Constructed Hierarchies: An Examination of the Relationship between Capitalist Ideology and the Institutional Practices, Productions, and Performances in U.S. Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA)

By

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For Morgan Springsteen Beerens (1987-2022)

“All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.”
-J.R.R. Tolkien

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the complex relationship between the United States' neoliberal capitalist society/ideology and the American Theatre ecosystem, with a particular focus on the subfield of Theatre for Young Audiences. Both from inside and outside of the field of Theatre in the United States, theatre for young audiences faces presumptions about its standing as a unique and artistic field, capable of offering aesthetic and cultural experiences for children and young adults. This project examines the unique ideological and material challenges that companies and artists have to navigate while creating theatre for young audiences work in the United States.

This dissertation uses theories from Marx, Althusser, and Bourdieu, as well as contemporary studies of capitalism as a lens to examine current theatre practices and structures. This includes the education system in the United States, as well as the accepted ideology surrounding the larger American Theatre ecosystem. The last chapter focuses on recent major movements for change in the theatre world in the U.S., and what the future looks like for American TYA. These developments have already dramatically changed the landscape of American Theatre, and, in turn, American TYA. This project aims to highlight the importance of focusing on changing actions and policies with theatre, in addition to the accepted goals of disseminating knowledge and encouraging discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

Frequently, when I tell people that I study theatre for young audiences, they either respond, “oh, you must love working with kids!” or I get a confused look and some form of the question “how can you get a PhD in that?” While the second question was there when I was not studying TYA specifically, the first question always makes me pause. On the whole, I don’t work with children in my PhD program, and working on producing TYA doesn’t necessarily mean working with children at all, although the premise of artists and researchers alike is that children have the right to experience theatre. While this may seem like just an innocent misunderstanding, I think it generally reflects some of the larger issues at play in theatre for young audiences in the United States.

While assumptions and misunderstandings run rampant regarding the entire theatre industry in the United States, theatre for young audiences work deals with its own set of stereotypes to overcome. Many people within the theatre field assume the work is ‘less than’ that of ‘adult’ theatre, or isn’t as artistically satisfying to work on. Outside of the field, many people equate theatre for young audiences with theatre featuring children, or drama activities in the classroom or in schools. Both from inside and outside of the field of Theatre in the United States, theatre for young audiences faces presumptions about its standing as a unique and artistic field, capable of offering aesthetic and cultural experiences for children and young adults. This dissertation will examine the unique ideological and material challenges that companies and artists have to navigate while creating theatre for young audiences work in the United States.

I have come to this project not only as a scholar, but as an actor, director, designer, and administrator who is deeply interested in how our theatre practice in the United States is shaped by economics, politics, and ideology. As a first-generation college student, I have particularly

been interested in how class dynamics shape the fields of theatre and theatre education in the United States. Throughout my undergraduate and graduate career, I realized I could not talk about class in the United States without also talking about race, as the two overlap and reinforce each other in many ways. This project is my attempt to understand how theatre in the United States is shaped by our economic system and its institutions.

Literature Review

This project draws on scholarship from the field of theatre for young audiences, as well as general theatre scholarship, education theory, and studies of American[1] Capitalism and ideology. Additionally, it draws from various periodicals and trade magazines, particularly in sections on how the field is responding right now to social and economic issues, as well as my own experience navigating some of these issues as a student, designer, director, actor, and administrator.

The concept of Theatre for Young Audiences is niche in Theatre Studies, and in terms of journals and conferences, is typically grouped with other disciplines under the general umbrella of "Theatre for Youth". This umbrella includes Applied Theatre Studies, Drama in Education studies, Educational Theatre studies, and Theatre for Young Audiences. This dissertation is focused on Theatre for Young Audiences, or TYA, which I will define as professional theatre created by compensated adults for children, teens, and young adults. This definition is not accepted by everyone in the field, as many will include professional and amateur theatre made with young people. For the purposes of this project, it is important to draw the hard line between

[1] For the purposes of this project, American is used as a descriptor for things relating and pertaining to the United States of America. I fully understand and respect the critique that America should be used to describe anything on the North American and South American continents, and that the use of the term to describe things exclusively from the United States has imperialistic undercurrents. For lack of a better adjective in the English language, I use American to keep in line with the scholarship referenced. For more, see Martinez-Carter, 2013.

professional and amateur, and between theatre catered to a young audience and theatre for the sake of teaching theatre skills to youth.

Theatre for Young Audiences as a field of scholarly analysis is still relatively new. While there were a few historical surveys and how-to books regarding children's theatre published in the middle of the 20th century, critical analysis of the field began in the 1970s. Nellie McCaslin's 1971 *Theatre for Children in the United States: A History* provided the first major survey of the field, although it "perpetuated the ideological assumptions" of earlier advocates of theatre for young people, like Winifred Ward and Constance D'Arcy Mackay (van de Water, "Constructed Narratives" 104). Roger Bedard and C. John Tolch's *Spotlight on the Child* (1989) was a major turning point in TYA studies, as the editors argued that TYA had been historically excluded from U.S. theatre histories due to its connection with education and social work. The 1980s also brought about the creation of the field's major peer-reviewed journal, *Youth Theatre Journal* (YTJ). YTJ "focuses on the dissemination of ideas relating to practical and theoretical developments in the field of theatre and performance by, with, and for children and youth and drama/theatre education" ("Aims and Scopes"). The journal continues to operate today as the premier American publication dealing with Theatre for Youth.

