



Theatre at a Crossroads

Hiring Bias & Wage Gaps in 2020



2020 Report
Hiring Bias by the Numbers



ACTORS'
EQUITY
ASSOCIATION 1913

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PHOTO CREDITS: On cover - Equity members Erika LaVonn and Jamen Nanthakumar in *Mary Stuart* at the Pioneer Theatre Company. Photo by Stephanie Dunn/BW Productions. On page 2 - Equity Diversity & Inclusion Specialist Bliss Griffin. Photo by Josh Levinson. On page 4 - Equity member Kimberly Immanuel in BTG's *Godspell*, 2020. Photo by Emma K. Rothenberg-Ware. On page 12 - Equity members as the Voices of Liberty at Walt Disney World. Photo by Donna-Lynne Dalton. On page 16 - Equity members Alexandria Wailes (left) and Monique Holt (right) in a reading of *Another Kind of Silence* at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts. Photo by Adams VisCom. On page 17 - The creative team and Equity cast of *Mother of Exiles* at Playwrights' Center. On page 20 - Equity member Clarissa Marie Ligon stage manages the company of *White Girl in Danger* by Michael R Jackson, a virtual reading. Photo courtesy of Clarissa Marie Ligon. On page 21 - Equity members Karen MacDonald, Tyrees Allen and Paula Plum in *The Children*. Photo by Maggie Hall Photography. On page 22 - Equity member R. Christopher Maxwell stage managing *Mojada: A Medea in Los Angeles* at the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. Photo by R. Christopher Maxwell. On page 25 - Equity members Derrick Cobey and Cicily Daniels in *Once on This Island* at the Pioneer Theatre Company. Photo by Stephanie Dunn/BW Productions. On page 30 - Equity members perform as the Dapper Dans at Walt Disney World. Photo by Rebecca Ashley.

REPORT CREDITS: Report authored by Gabriela Geselowitz. Data compiled by Russell Lehrer. Additional contributions by Rachel Goldfarb, Bliss Griffin and David Levy. Design and layout by Cassy Loseke of Controlled Chaos Consulting.

INTRODUCTION

Equity's annual report on hiring bias and pay equity in theatre arrives at a critical moment for our industry. In examining who among our 51,000 members worked on a union contract in 2020 and how much they were paid, we raise important questions about the choices theatrical employers make when programming, hiring and negotiating salaries above collective bargaining minimums.

When we consider the data through the lens of demographics, to see if all members share equal opportunity and equal pay with their peers regardless of their identities, we encounter a stark fact: the theatre industry is truly missing the mark when it comes to employment justice for union actors and stage managers. As we found in the last two iterations of this report, employers are still not hiring and compensating all Equity members – stage actors and stage managers – equitably. People of color, women, people with disabilities, transgender people all remain less likely to find theatrical work than members who are (or appear to be) white, male, cisgender and without apparent disability. And when they are hired, they are likely to earn less than other members doing the same and similar jobs.

Compared to previous reports, 2020 showed incremental progress. Some wage gaps have narrowed, and some groups now receive a percentage of jobs more closely aligned with their representation in the population overall. Ultimately, however, the rate of change is glacial.

When the industry was shuttered and racial justice protests demanded America's attention, theatre power brokers promised to do better, and institutions across the country released statements committing to

change. We at Equity welcome that change. But what we see is marginal at best. We hear lots of conversation about change, but do not yet see hiring and compensation



Bliss Griffin

that reflect equal opportunity and fair pay. The law forbids any labor union from telling their employers whom to hire, and Equity complies, but we must be outspoken in creating accountability for inclusive hiring and compensation practices by publishing the data in this report.

As with any American institution, Equity was built on a foundation formed with all the biases present within the U.S. society. As an organization, we have also been complicit in implicit white supremacy. We share in the responsibility to #ChangeTheStage as much as employers and every other stakeholder in theatre. There is plenty that we can do, must do and are doing to get our own house in order.

In the summer of 2020, we embarked on our [diversity and inclusion retrofit](#), a process through which Equity is reexamining every aspect of our union – both policy and process – to rebuild it from the ground up an anti-racist organization. This retrofit has many facets, from diversifying and developing our staff – including at the leadership level – to negotiating diversity and inclusion issues into our agreements as workplace safety issues.

I'd like to highlight a key component of our retrofit as far as this report is concerned: Open Access. For decades, the primary avenue for our members to join the union was working on Equity contract – contracts that only Equity employers could offer. This meant that producers, not the union, and certainly not individual workers, were controlling who could access the benefits and protections of union membership. These employers tend to be white, or men, or both. And like all people, they have implicit biases that make it more likely for them to offer opportunities to workers from similar backgrounds to their own than to others. The information in every hiring report to date bears that out. We know, however, that the overrepresentation of these privileged identities among Equity employers does not necessarily mean there is a shortage of theatrical employers with various other identities who also tell stories about and hire from their own communities. So, beginning this year, any stage actor or stage manager who can demonstrate that they have received payment for plying their craft anywhere in the theatre industry – not only in Equity theatres – is eligible to join Equity. The only objective of Open Access is to remove a barrier to membership access that has had a disproportionately negative impact on people with systemically marginalized identities. There is indeed more work to do for Equity to be a truly safe and inviting community for all people. The work is underway, and [semi-annual updates are available](#) on Equity's website.

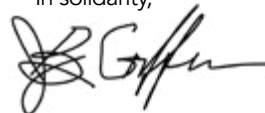
At the close of 2021, the data suggests that Open Access was a necessary and important change. A greater percentage of members joining under Open Access are people of color compared

to union membership as a whole. And the demographic distribution of the members joining via Open Access is more closely aligned with the overall U.S. population and with the populations of the major metropolitan centers employing the lion's share of Equity members. This is yet another reason why producers need to do better: The unionized talent pool is growing more diverse.

Of course, there were far fewer productions in 2020 than ever before, as COVID-19 made live theatre largely unsafe. So as jobs return, and curtains rise again, I have faith that opportunity will be within reach for the full rainbow of theatre makers from every walk of life.

We at Equity will continue to make noise about these issues and advocate for all our members. We encourage every industry employer to apply the analysis in this report to their own employees, from performers and creatives to administrators and ushers; set lofty goals, and track and measure progress toward theatrical workplace inclusion. We look forward to seeing the theatre industry's inclusion goals reflected in its hiring and compensation practices in future Equity Hiring Bias reports.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bliss Griffin', written in a cursive style.

