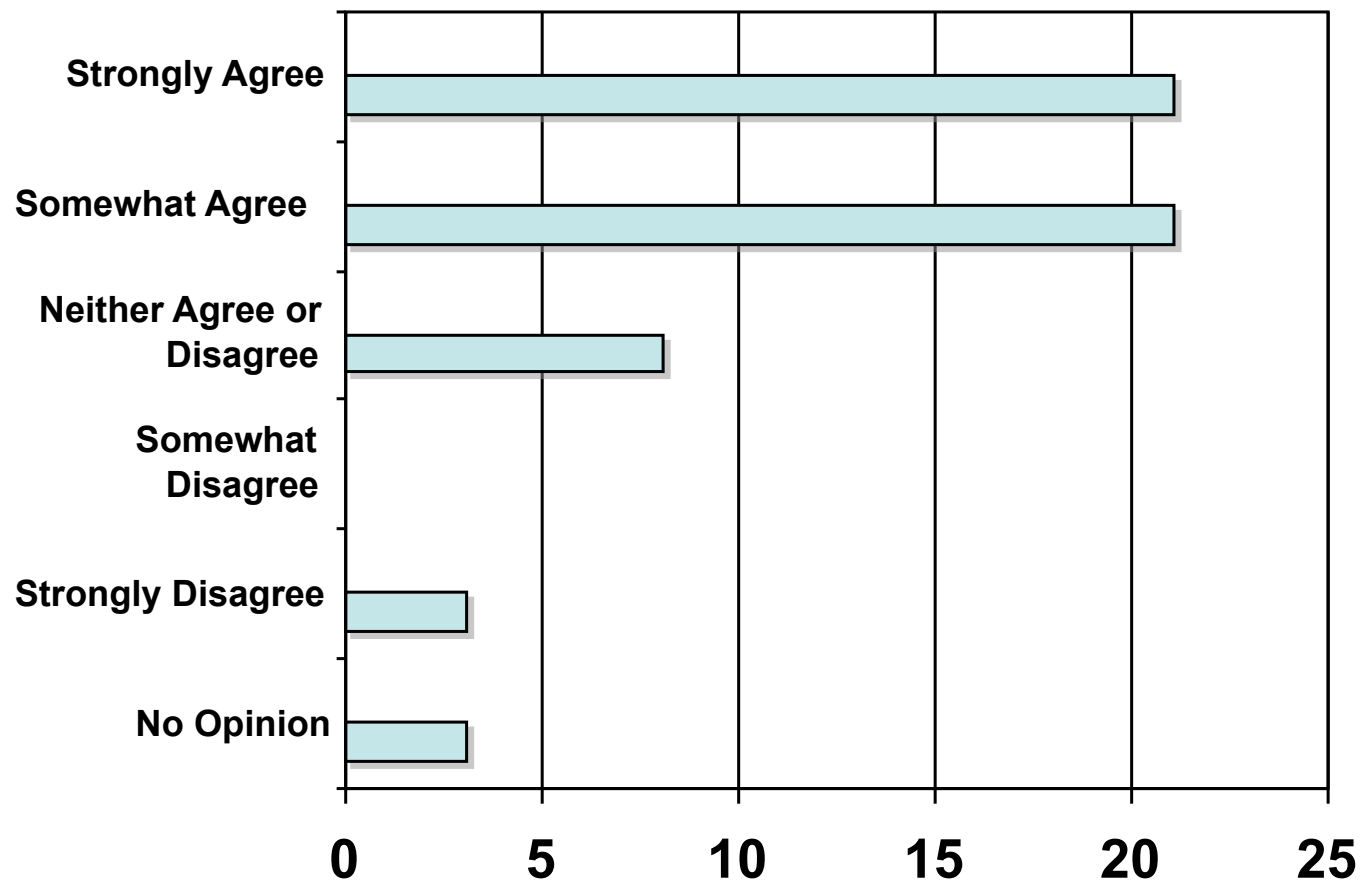
Do we need diversity?

The performing arts have a responsibility to address issues of cultural diversity.