Nowadays, YTJ primarily features pieces regarding the "by" and the "with" mentioned above; most work is about theatre education or drama in education, not professional theatre "for" young audiences. This is indicative of the type of scholarly work happening in the field; because of the historical connection of TYA and education, most work is about working with young actors, using drama as an educational tool, or applied theatre practice. Many of the early scholars came from an education background, and therefore studied TYA as an educational tool, or how to incorporate drama into the classroom and other learning arenas. A large amount of scholarship

being written today focuses on theatre as an educational tool, or on the practice of educational theatre (creating theatre in a school or training context). While these fields are worthy of study, they make up an outsized part of the scholarship in our subfield.

This project deals mainly with the "for," which dramatically reduces the amount of scholarly work to draw upon. In fact, the International Theatre for Young Audiences Research Network (ITYARN) was formed in 2006 due to a lack of research globally on TYA (van de Water, *TYA, Culture, Society* 7). Professional TYA has been largely ignored in scholarly work in the United States over the last few decades, with the notable exceptions of Roger Bedard, Manon van de Water, and some of their respective students. The small amount of scholarship that focuses on TYA as solely an art form has primarily examined representation on stage or has focused on the 'audience' aspect of theatre for young audiences. Dr. Lorenzo Garcia and Roxanne Schroeder-Arce have written extensively about representation on the TYA stage in the U.S., with a particular focus on Latinx identities. While there has been a concerted effort by the field in the last few decades to diversify the "visible" parts of theatre for young audiences, there's been less about the invisible forces that tie us to problematic practices.

I primarily follow my advisor, Dr. Manon van de Water, and Dr. Roger Bedard in their examination of ideology and cultural practices that influence the definition of the field and how it operates in our current society. Like van de Water and Bedard, I am looking at Theatre for Young Audiences as a field, one that is formulated and written about and referenced as a 'unit'; and has a distinct set of rules and expectations that accompany it. While looking at a diverse and varied field as a single unit is not ideal, the field does carry with it a set of expectations and ideals, both explicitly and implicitly. These broad commonalities will be the focus of this work,

but I will also reference the companies and artists that are outliers pushing back against the issues.

In addition to peer-reviewed publications, I will be referencing contemporary commentary on the state of theatre in the United States. The U.S. branch of ASSITEJ (the International Association of Theatre for Children and Youth), TYA/USA, publishes its own trade magazine, *TYA Today*, which offers important insight on contemporary U.S. TYA practice, as most of the articles published are written by those working in theaters across the country. *TYA Today* covers a lot of the issues I will talk about in this project, from diverse casting to audience recruitment, but does not deeply engage with the theoretical frameworks that cause these issues. I will also reference *American Theatre Magazine*, as it also covers issues in contemporary American theatre practice, and various blogs and personal narratives from those in the field.

Methodology

In this dissertation I will use a qualitative approach, examining primary and secondary sources, including extant publications, and first-hand experience in producing, directing, designing, and acting in TYA productions to dissect some of the major ideological and material issues in contemporary United States TYA. I will by no means cover all the issues in a comprehensive way; rather, I will focus on the aspects that have drawn my attention throughout the years and that I see as some of the most pressing or most intrinsic. My identity location as a white, cisgender woman will inherently inhibit my knowledge and capability to fully understand some of the issues I engage with, but I will attempt to draw on the scholarship and experiences of the global majority to make my arguments.

I use my personal and professional experiences as legitimate sources in the tradition of contemporary feminist scholarship. While I do not argue that my personal experiences are

representative of an entire field, I do think there is value in sharing the experiences that inspired this project. I will be examining texts and the experiences of myself and others through the lens of dialectical materialism and Marxist critique, with a particular focus on Althusserian and Bordieuan theories of ideology and social capital. I will also draw on studies of race and education to talk about the practices and ideas that shape the field of theatre and theatre for young audiences in the United States.

This project was inspired in large part by a quote from Dr. Roger Bedard's article "The Cultural Construction of Theatre for Children and Young Audiences: A Captive Eddy of Recursive Harmonies," published in *Youth Theatre Journal* in 2009:

> The TYA performative occupies a highly unstable space, nested and shaped precariously within and variously inscribed by the culturally constructed adult–child binary, the ideological tensions between art and education, and the pervasive struggle between art and commerce, to name just three signifying contexts. (24)

The chapters in the dissertation will deal with all the tensions listed by Bedard, weaving the topics together under what I see as the larger umbrella issue: American Capitalism and its ideological constraints.

Capitalism, as both a concept and a system, is a controversial topic in the U.S. While many people in the United States see Capitalism as inherently American, there is a growing number who harbor anticapitalist beliefs. The standard argument for capitalism as a system is that it encourages innovation and productivity. However, that innovation comes at a cost – "the hallmark of capitalism is poverty in the midst of plenty" (Wright, 2). While I will get into more of the specifics in Chapter 1, I think it is necessary to state upfront that this project takes an anticapitalist stance - that capitalism is not the ideal economic system for artistic innovation.