Bliss Griffin, Diversity & Inclusion Strategist



THEATRE AT A CROSSROADS: HIRING BIASES & WAGE GAPS IN 2020

You do not require hard data to sense that there is inequity in the theatre.

The idea of a play where a wealthy white family reveals secrets in their living room has become a cliché because audiences know that the stories of those with privilege dominate the American stage. And what we see onstage is just the tip of the iceberg, the most visible part of an industry traditionally dominated by white men.

However, at Actors' Equity Association we know that to fight discrimination in the theatre industry, we need data to demonstrate how this problem manifests and who exactly it affects, and to give us guidance on how to push for change.

In 2017 we began taking a serious look at hiring bias within our industry and publishing our findings. Our systems were at last advanced enough to analyze a significant amount of data about the contracts our members were being offered. We proved empirically what our members have known all along: the theatre is rife with inequality. Members of marginalized groups, like people of color and women of all races, are less likely than average to be hired as Equity stage actors or stage managers, and they tend to earn less for the same amount of work.

WHAT ARE MARGINALIZED GROUPS?

Marginalized groups refer to people who share an identity or life experience that makes them more likely to experience discrimination or exclusion. Some of these characteristics are known as protected characteristics, because they are protected by law from discrimination due to that identity or background. These protections can differ throughout the country based on local or state law, but many are protected by federal law. Federally protected characteristics include age, gender and gender identity, race/ethnicity, disability, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation and veteran status.

In 2019, we made the commitment to publish our findings annually going forward. That second report found minor improvements in many cases. But by and large the issue of inequity persisted.

We never could have anticipated how profoundly the industry would be disrupted in 2020. That spring first brought an unprecedented shut down of in-person theatre due to COVID-19. Then the summer saw considerable racist violence met with significant anti-racist protest, pushing many to resolve to work toward a better future in our industry and beyond. This impetus for self-reflection, along with the time during the shutdown to actually do that reflection, have the potential for long-term change.

But if long-term change is to come, we are only seeing the seeds of transformation right now. In this year's report, we unfortunately tell the same story as the previous reports: Change is coming too slowly.

This report shares data about who was hired on Equity contract in 2020, and how much money they made on average. It is a different report than its predecessors in a few ways. This is the first edition of the report to analyze data from a single year. Going

forward, we can track year to year how our members from marginalized groups are faring in the industry, and where they face unequal treatment. Additionally, this report reflects the evolving vocabulary we use to discuss issues of diversity and inclusion. We have also strengthened our focus on some data that we did not include in the past.

Of course, 2020 featured fewer than three months of theatre as usual before the pandemic shut down nearly 100% of the industry. Some theatres found ways to exhibit shows virtually, either hiring companies for new work or redistributing recordings from previous years. Both cases involved paying actors and stage managers on union contracts. By the year's end, theatres had just begun to reopen. Still, there is value in examining this atypical year to see what we might learn. The underlying issues still exist, and even this anomalous year reflects what the first two reports found: Inequity in the industry remains rampant, despite small improvements for certain groups; and the shift toward inclusive hiring and compensation overall is coming too slowly, if at all.

INEQUITY VS. INEQUALITY

Inequality refers to different groups receiving different treatment. For example, when women are less likely to be hired for a job, despite being roughly half the population, that is inequality. Inequity is closely connected to this concept, but refers to injustice, to resources not being distributed fairly. In addition to being unequal, pay gaps that favor men are an example of inequity because they compound the socioeconomic issues women are more likely to face, like the "pink tax" and career interruption to accommodate family care.

This raises the question of whether 2020's heightened reckoning with the legacy of racism in the United States affected our data. Many theatres committed to doing better, to diversifying their workforces onstage and off, to telling stories from excluded or marginalized groups onstage, to creating an environment where workers and audience members alike will feel safe, regardless of their backgrounds. But these resolutions came late in the year relative to the issuing of most contracts. It remains to be seen if future years will mark a dramatic change in the industry, but despite half of 2020 taking place in the wake of these antiracist declarations, the data tells us the same story we have seen before: Progress, but merely incremental.

At a time of such societal introspection and opportunity for change, it is disheartening to find employers clinging to traditions and norms that support the status quo. Equity is far from perfect. And throughout our history, we have also been complicit in white supremacy. Nevertheless, we continue to hold racial justice as a core value and to nurture the organization to operate in alignment with those values. Beginning in the 1940s and throughout the

'50s and '60s Equity pushed back against bigotry in the industry, including forming a committee on "ethnic minorities," boycotting segregated theatres and creating "integration showcases" to encourage casting directors and producers to hire performers of color for roles they might not have considered.

Equity cannot control who employers choose to hire. However, we all must raise awareness that inequality in the theatre is a foundational concern for the longevity of our industry. Equity is committed to documenting the truth of employment discrimination and holding employers responsible for the choices they make which affect us all.

As for salary gaps, Equity contracts stipulate the minimum that an employer must pay a worker, but stage managers and especially actors frequently negotiate to work above that minimum. Members' ability to negotiate above minimums was restrained, however, by the limited number of safe options for presenting theatre in 2020. Pay gaps are predicted on a variety of factors, including the contract on which a member is hired, how often members work over minimum and the amount of overscale payment.

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THIS REPORT

Equity first began issuing this report in 2017, at the beginning of the union's three-year plan known as Equity 2020, in which the association committed to being "aggressive, inclusive and responsive." That [first study](#) shared data from 2013-2015, and the 2020 Equity report published data from [2016-2019](#). 2020 was also the year the union strengthened its commitment to racial equality in the theatre industry with a statement affirming that [Black Lives Matter](#), which included a commitment to issuing this report annually.

This report analyzes demographic information for stage managers and actors working on Equity contracts nationwide from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020, totaling 5,818 contracts.

This data only refers to new, opening night contracts issued in 2020; if a member was first hired

for a job in an earlier year and was still working into 2020, such as in a long-running Broadway show, their contract is not counted for this report. Furthermore, we did not include replacements into an existent job or new positions at an ongoing production. With this focus, we highlight employment opportunity in initial artistic and casting decisions.

This data does not represent how many actors or stage managers were employed. It instead counts contracts, i.e., jobs that were filled. For example, when you see that in 2020 two LORT contracts for the principal role in a play were offered to an actor of Middle Eastern or North African descent, that could be two actors each working once, or one actor working twice.

Average numbers represented here, such as salaries, have been calculated as arithmetic means.

There are two categories that represent a lack of information: "Prefer not to say" is an option for members who wish to keep specific demographic information private, whereas "not provided" means the question went unanswered.