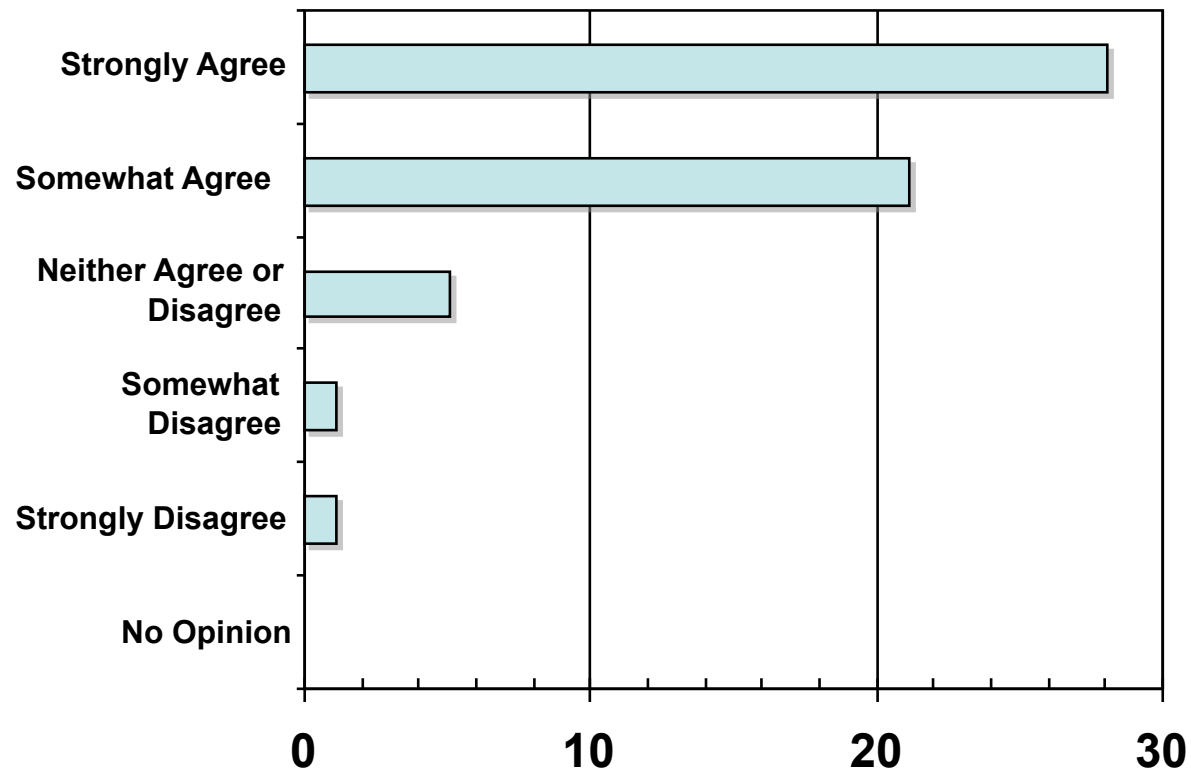
Do we need diverse casting?

Diverse casting in theatre productions, in general, is important to me.



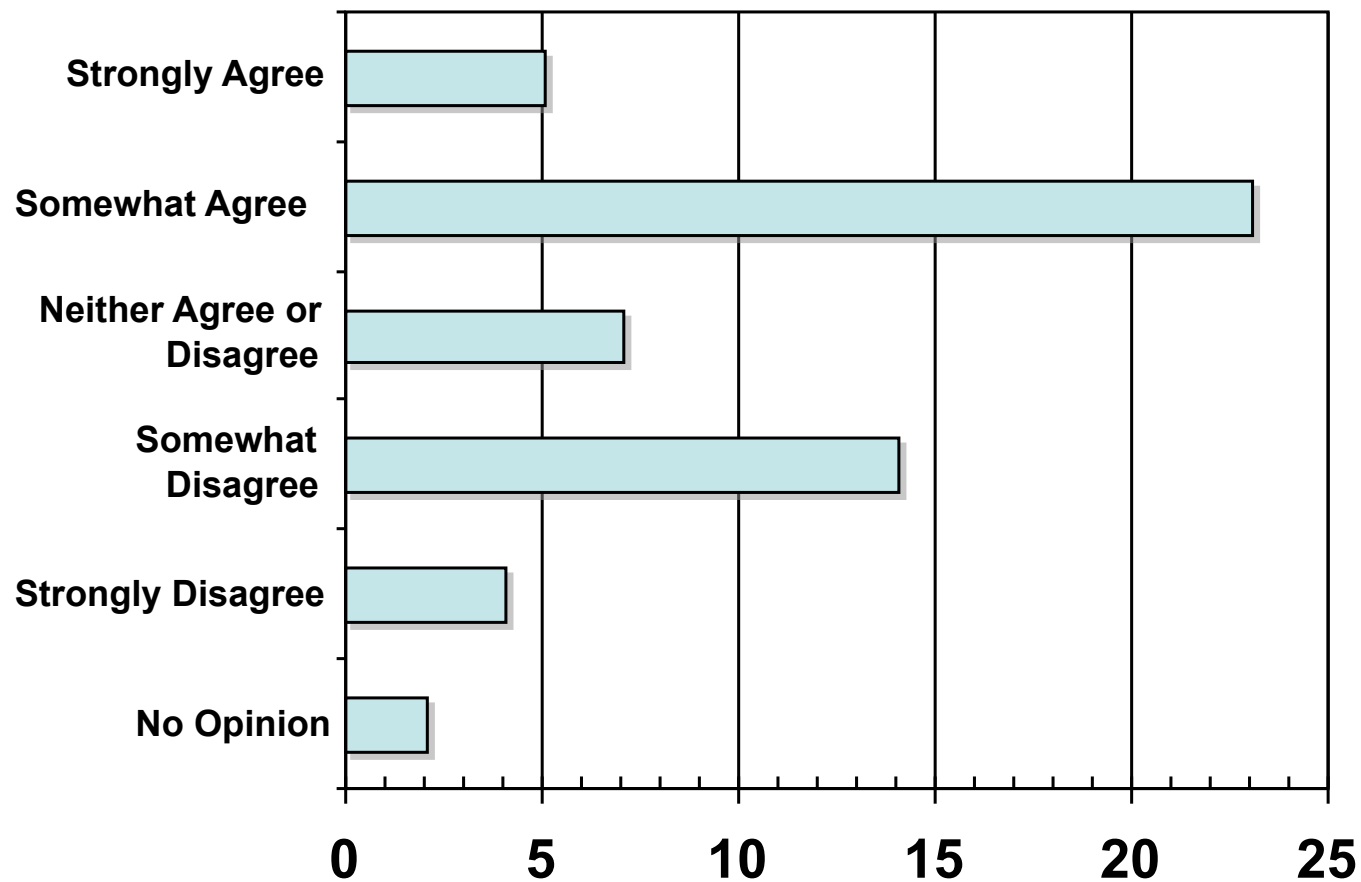
What is our responsibility?