Chapter Breakdown

The first chapter, "Theatre and Capitalism," will look at the tension between creating art and a capitalist economic system, and how selling the shows is more central to the ethos of TYA than "adult" theatre. This includes defining the American capitalist system as it is and how it used to be, exploring the historical connections between TYA and a capitalist mindset, and how TYA fits into the current ideological structures. A major crux of this chapter is explaining and exploring how capitalism engenders systems of marginalization and oppression just to operate in the United States. I'll explore how ideology functions in the United States, before launching into the next chapters, which will focus on the field of TYA as an entity operating as/within Althusserian Ideological State Apparatuses.

The second chapter, "The Problematic Marriage: Education and TYA in the United States," will focus on the deep connection between education and TYA in the United States, and the difficulty to produce TYA that does not fit in the educational system's framework. This section will look at the ways the United States education system is used to produce 'good citizens' (aka good capitalists), often through the weaponization of racial and class differences. Using the framework of Althusser as a base, I will explore how TYA contributes to/is shaped by the mightiest Ideological State Apparatus, the Education system.

The third chapter, "Issues associated with TYA's Relationship to the larger American Theatre," will focus on theatre for young audiences as part of the larger 'American Theatre.' This chapter contains the most personal anecdotes about theatre education and practice, interwoven with recent data breaking down the lack of diversity in theatre practice in the United States. I'll examine the idea that adult theatre and children's theatre exist on a binary (the "if this,

then not this" idea that permeates every decision in the field), and look at the many ways that TYA operates as part of the larger Cultural ISA in the U.S.

My conclusion chapter will present the ways that artists and scholars are pushing back against the engrained issues presented throughout the body chapters, and how TYA artists are working in ways that challenge the capitalist ideologies in the United States. This includes recent movements questioning the structural racism and classism in theatre practices, including *We See You, White American Theatre* and the continued activism from the Asian American Performers Action Coalition. I will end with a theory of how theatre artists can work against capitalistic structures, and towards a more ideal practice and world.

My main goal with this project is to bring a more concentrated awareness to the ways that our particular brand of capitalism in the United States contributes to how TYA is created, disseminated, and examined. Identifying the issues will hopefully set the stage for further scholarships and activism.

CHAPTER 1: Theatre and Capitalism

The largest ideological roadblock restricting the freedom of theatre for young audiences as an art form is the economic system at work in the United States. Capitalism, or at least the idealized version, is one of the cruxes of American ideology, and informs many of the other 'truths' we think of as being inherently 'American.' While theatre artists can and do work against the status quo, capitalism and economics shape our everyday lives and projects in ways we don't usually even think about. In this chapter, I will lay out my working definition of capitalism and ideology, including the theories of Karl Marx, Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu, and others critical of capitalist systems. The second part of this chapter will look at the history of capitalism in the United States and how it operates today, before moving into a more specific analysis of how Theatre in the United States is affected by our version of capitalism. This analysis will provide the basis for the next two chapters, which will focus on two specific ideological issues.

Defining Capitalism & Ideology

The word "Capitalism" is used as a blanket identifier in many casual contexts, and has certainly become a large topic of conversation during the last few years as the coronavirus pandemic upends our economic systems, and as more people begin to realize that there might be some issues with our version of Capitalism in the U.S. When the pandemic hit in March 2020, thousands of people quickly lost their jobs, as many businesses closed their doors. In 2021, U.S. businesses encountered what has been dubbed as "The Great Resignation," when thousands of people left their jobs due to low pay, inflexible hours, and disrespect by their employers ("The Great Resignation"). This first section will focus on historical and contemporary definitions of Capitalism before moving into looking at the timeline of formalized Capitalist systems in the United States.

Historical Contexts

Prior to the 19th century, the word 'Capitalism' did not exist[2] – "capitalists" referred to anyone owning assets but did not yet refer to proponents of an economic system. The term 'Capitalism,' as we know it now, was not used widely until the mid-1800s, when the German philosopher Karl Marx was beginning to write about the workings of 'capitalist modes of production,' and his predictions for a future socialist movement that would arise from the labor force. While hardly the last critic of capitalism, Marx remains the most famous and controversial critic of the system. Throughout his works, Marx examined the Capitalist system and its shortcomings, and imagined a world where those who own the means of production are the laborers themselves. His understanding of capitalist systems forms the basis for the conversations around ideology and theatre in this project.

Marx's theories are collectively referred to as Marxism, which theorizes that societies are formed and based around the social relations between different classes. Marx (and his frequent collaborator Friedrich Engels) refers to these classes as the Bourgeoisie, or the ruling class, and the Proletariat, or the working class. The conflict in a Capitalist society is between those in the Bourgeoisie who own the Means of Production (i.e., the equipment, buildings, finances, etc.), and those in the Proletariat whose bodies and labor are commodified to run the production of goods. According to Marx, the Proletariat in Capitalist society will eventually gain "class consciousness" and will seize the means of production. This will be the first step towards a successful communist society, where classes and class conflict will be eradicated (Marx and Engels).

The foundational Marxist theory that informs this project the most is the idea that all

[2] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, an earlier use of capitalism as a noun referred to advocacy for the centralization of power in the capital city of Buenos Aires in the early 19th century.