WHO OUR MEMBERS ARE

Equity's membership demographic data depends on the members going through the self-ID process where they report information about their identities to the union. We never share that individual information; it is used only for aggregate studies such as this. The more our members tell us about themselves, the more clearly we can see patterns of inequity and discrimination in the industry. For some data, like ages of members, our information is almost complete. For other categories, such as disability status, we still know very little, and we urge our members to complete the [self-ID survey in the member portal](#).

This report examines hiring trends focused on:

- gender and gender identity,
- race and ethnicity,
- disability,
- and age.

In addition to being documented the longest by the union, these four protected characteristics are key concerns for employers and members alike regarding equity in the workplace.

Our analysis of Equity contracts is divided into five different job categories:

- *principal actor in a play,*
- *principal actor in a musical,*
- *chorus actor,*
- *stage manager,*
- *and assistant stage manager.*

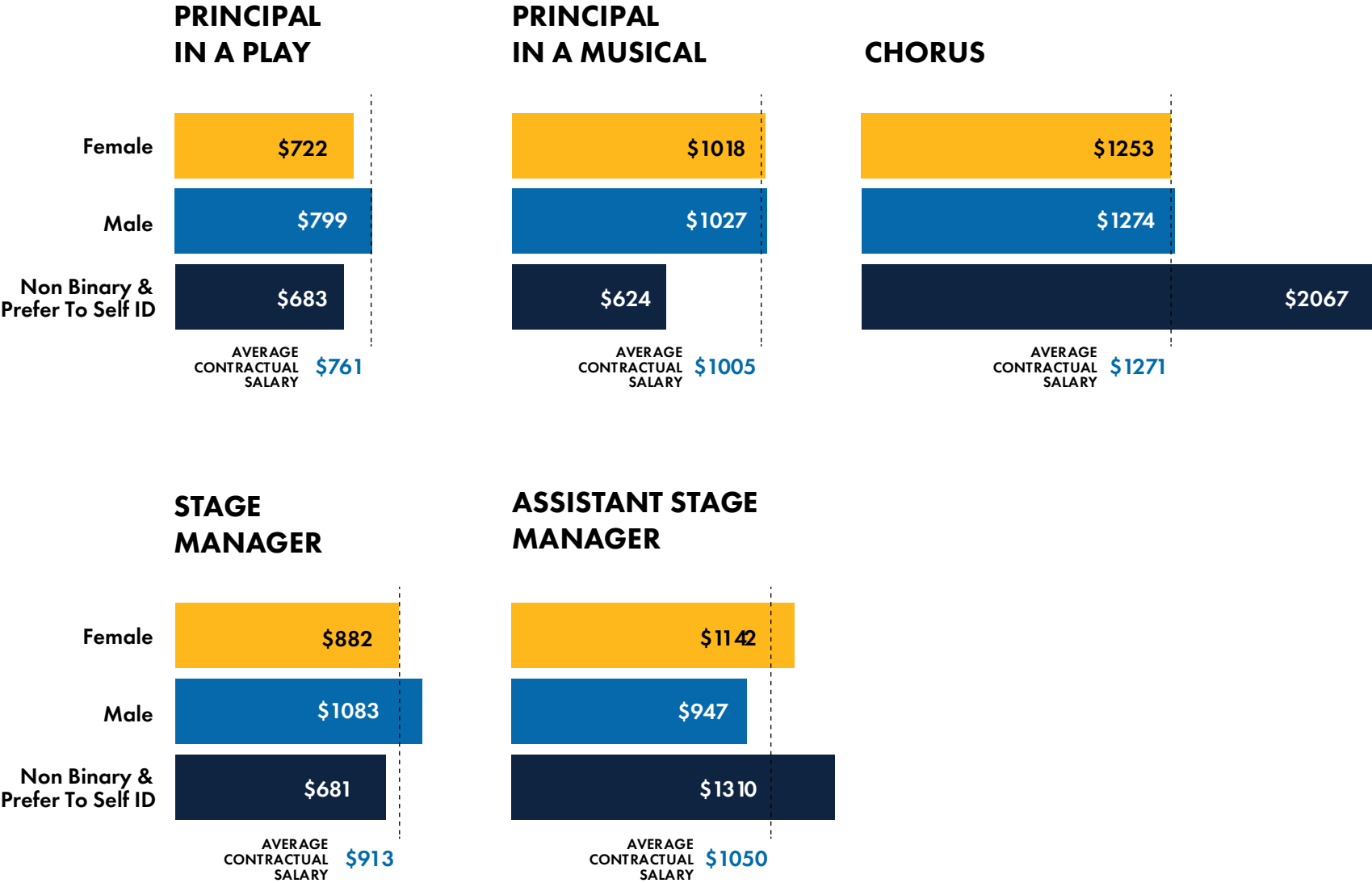
FINDINGS

IDENTITY: GENDER

Our membership in 2019-2020 was 50.11% women and 49.59% men, similar to the gender breakdown of the United States as a whole. 0.18% of our members either identify as non-binary or they have their own self-description, also comparable to national statistics.

In 2020, nearly an identical number of contracts went to men as women, reflecting relative gender parity around opportunity. (Non-binary members received 0.91% percent of contracts, higher than their proportion of the general population, though in 2020's year of little job opportunity this was only 53 contracts. The higher average of pay for non-binary chorus performers is attributable to a single case of a member being hired on a contract with a high-paying minimum.) However, that opportunity remains disparate in terms of compensation, as men still earn more than women on average across nearly every job category, and non-binary members tend to earn less than men or women.