Theatre, as an artistic field, has a responsibility to give accurate portrayals of multicultural and diverse viewpoints.



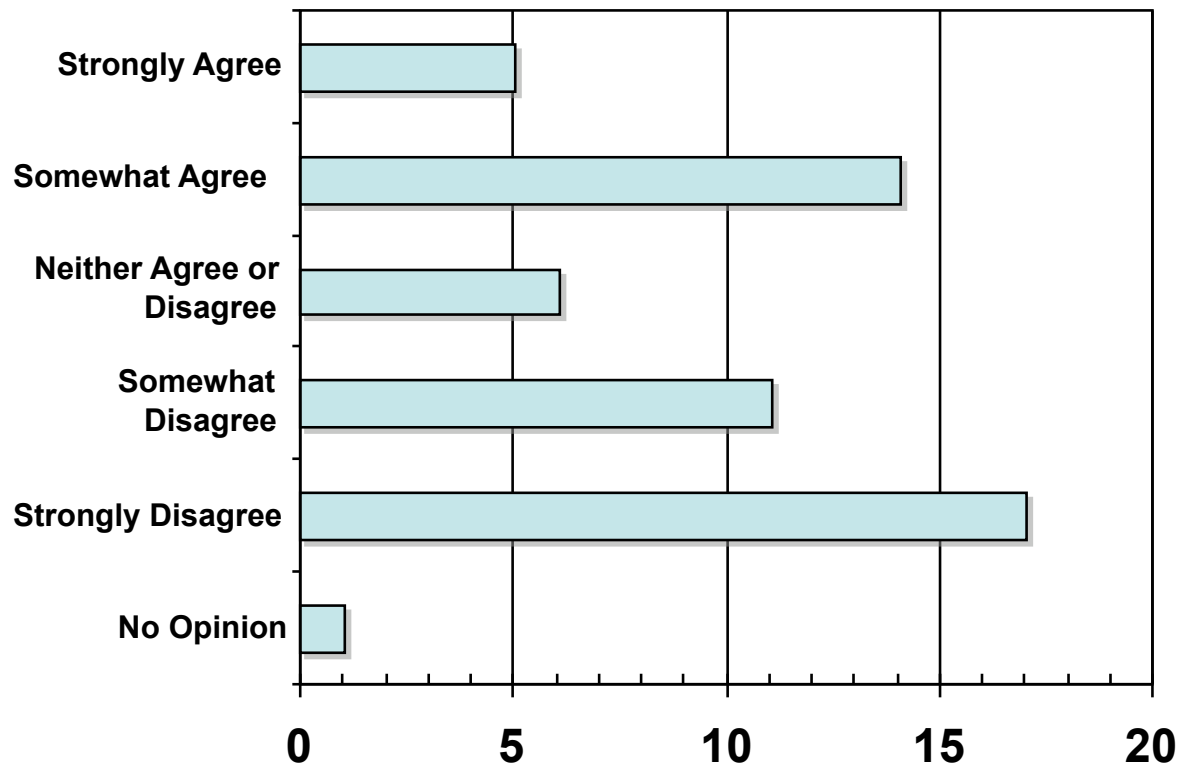
Cast racially specific?