Capitalist systems have a Base and Superstructure. The 'Base' refers to the means and relations of production, while the Superstructure refers to the society that forms around the Base. The Base and Superstructure exist in a cyclical relationship with one another; the economics and relations in the Base influence the cultural aspects and ideology of the superstructure, and in turn, the cultural and social aspects of the Superstructure can inform the workings of the Base (although Marx and Engels would argue that the Base always takes precedence). In this conception of capitalist modes of production, the surrounding cultural formations are formed only in relation to the economic system. As Marx wrote in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859): "The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political, and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness." Marx conceived that the Superstructure was divided into two 'levels': "the politico-legal (law and the State) and ideology (the different ideologies, religious, ethical, legal, political, theatrical, etc.)" (Althusser 105). Depending on which scholar you ask, the 'State' in Marxist theory can refer to a myriad of things. Colin Hay, in *Marxism and Social Science*, formulates 4 definitions of the State: The State as the Repressive Arm of the Bourgeoisie (the name for those who own the means of production), The State as an Instrument of the Ruling Class, the State as an Ideal Collective Capitalist, and The State as a Factor of Cohesion within the Social Formation (153-155). My use of the term in this project takes an instrumentalist approach; that the State is formulated and wielded as a tool by the ruling class to maintain control.

Approximately a century after Marx's writings, Louis Althusser, a French philosopher, expanded on Marx's idea of the relationship between the Base and Superstructure in his 1970 essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses":

> As Marx said, every child knows that a social formation which did not reproduce the conditions of production at the same time as it produced would not last a year. The ultimate condition of production is therefore the reproduction of the conditions of production.... What, then, is the reproduction of the conditions of production? (100)

Althusser explores how ideology is used in a capitalist society to reproduce the conditions needed to sustain a Capitalist system; in particular, the reproduction of the labor force. Althusser conceives of ideology as being enforced on citizens through what he coins Ideological State Apparatuses, or ISAs "which "teaches 'know-how', but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its 'practice'" ("Ideology" 104).

Althusser formulates the idea of Ideological State Apparatuses as being an essential tool of the State, alongside what he calls the Repressive State Apparatuses: "...that in Marxist theory, the State Apparatus (SA) contains: the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc., which constitute what I shall in future call the Repressive State Apparatus. Repressive suggests that the State Apparatus in question 'functions by violence' – at least ultimately (since repression, e.g., administrative repression, may take non-physical forms)" ("Ideology" 110). Since the RSAs ' function by violence', ISAs function in a much more subtle way, making it much harder to identify and remove from society.

In a Capitalist society, there are many interwoven and overlapping Ideological State Apparatuses. Althusser lists the following: "the religious ISA (the system of the different Churches); the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private 'Schools'; the family ISA; the legal ISA; the political ISA (the political system, including the different Parties); the trade-union ISA; the communications ISA (press, radio, and television, etc.); the cultural ISA (Literature, the Arts, sports, etc.)" (110-111). Althusser notes that while the Repressive State is

composed of 'public' institutions, Ideological Apparatuses include institutions thought of to be 'private' by most citizens, but in fact are thought of that way only because the State has deemed it so. "To my knowledge, no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses" (Althusser 112). Through these ISAs, the ruling class creates a culture that ensures the conditions of production are duplicated, and order is maintained. Ideology is, then, an extremely important tool in maintaining the hierarchical status quo in Capitalist societies.

This dissertation will also refer to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural and social capital, which builds on (and criticizes) Marx's economic theory. Bourdieu, responding to the theory that economic capital determined every aspect of society, theorized that there are three major categories of capital:

> Depending on the field in which it functions, and at the cost of the more or less expensive transformations which are the precondition for its efficacy in the field in question, capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility. ("Forms of Capital" 281)

While I personally believe in the importance of economic capital in the determination of one's experience in a Capitalist society, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is extremely important to the arguments I will make about the hierarchical structures that exist in traditional theatrical

practice and education. Bourdieu further defines cultural capital by breaking it down into three forms:

> Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the *embodied state*, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified state*, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the *institutionalized state*, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee. ("Forms of Capital" 282)

I will reference primarily the embodied state of cultural capital as it relates to cultural capital as it is inherited from family circumstance and environment, as well as the institutionalized state of cultural capital in theatre education.

While many theorists and scholars have written about Marx and Althusser (and responded to them) since their contributions, I am continuing to use Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses to examine the structures at play in American society, and in particular, our field of Theatre for Young Audiences. Althusser's formulation of how ideology functions in a capitalist society can provide a lens to look at some of American TYA's biggest issues. One of the most interesting things about theatre for young audiences to me is that it functions as part of both the education ideological state apparatus and the cultural ideological state apparatus. The two following chapters will stem from this perceived dual existence: the first will focus on how the education system and its accompanying ideology affects theatre for young audiences, and the second will examine the consequences of our alignment with the larger theatre ecosystem and its ideology. For now, I will look at how Capitalism functions in the United States, and how it came

to be a dominant trait of our society, before moving into an examination at how theatre and TYA function in contemporary Capitalism.