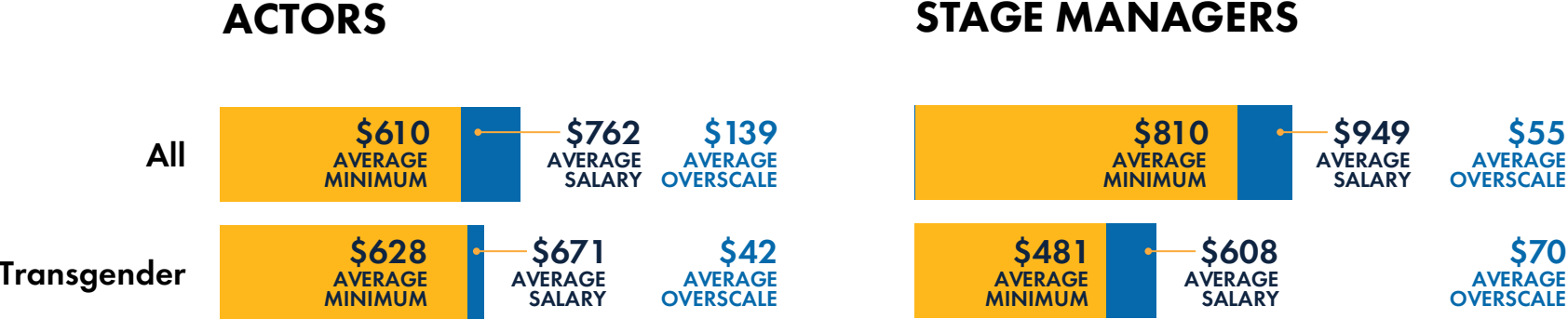
PAY DISPARITY ACROSS GENDER BY JOB CATEGORY



The vast majority of our members have not told us whether or not they are cisgender or transgender, and only 75 members nationwide have told the union they identify as transgender. Compounded with 2020's scant theatrical employment opportunities, we only have data for a few dozen contracts issued to transgender members. However, what we can see from what data we do have is that transgender members consistently earned less than the national average. This wage gap can be attributed in most cases to member-negotiated overscale rather than contract minimums.



PAY DISPARITY FOR TRANSGENDER ACTORS & STAGE MANAGERS



Note: Different Equity contracts have different minimum salaries. When a contract has a lower minimum salary, this often reflects Equity's agreement with the employer. Many members negotiate for overscale, that is, wages above their base salary.

These averages have been calculated independently, so the average total salary is not necessarily the average minimum plus average overscale.

IDENTITY: RACIAL/ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION

As of 2019-2020, 18.60% of Equity members identified as people of color. This remains grossly under-representative of the general population in the United States, where it is nearly 40%. In 2020, 24.77% of contracts issued went to those members, compared with 21.50% reported for the years 2016-2019. This does not however, mean that representation of all global majority people showed the same degree of improvement. While Black members received 2% more contracts in this study than in the last, Indigenous Hawaiian or Pacific Islander contracts declined from .07% to .03%.

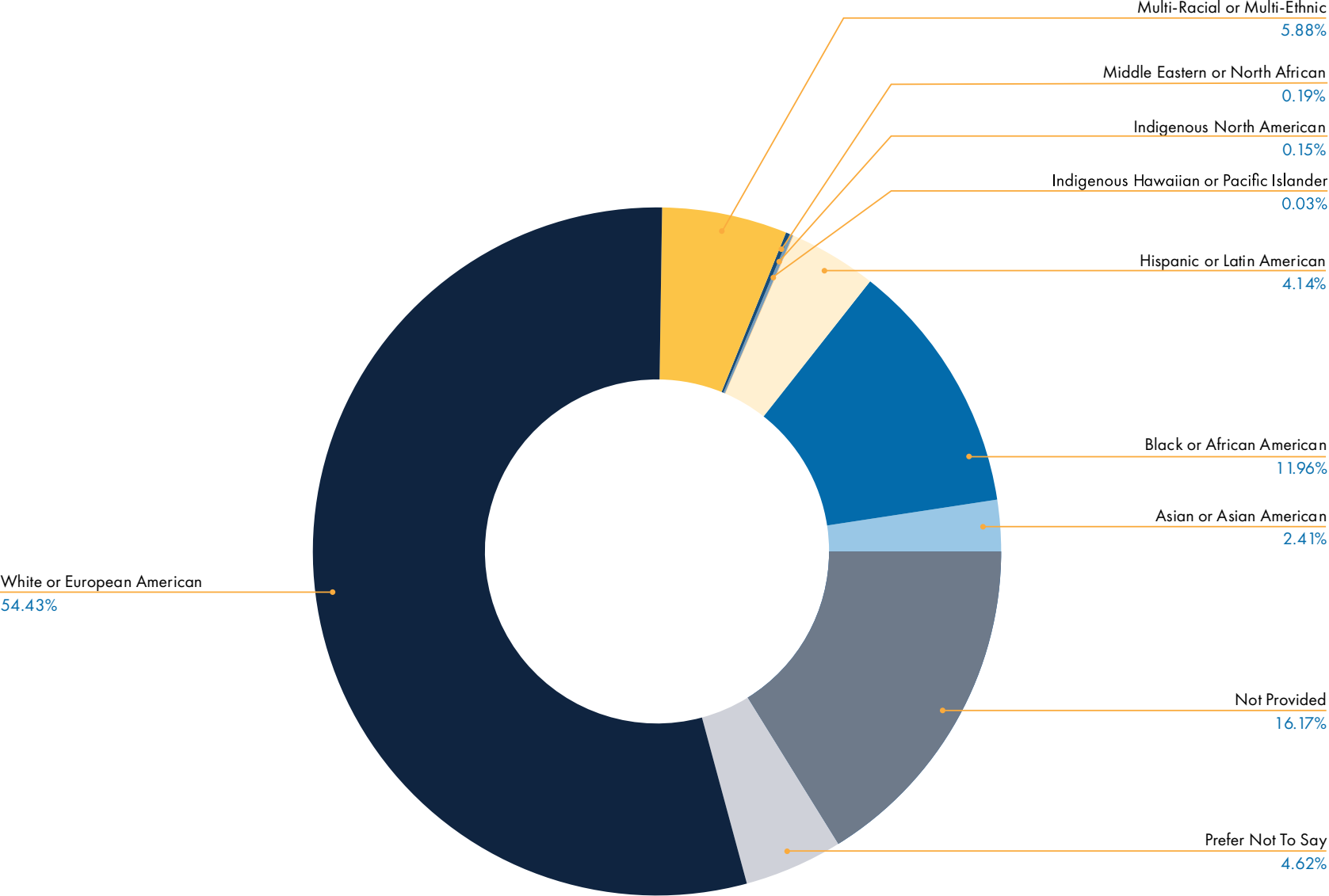
This finding is weighted, as in previous years, and while chorus employment is more racially diverse than principal roles in both plays and musicals, it is still not reflective of the country's demographics. All three acting categories and stage managers saw improvements in the percent of contracts issued to people of color between 2016-2019 and

2020, ranging from a 2.12% improvement for stage managers to a 4.79% increase for principal actors in musicals; chorus contracts were in the middle of this range with a 3.20% increase. However, the chorus remains the most racially diverse category by far, with 34.16% of contracts going to POC.

In 2020, members of color nationally earned an average of 91.80% of what white members made per week. This gap is worse for Middle Eastern or North African members, as well as Indigenous North Americans, who usually made less than their peers with other non-white identities.