In theatre, plays such as “Raisin in the Sun,” “West Side Story,” “Smokey Joe’s Café,” and “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,” should be cast racially and ethnically specific-as written by the original playwright.



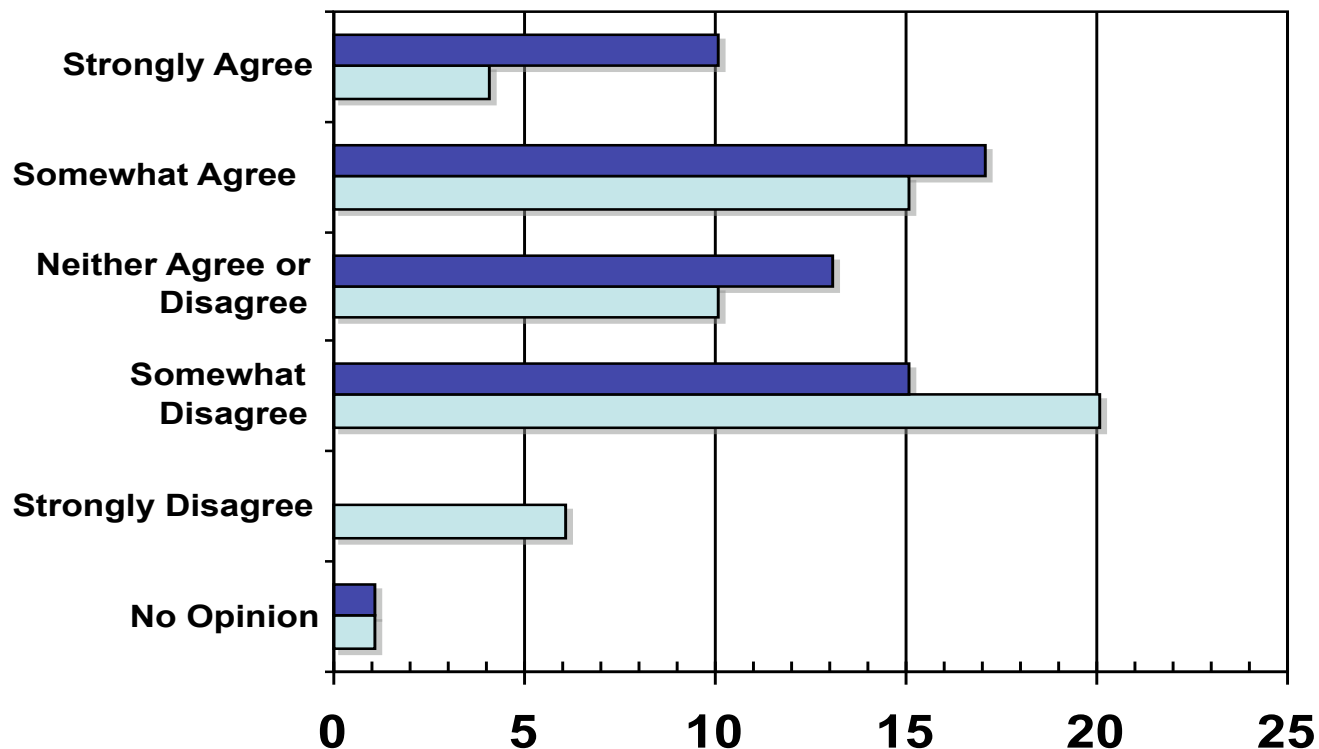
Change the script?

When a play is cast non-traditionally, with multi-ethnic actors in a variety of roles it is acceptable to change the script to accommodate casting changes.



Cast Blindly?

1. In plays that depict persons who are White, a director may cast any actor, no matter what their racial or ethnic identity.
2. In plays that clearly involve specific racial, ethnic, or culturally specific characters, only actors who are from the character's specific culture should be cast.



Do we draw a line?

“With make-up, costume and dialect training an actor/singer can just as accurately portray a part regardless of race.”

“We cannot ignore that color blind casting does still affect our audiences...we live in a racist society.”

“People shouldn’t be mimicking each other...I think it’s better to just change the script.”

“Cultural diversity should be given both ways, to all races including whites.”

Where do we draw the line?

“...some roles require race, i.e. *The Color Purple*.”

“I wish black people could play whites and vice versa, but it’s not the same.”

“...sometimes the color of their skin is clearly unacceptable for certain situations to occur in some shows.”

“In *West Side Story* it is possible for a white girl to portray a Puerto Rican girl...”

“If a white person looks fairly dark, they could pull off a Latino, maybe, but I still think the role should be given to a Latino.”

Issues and Questions

- ❖ Why this play?
- ❖ Who are we casting and why?
- ❖ How do we avoid stereotypes?
- ❖ Does the casting change the art of the play?
- ❖ Does the standard depend on the race?
- ❖ Should we talk about the elephant in the room?