American Capitalism

While Marx defined Capitalism as he saw it in 19th century German industrializing society, and Althusser in 20th century France, the definition of contemporary Capitalism in practice is a lot harder to pin down. In the introduction to *American Capitalism: New Histories*, Sven Beckert and Christine Desan talk about the difficulty of defining capitalism in a decade of conversations with scholars and students in the "Workshop on the Political Economy of Modern Capitalism" at Harvard University:

> To be sure, capitalism's definition is a central issue for the field. Most of our participants had working definitions to deploy. Sometimes those claims were explicit; other times they were implicit, functional vocabularies that shaped the scope and direction of work.... The contest over definitions for capitalism critically informs the project of understanding it. Each alternative puts forward claims about the nature of human agency, the causes of economic change, the interplay of institutions, culture, and ideology, the role of the state, and the power and character of coercion and choice. Each definition carries, as well, implications about capitalism's "edges," the aspects that set it apart from other political economic orders. (4)

While scholars in different fields may have different definitions of capitalism, some commonalities did emerge in the conversations at the Harvard Workshop:

> Dialogue in the Workshop (and, we think, beyond) directs attention to "the market" as an organizing concept often assumed to distinguish private activity from public authority; the sanctification of property and contract as enforceable categories commodifying labor

> and structuring exchange; the salience of profit and self-interest in the cultural repertoire; the importance of racial and gender hierarchies; the prevalence of imperial power in structuring global markets; and the crucial role of money and credit. Capitalism thus takes shape as a phenomenon of our time that is both distinctive and compelling in significance and that can only be understood historically. (Beckert and Desan 5)

This skeleton definition covers the big points of Capitalism that I wish to explore: 1) that there is an existence of a 'market' which separates out economic activity as privately-owned rather than publicly held; 2) that labor (the body that performs it) is valued based on the amount of product(ivity) it produces; 3) that productivity is how we measure worth internally and externally; and that 4) hierarchies based on racial and gendered difference (as well as ability and sexuality) play an important role in the reification of the system, especially in the United States.

The most important facet of capitalism to this project is its imperfections. While capitalism has been responsible for many great inventions and societal developments, it will always also be responsible for unnecessary stratifications.

> Capitalism inherently generates massively unequal access to both the material and social conditions needed to live flourishing lives...Even in very rich capitalist economies like the United States, millions of people live an economically precarious existence; they suffer from hunger and poverty-connected ill health; they reside in unsafe neighborhoods; and they are subjected to the social indignities and stigma connected to poverty. Capitalism perpetuates these eliminable forms of human suffering…High levels of economic inequality are not an accident in capitalism; they are inherent in its basic mechanisms of operation. (Wright 23-24)

Capitalism can never be the morally ideal way of organizing economies due to its violation of "three clusters of values: equality/fairness, democracy/freedom, and community/solidarity" (Wright 8). I will return to these values later; for now, we will shift our attention to the historical context of capitalism in the United States.

The Gilded Age & Progressive Era

Another major issue that has been debated in Capitalist studies is *when* capitalism became the dominant economic system in the United States. While many place the beginning of American Capitalism during the 19th century, with the increase in industrialization, there are a number of historians who argue that American Capitalism began with the first colonizers (Degler qtd. in Beckert and Desan), or the writing of the Constitution (Holton qtd. in Beckert and Desan). While these are both intriguing arguments, my definition of Capitalism aligns more with the former option. While the commodification of bodies as tools for profit has existed for much longer, there was an emergence of formalized capitalist systems during the Gilded Age, and a large push to sell Capitalism to the American public as the best way to assert dominance over the world. This period in history sees the emergence of many of our contemporary economic institutions and practices and, in my opinion, the beginnings of some of our most entrenched ideologies.

In the United States, there was a second period of industrialization after the Civil War, which has been tentatively labeled by historians as The Gilded Age and Progressive Era:

> No one today is quite sure what time period the Gilded Age and Progressive Era covers. It sprawls somewhere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but few historians can agree on where its edges lie. Some argue for a period that begins in 1865 with the end of the Civil War, or in 1873, with economic overproduction, or in 1877, with

> the alleged death of Reconstruction (Schneirov 2006). The end of the era is even more problematic. Perhaps the period ended in 1898, when the Spanish–American War launched the nation into imperialism, or in 1901, with the ascension of Theodore Roosevelt to the White House, or in 1917 with the outbreak of World War I or in 1918, with its end... In trying to section off the late nineteenth century in America, there is also the problem of figuring out where the Gilded Age and Progressive Era overlaps with the period termed Reconstruction, which everyone agrees was also crucial to the rise of modern America. (Richardson 7)

While there is no consensus among historians on what exact years the Gilded Age and Progressive Era spans, I am using Heather Cox Richardson's periodization of 1860-1920, which stretches from the election of Abraham Lincoln to the election of Warren G. Harding in 1920. For the purposes of this project, the exact span of years won't have a large impact; what's more important to me is what came about during The Gilded Age and Progressive Era in the United States: formalized Capitalist systems and practices, as well as the emergence of 'social welfare' as a response to these systems and practices.