Furthermore, actors and stage managers who have told the union they belong to those three racial groups cumulatively comprise less than one percent of the union population (as opposed to over 3% of the population of the United States). As such, their entire employment in 2020 accounted for a mere 22 contracts.

CONTRACT SALARY DISTRIBUTION BY RACE



CASE STUDY: THE YEAR IN TWO HALVES

While activists have been fighting for racial equality in theatre for decades, 2020 began as a standard year for the industry. Then in the summer, months after the shutdown began, calls for change picked up greater momentum in the aftermath of high-profile acts of anti-Black police violence. We were curious to see if the events of the summer affected hiring practices in the latter half of the year. So, Equity also examined this hiring data divided into two distinct time periods: January through June and July through December. While there were far more contracts issued in the first quarter of the year, many theatres across the country did program new content, in person or for online exhibition, from the summer onwards.

We found that examining the industry before and after these protests reinforces what we saw in the year as a whole: Improvement in equity, but incremental.

Of the 5,202 contracts signed in the first half of the year, 1264 contracts (24.3%) went to members of color between January and June 2020, with 609 (11.7% of the total) of those contracts going to members who identified as Black or African American. In the second half of the year, when only 661 contracts were issued, 185 contracts (28.0%) went to members of color, and 90 of those (13.6% of the total) went to members who identified as Black or African American.

Unfortunately, this indicates that the hope for 2021 is not to sustain sweeping changes in the industry, but rather to implement them in the first place. At best, it seems the social unrest in early summer of 2020 drove employers to lay the groundwork for change but not to follow through with significant shifts that are recognized as more equitable rates of hire and compensation.





IDENTITY: DISABILITY

Disability encompasses a broad and diverse spectrum of identities. There are many categories of disability. Disabilities may be visible or invisible, and they have different impacts on each individual and the various aspects of their lives. Some disabilities require reasonable accommodations, and most do not prevent a person from performing essential tasks at all. One in four Americans lives with a disability, and most people will have some sort of disability at some point in their lives, making it one of the largest marginalized groups in the country. That makes its near erasure from the theatre industry all the more troubling.

Only 13.30% of our members (6,876 stage managers and actors) have reported whether they have a disability, and only 529 have indicated that they do. Still, those who are disabled and have identified themselves to the union as such consistently make less than average.

CONTRACT SALARY BY DISABILITY STATUS

ACTORS



STAGE MANAGERS

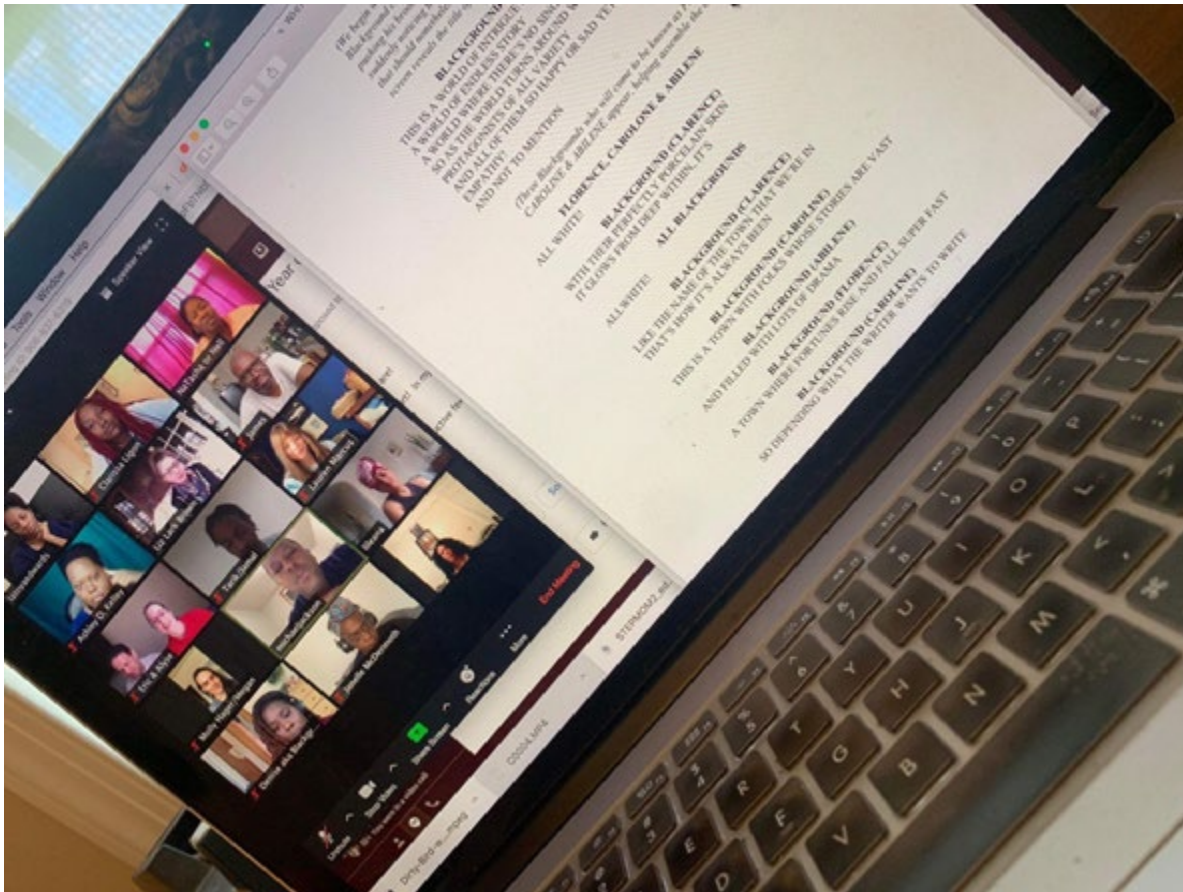


Note: Different Equity contracts have different minimum salaries. When a contract has a lower minimum salary, this often reflects Equity’s agreement with the employer. Many members negotiate for overscale, that is, wages above their base salary.

These averages have been calculated independently, so the average total salary is not necessarily the average minimum plus average overscale.

IDENTITY: AGE

Members over 65, who were particularly vulnerable to COVID, did receive a higher percentage of contracts than in years past, rising from 3.37% to in 2016-2019 to 6.12% in 2020. However, 13% of the United States population is 65 and older, and the weekly earnings of members in this age demographic averaged only 89% of what members under 65 earned.