The Gilded Age, also known as 'The Second Industrial Revolution' by some historians, saw an explosion of technological advancements which definitively changed the economic and social landscape of the United States. Jonathan Levy calls this period the "Age of Capital" in his *Ages of American Capitalism*. During this time, Levy explains that

> Capital moved into illiquid "capital goods," or intermediate means of greater production—the structures, machines, and equipment of factories. Capital goods generated gain by being used up, depreciating over time, and losing value, through labor and enterprise. The greater presence of capital goods in economic life alone justifies the

> name of this age. Critically, the capital goods of the industrial revolution were more energy intensive, tapping stocks of newly discovered fossil fuels, transcending the limits of the organic economy's flows of energy from the sun and from human and animal labor. (190)

The largest catalyst for many of these changes was the dissolution of formalized slavery in the United States in 1860. During the period of 1660-1860, or the "Age of Commerce" as deemed by Levy, land and enslaved bodies made up most of the political economy in the United States. In the Age of Capital, "the Age of Commerce's political economy of property ownership gave way to a new political economy of income" (Levy 192). The invention of the factory meant more people became wage laborers, which contributed to a new class hierarchy in the United States between owner and worker. At the same time, immigration numbers soared, as foreign workers sought positions in factories. Railroad expansion was massive during this period as well, as it played a key role in distributing the products made in factories to places across the country. With the increase in factories and the mass production of everyday products, business management techniques emerged as a way to promote efficiency and productivity. During this time, the United States moved from a largely rural, agrarian society, to an urban, industrial one, which drastically altered its identity, both internally and externally. This shift to industrialization came with a myriad of issues, including political corruption, inhumane immigrant living situations, and the exploitation of child labor. The Progressive Movement was born out of the social and legal needs of these cities which were drastically altered over a small period of time, due to a boom in urbanization resulting from increased industrialization and a large influx of immigrants.

> Cities of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era were highly divided by class, ethnicity, and race. It was in these divided cities that reformers of many stripes, often grouped under the

> banner of Progressivism, rose to prominence beginning in the 1890s. Many of them proclaimed that their goal was precisely to overcome these divisions: to create, or perhaps to restore, a sense of social unity and a striving for the common good. (Kahan 37)

The Progressive Era is memorable for its many different reforms, either through legislation or social programs, united by "a belief in the possibility of individual and social progress" (Kahan 37).

> Progressive reformers believed that social problems could be corrected, and human nature could be improved, through improvements to the social and physical environment. These improvements, in turn, would stem from the proper application of scientific and social scientific expertise. Applying professional expertise to social questions, Progressives believed, would help a community, whether a neighborhood or a nation, to arrive at a shared, rational, orderly vision of the common good. (Kahan 37)

Politically, early Progressives pushed against corruptness in city employee positions, as well as stronger mayoral offices (Kahan 39), and eventually led the cases against breaking up some of the monopolies that were beginning to emerge. There was also an increase in government regulation and oversight during the Progressive Era, leading to offices that still exist today, like the Food & Drug Administration.

Women played a large role in the Progressive movement - suffragettes advocating for women's right to vote are iconic of the age, prohibition of alcohol successfully (albeit briefly) became the word of law due to Evangelical reformers, and the settlement house movement emerged to try and combat some of the social problems that resulted from the rapid urbanization and immigration.

> Part community center, part school, part research institute, settlement houses were established first in England, then brought to New York in 1886, and shortly thereafter to Chicago, where Jane Addams founded Hull-House in 1889. (Kahan 37)

Settlement houses were created to 'deal with' the huge influx of immigrants to cities, by providing services and classes to help them assimilate into American society. The houses were mainly staffed by "young, nativeborn, middle-class college graduates, many of them women for whom settlement houses represented one of the few socially acceptable ways to use the skills and ideals they had acquired through education" (Kahan 38). These women also used the setting of the settlement house to gather information about the living and working conditions of the immigrants in the community, which they would use to advocate for labor and housing reform. Settlement houses worked to improve the communities in which they resided, through city beautification and sanitation initiatives, and, as we will get to later, arts education. The settlement house movement would also inspire the creation of the Junior League in 1901, whose mission was also to serve the immigrant communities living in settlement houses.

While settlement houses did provide positive services and advocacy, the rich white women running these organizations are also sometimes seen as forcing American culture and values onto immigrants. The focus was on assimilating into American society. This relationship between affluent white American women and marginalized communities is prevalent in the history and practice of education in the United States, as well as Theatre for Young Audiences, and I will return to this topic later in this chapter.

Conceptualizing Capitalism as Fundamental to American Society

While the inventions and social structures of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era brought about the system of formalized Capitalism in the United States, it also brought about some of our

most entrenched ideologies about what it means to be American. Capitalists had to sell the idea of Capitalism just as much as the products and services they were selling. Peter Knight talks about this period's capitalist propaganda in *American Capitalism: New Histories:*

> The increasing omnipresence but also odd invisibility of capitalism in the Gilded Age was in large part the result of the emergence of a recognizably modern form of financial capitalism. Wall Street became the symbolic capital of capital, with the stock market standing in synecdochically for the whole of the economy...It is arguable that financial capitalism more generally creates recurrent crises of representation, when the faith that is necessary to maintain belief in the value of the numerous fictive substitutes and abstractions of "real" value (paper money, credit instruments, futures contracts, and so on) periodically begins to crumble. (236-237)

Because this new economy was less 'real' than its predecessors, there was a concerted effort to prove to the country that it was the right choice and even the inevitable choice. For the first time, people were allowed to own the means of production on paper, without ever being directly connected to that production, or the labor that produces the product. Knight explores how the "visual culture of capitalism" at this time "simultaneously abstract[ed] and humaniz[ed] the problem of finance" (237). Knight looks at four different visuals: a satirical cartoon, a 'Babsonchart' supposedly used to chart securities, an economist's attempt to symbolize the economy as a machine, and a hand-drawn chart of power networks used to show how connected all of the power players were. Primarily visual in nature, "These representations did not merely create new ways of visualizing the stock market; they helped reconfigure and rationalize the very idea of the market and later the economy as coherent, predictable, and self-sustaining entities" (237). The propaganda from this era established capitalism as the 'natural' way of being, a core

American belief that exists to this day, as evidenced by the negative power the word "socialism" wields in our contemporary society.

With this shift towards accepting capitalism as natural and inevitable, our culture also absorbed capitalist ideology as inherently true and unshakeable. One of the more insidious ideologies that emerged during this period was the idea that efficiency and productivity was central to what makes a good citizen or person. A major 'innovation' of the Gilded Age was Taylorism, which was the study of labor with the goal of producing the most product in the shortest amount of time. More formally known as Scientific Management, the practice is often referred to as Taylorism, after its founder, Frederick Winslow Taylor, who believed that labor could be analyzed scientifically and be made more financially efficient (Mee). While the specific practice of Scientific Management went out of style in the early 1900s, some aspects of Taylorism held on: celebration of a person's work ethic, competition in the workplace, efficiency at all costs, etc. Taylorism focuses on how efficiently the body can be used for labor in the workplace; it is not interested in the person or the body once it isn't working efficiently.

Another American ideology that solidified during this time was the idea that Capitalism and its ills can be balanced out by charity and/or good deeds. The Progressive Age saw the establishment of social movements to counteract the ills of capitalist ventures, such as "political corruption, the rise of overcrowded slums, and the exploitation of both workers and the environment" (Nichols and Unger 1). It established a dynamic where unfettered Capitalism and its excesses caused major societal issues, and Progressive Era movements had to emerge to counteract these issues. This dynamic is still seen today; instead of changing the way society functions and eliminating problems at the source, we focus instead on the smaller issues caused by our system. Instead of treating the disease, we treat the symptoms. We tend to view arts and

theatre this way; those of us who identify as theatre artists see ourselves and our work as the remedy to some of the harsher elements of our society. While this is a noble cause, what would it be like if we worked to fix the source of the issues instead?

American Capitalism Today/Global Neoliberalism

Capitalism is still the primary economic system at work in the United States, although the landscape has changed, due to increased, and then decreased, oversight and regulation from the government over the past century. The Progressive Era bled into the economically booming New Era of the 1920s, which ended with the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and ultimately the Great Depression (Levy xxvii). In response to the financial crises of this period, there was an increase in government regulations to prevent future crashes. These policies reigned in the issues that led to the Great Depression, which led to a period known as "the golden age of capitalism": in the "roughly three decades following World War II—social democratic policies, especially in those places where they were most thoroughly implemented, did a fairly good job at moving in the direction of a more humane economic system" (Wright 46). The system was still capitalist in nature, but through an expansion of funding for public goods and regulations that insured the safety of workers, some of the worse effects were diminished (Wright 46-47). However, the globalization of the economy in the back half of the 20th century made it possible for these relations to crumble, as capitalists gained more bargaining power with threats of moving their investments to places in the world with less regulation and cheaper labor" (Wright 48).

> The threat of such movement of capital, along with a variety of technological and demographic changes, has fragmented and weakened the labor movement, making it less capable of resistance and political mobilization. Combined with globalization, the financialization of capital has led to massive increases in wealth and income inequality,

> which in turn has increased the political leverage of opponents of the social democratic state (48).

The pull towards less government regulation and a return to capitalist power similar to that of the Gilded Age is referred to as Neoliberalism, and has become a defining feature of contemporary American capitalism. Neoliberalism "is a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade" (Harvey 22).This idea, paired with globalization, or the ability to be connected to the rest of the world by both physical and digital transportation mediums, results in neoliberal globalization, or the attempt to establish a global economy with the ideals of liberalism, which believes that profits are the best indicator of human and societal achievement (Fuchs).

An important facet of neoliberalism is the privatization of once-public goods, like water, prisons, and education (which I will talk more about in Chapter 2). Donald Cohen and Allen Mikaelian, in their book about the privatization of public goods in America, describe privatization as:

> …the transfer of control over public goods to private hands. Sometimes this happens during procurement – the outsourcing of public services to a private contractor. In other cases it's due to austerity – reducing public funding of a vital public good and letting private options take over. Or it can happen through deregulation – when we eliminate or fail to enforce public control through important regulatory safeguards for consumers, workers, or the environment. In all these ways, privatization is a transfer of power over

> our own destiny, as individuals, and as a nation, to unelected, unaccountable, and inscrutable corporations and their executives. (4-5)

Starting in the 1950's, there has been a growing movement towards the privatization of goods, and the shrinking of government influence. Beginning with the privatization of schools in the South after *the Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling, multiple public goods have been subsequently privatized, particularly during the Reagan, Bush and Trump eras, but also during the Clinton and Obama administrations (Cohen and Mikaelian 21-38).

> Public utilities of all kinds (water, telecommunications, transportation), social welfare provision (public housing, education, health care, pensions), public institutions (such as universities, research laboratories, prisons), and even warfare (as illustrated by the "army" of private contractors operating alongside the armed forces in Iraq) have all been privatized to some degree throughout the capitalist world. (Harvey 35)

One of the more egregious recent examples of the shift towards privatization was the Trump administration's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of centralizing the response, the administration chose to let the market decide where life-saving products like masks, ventilators, and hand sanitizer were sent, and how much they cost (Cohen and Mikaelian 3-4). Privatization is not just an economic choice – it has reverberating consequences through most aspects of a citizen's life.