CASE STUDIES

STAGE MANAGERS

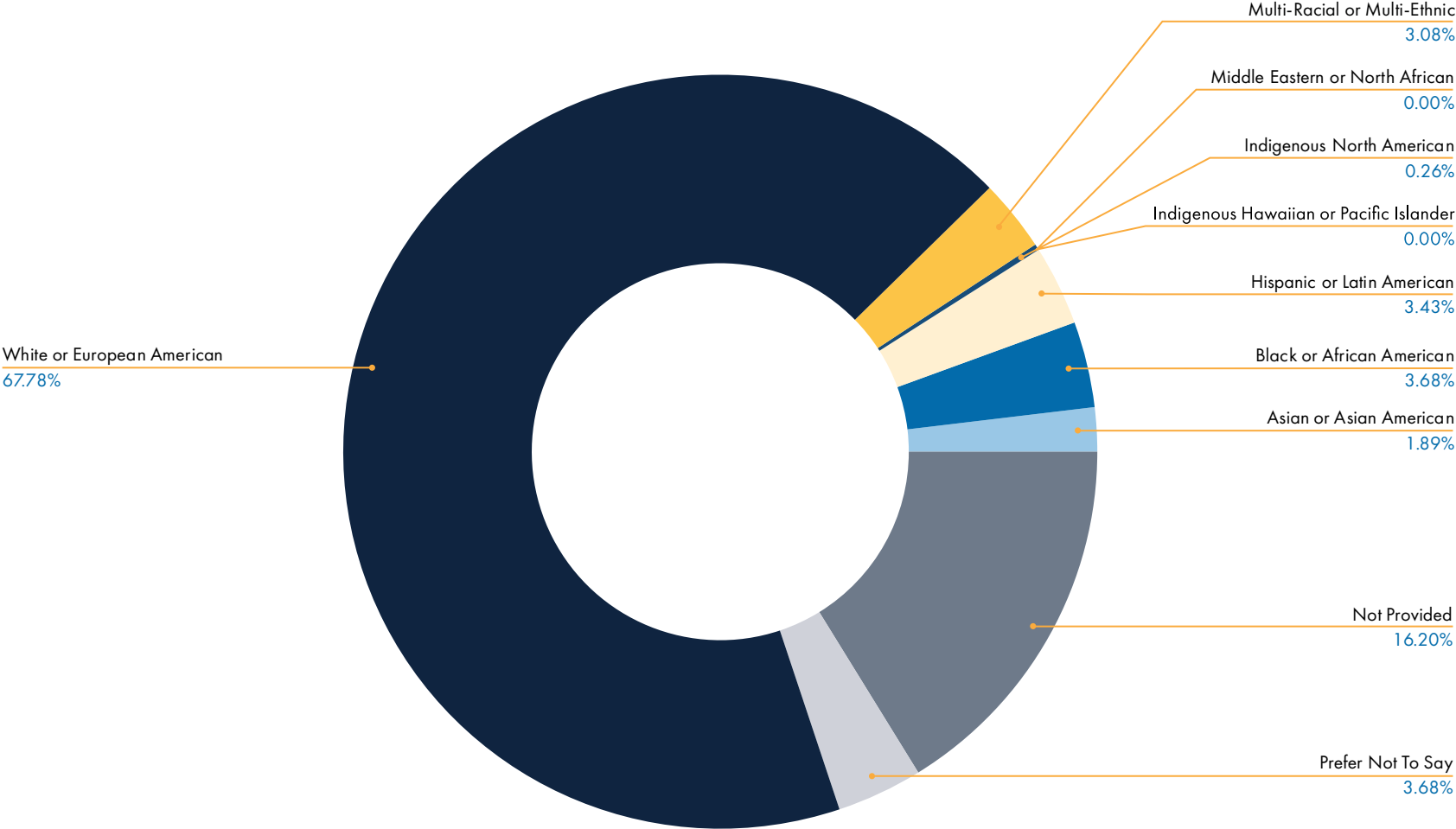
2020 was the Year of the Stage Manager, marking one hundred years since Equity formally acknowledged stage management as a distinct job category in the union.

Stage manager (SM) contracts continue to be issued to white people at a disproportionately high rate as compared to any actor category: The percentage of SM contracts going to people of color

crept up from 10.13% to 12.25%, while assistant stage managers (ASM) contracts, which account for roughly a quarter of overall SM contracts, declined from 13.24% going to people of color down to 12.58% in 2020. White stage managers made over 20% more money for their labor per week in 2020 than their peers, attributable to a combination of higher contracts minimums as well as negotiated overscale.



STAGE MANAGERS BY RACE



Working stage managers are most often female; Nationally in 2020, 64.18% of stage manager contracts went to women, compared with 62.90% of assistant stage manager contracts. However, the gender pay gap paralleled the racial gap, and male stage managers made, on average, 22.78% more money for their labor per week in 2020 than women did. This gap only widens with

non-binary members (58.26%) and members who self-describe their gender identity (63.10%). These disparities are attributable especially to contract minimum salaries, as well as negotiated overscale.

For ASMs, men in 2020 tended to earn less per week on average than their female or non-binary colleagues (17% and 27.6% less, respectively).

Just as chorus actors and principal actors are different jobs that work on different contracts, stage manager and assistant stage manager are similar but distinct roles. Stage manager contracts are more plentiful, outnumbering ASM contracts by roughly 3:1. As with actors, we pulled data for the two types of stage manager contracts separately. Throughout this report, the term “stage manager” generally refers to only that particular subset of the category. It only refers to both SMs and ASMs in aggregate when compared to actors as a general category.



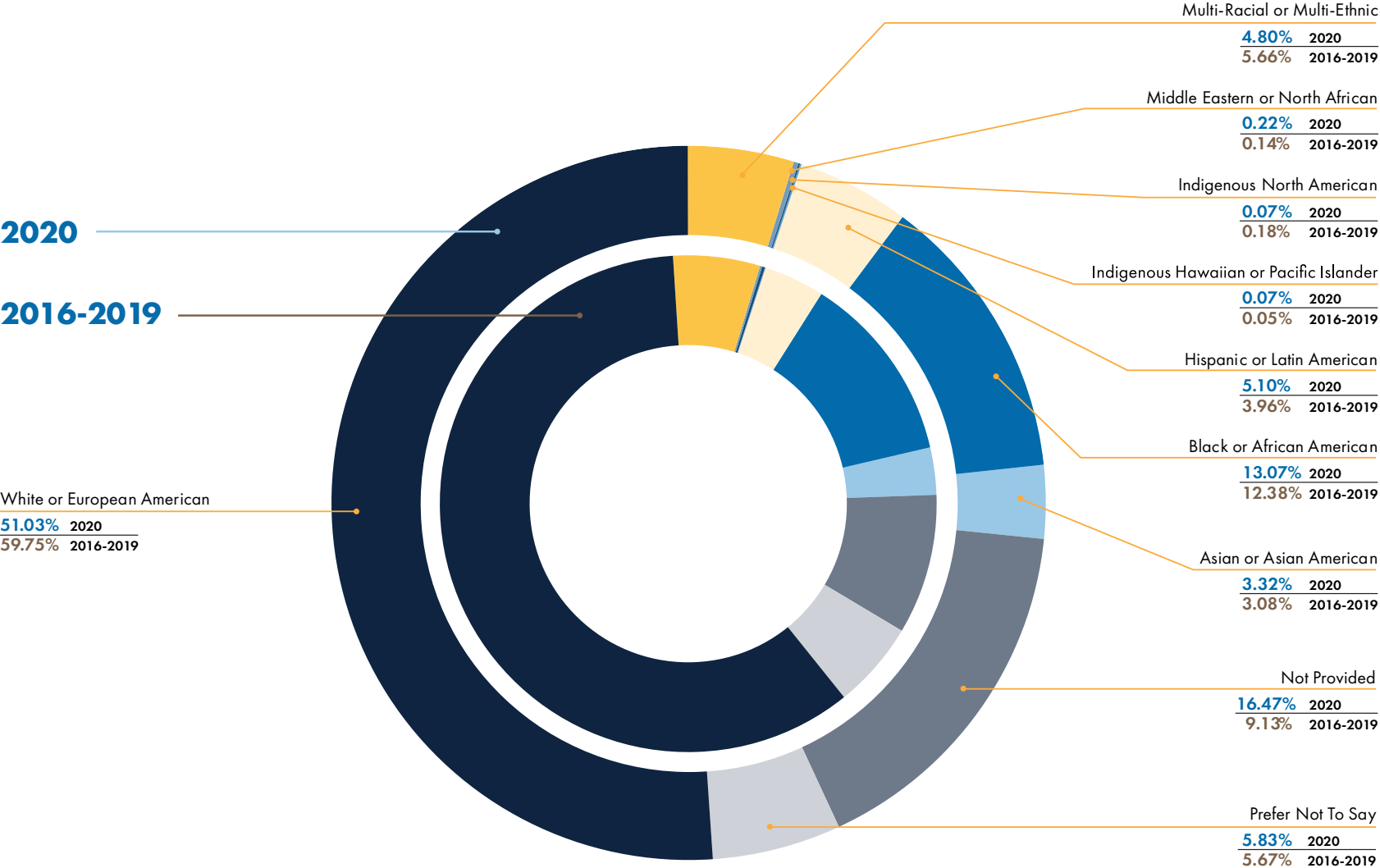
THE LORT AGREEMENT

The League of Resident Theatres (LORT) Agreement covers established not-for-profit seasonal theatrical producers across the United States, and accounts for the second-highest source of employment for Equity members working on contract. LORT is especially prevalent in the union's liaison cities – metropolitan areas with a concentration of at least 100 Equity members.

In 2020, albeit with far fewer jobs total, a higher percentage of contracts went to women, people of color, members with disabilities and LGBTQ+

members (including trans members specifically) than in previous Equity employment studies. These gains in representation were often modest. In the case of race, however, pay inequity persists, with white members tending to make more than their colleagues of color for principals in a musical and both types of stage manager. This is particularly notable among stage managers on LORT contracts. Still, LORT, a contract used across the country, is indicative of the national trend of gradual progress.

LORT BY RACE IN 2016-2019 VS. 2020



THE PRODUCTION CONTRACT

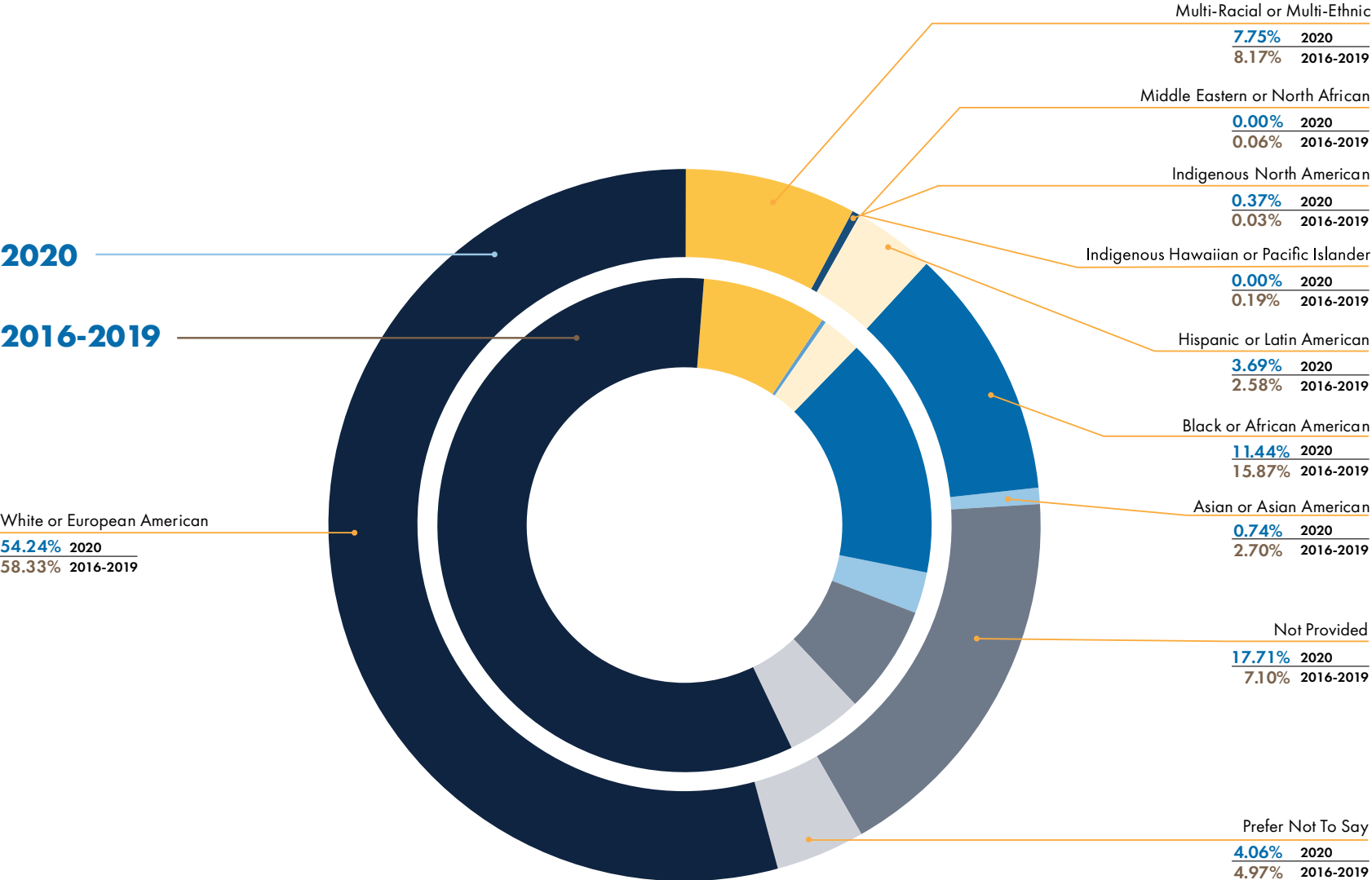
The Production Contract, which covers Broadway and many national tours, is Equity's highest-paying contract, both in terms of minimum salary and contractual salary factoring in negotiated overscale. Before the pandemic, the Production contract represented nearly 55% of all Equity contract earnings and accounted for nearly a quarter of work weeks nationwide. Producers operating under this agreement tend to hire for new jobs later in the calendar year. This means that the pandemic shut down theatre before Broadway and touring producers' most active hiring season. For this reason, very few actors or stage managers were newly hired under Production Contracts in 2020.

Unfortunately, in 2020 the Production Contract was generally less equitable in its hiring and

compensation than the nation at large. Men tended to work and earn more, and the percentage of contracts going to POC declined, from nearly 30% to under 24%.

While Equity does not yet have complete data for 2021, Broadway's reopening has seen a flourishing of plays with predominantly Black casts and creative teams, and we hope the data for 2021 ultimately reflects this pattern as being statistically significant. We also have yet to see if that inclusion extends to other racial identities and other dimensions of diversity. We can only see in the coming years if this casting profile was an anomaly, or significant and the beginning of a shift for the contract that has consistently driven the most income to members.

PRODUCTION BY RACE IN 2016-2019 VS. 2020





KEY TAKEAWAYS

WHAT ELSE MIGHT WE LEARN?

The theatre industry is a complex ecosystem. While these figures about hiring and compensation are important to identifying patterns of bias in the industry, we cannot derive causation in each case. In fact, information from other branches of the theatrical ecosystem, which fall beyond the scope of this union, may offer a fuller picture of the state of the industry's inequities.

We encourage professionals across the industry to collect and consider the information they have that may help the theatre community to better understand how these gaps in opportunity occur, and what they can do to close them. The following questions arose as we processed our data, and the answers may support strategies to create a more inclusive American theatre:

1. How do the statistics measured by Equity's study change at non-union theatres? What about productions that hire only part of their companies on Equity contracts? How do they compare to the outcomes in Equity's hiring study?
2. How do hiring practices at theatrical institutions look beyond actors and stage managers? Are their staff more or less diverse than they have been in previous years? Do any changes in representation among staff include leaders? Are compensation practices just, meaning do they show any statistically significant differences along the lines of protected characteristics? Do tenure and turnover of staff show any notable difference along those same lines? Are theatrical employers developing concrete actionable diversity and inclusion strategies? Do these have measurable goals and rewards for success?
3. Is there a correlation between the representation among leaders, teachers and students and subject matter at arts education institutions and the representation of practitioners in the industry? Are theatrical educators developing concrete actionable diversity and inclusion strategies? Do these have measurable goals and rewards for success?
4. How much access do audiences in local communities have to theatre arts? Where, when and how are those access points developed? Do these resources reflect the diversity of the local community, or is access to theatre concentrated in particular subsets?
5. What arts organizations receive the most funding? Do organizations that are more diverse to begin with receive as much funding as others? Does that money come with diversity incentives? What systems and standards can arts funders implement to drive inclusive business practices as a condition of funding?

(Note: [Equity has recommendations](#) for ways that public arts funding can improve equity, diversity and inclusion for arts institutions.)

WHAT ABOUT 2021?

2021 has been another pivotal year for the industry, with its own unique challenges. Theatre has been reopening gradually and inconsistently, still subject to unpredictable pandemic response and varying audience confidence. Even so, many theatres have an opportunity to follow through on their 2020 commitment to create a more equitable industry.

2021 is also the first year of Equity's new Open Access initiative. Previously, the main pathway to Equity membership was through an employer-offered union contract. These employers disproportionately hold various identity-based societal privilege, as we see in these hiring bias reports — the Equity contracts they offer are not always offered equitably to those with very different identities. Open Access created a new pathway to join the union such that any actor or stage manager who can demonstrate they have practiced their craft professionally may become a member.

While the extent of Open Access's effect on Equity demographics will not be clear for some time, workers enrolling under its auspices so far are a more diverse pool of artists than in the union's past—roughly a quarter of those joining via Open Access so far identify as people of color, compared with 18.2% of Equity's membership as of 2020. We take this to mean that Open Access has succeeded in removing a barrier to entry that has a disproportionately negative impact on actors and stage managers with socially marginalized identities. While we celebrate this success, there is certainly more to do in terms of creating a more inclusive union. Regardless of the makeup of the union, however, the obligation to employ professional stage managers and performers who reflect the diversity of their local communities and the world at large will continue to be the producer's responsibility.

CONCLUSION

2020 was a difficult year for everybody, particularly in the theatre industry. The pandemic put extreme limitations on the art that theatres could share with audiences. However, both before and during the pandemic, employers failed to make significant changes when hiring stage managers and actors, once again falling short of representation of our communities at large. From wage gaps that favor men and white people to a near-invisibility of people with disabilities, the inequity that pervades the country at large is still rampant in the theatre industry. The issues we have recorded from 2013 to 2019 persist.

We urge employers to revisit the commitments they made to racial equality in the summer of 2020, and to consider how those values can extend to members of all marginalized groups.

We know that change is not easy, and Equity's process to become antiracist and create safe work environments for marginalized artists is ongoing.

We hope that next year's report shows real momentum, and that the work of community organizers across the country bear fruit. In the meantime, we continue to urge those in power to do better.

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