There have been consequences to some of the United States' more neoliberal economic policies in the last few decades. American society now faces an increasingly drastic stratification of classes, with a giant gap between those at the top and those at the bottom*;* less people able to afford homes (an American 'dream') without generational wealth to back them up; a student loan crisis that burdens young people with significant debt before even starting a career, with interest

rates that make it nearly impossible to pay them off in a lifetime (Friedman), and an ever-worsening housing crisis where lavish homes and apartments sit empty as the homeless population grows (Badger and Washington).

However, even with the emergence of these overlapping and intersecting crises, Americans have a hard time visualizing a non-Capitalist economy and society. The Pew Research Center conducted a study in early 2019 regarding Americans' views on Capitalism and Socialism. 65% of the 10,170 people surveyed held a positive view of Capitalism, with one respondent saying "Capitalism in America has done more to raise people out of poverty *than any other economic system.* Capitalism encourages innovation, invention, and growth" ("In Their Own Words" 7) (emphasis mine). For those with negative views of Socialism (55% of those surveyed) the reasons why varied. "About 1-in-5 (19%) say that socialism undercuts people's initiative and work ethic", while about the same amount "(18%) refer to how socialism has failed historically or in other countries" ("In Their Own Words" 4). Another 17% say that socialism "is not consistent with democracy in the United States," reiterating the point that many see capitalism as inherently American, and socialism as the very un-American. One respondent said:

> I don't want to see the American dream die; I think everyone should aspire to become the best they can be and go as far as they can in life, and not just work to feed their neighbor. I do agree we need to do something to help keep our middle class from disappearing, but I'm just not sold on socialism. (4)

This quote really shows that some people believe that the "American Dream" is directly tied to capitalism. Going even further, the study also found that:

> One-in-five adults with positive views of capitalism associate the system with the foundation of America: They mention that capitalism has advanced America's economic

> strength, that America was established under the idea of capitalism, or that capitalism is essential to maintaining freedom in the country. ("In Their Own Words" 7)

When people believe that our country was founded under the idea of capitalism when it formally did not exist yet, it is hard for them to see that a critique of the economic system isn't necessarily a critique of the country.

Contemporary Ideology

As Jonathan Levy writes in the introduction to his history of American Capitalism, "The ideological belief that a capitalist economy is governed by a rational economic calculus intrinsic to our natures and dedicated to the pursuit of moneymaking is so deep-seated in our culture that it can be difficult to shake" (xviii). Depending on who you ask, Capitalism is either the bedrock of our free country and it should not be regulated, or our commitment to its ideal is holding back our country's potential. While many Americans would argue that capitalism is the best economic system for human innovation, there are many (including myself) that believe that there is an alternative that prioritizes human 'flourishing' over profit. Erik Olin Wright writes that there are "Two general kinds of motivations are in play in these diverse forms of struggle within and over capitalism: class interests and moral values. You can oppose capitalism because it harms your own material interests, but also because it offends certain moral values that are important to you" (5).

Borrowing from Wright, I believe that capitalism inherently violates "three moral clusters: equality/fairness, democracy/freedom, and community/solidarity (9)" and is therefore worth searching for a viable alternative. Capitalism violates the idea of equality/fairness as it "inherently generates massively unequal access to both the material and social conditions needed to live flourishing lives" (Wright 24). While democracy and freedom can exist under capitalism,

the system restricts the fullest realization of both, as private control of businesses restrict the ability of the average person to participate in the decision-making processes that may affect them acutely, like a factory being shut down and moved overseas (Wright 28). In capitalism, the ones with more money have a lopsided control of the "democratic" processes, therefore giving some citizens more weight than others. And community/solidarity cannot thrive under capitalism as these "cultures generally affirm two clusters of broadly shared values that are in tension with community and solidarity: competitive individualism and privatized consumerism" (Wright 32). Beyond the moral failings of capitalism, the tension between those who are pro-capitalism and anticapitalism comes down to a perceived lack of alternatives: "Where the real disagreement lies—a disagreement that is fundamental—is over whether it is possible to have the productivity, innovation and dynamism that we see in capitalism without the harms" (Wright 3). Additionally, those who benefit from the inequality capitalism engenders have less of a motivation to support an alternative economic structure.

This perceived lack of alternatives to capitalism is heightened and shored up by the pervasive American mythology which is imbued with Capitalist imagery and ideals. The most insidious ideology of American capitalism is the 'bootstrap' theory, where a person can supposedly "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" and succeed if they just work hard enough. Unfortunately, the 'bootstrap theory' does not account for the forces at play in our society that hinders mobility between classes, and it is frequently used to misplace blame for one's circumstances on themselves. The American neoliberal society places importance on the individual rather than the community. This does not mean that people prefer to be alone, but "taken in broadest terms, has consisted mainly of a rejection of the state and impatience with restraints upon economic activity" (Williams, 1970:485, qtd. In Fischer, 2008: 363). Basically,

many Americans equate freedom with the ability to make whatever financial choices they wish to without the oversight of the government. In a similar vein, Americans tend to see failures as individual missteps, rather than societal ones:

> Such worldviews feed quite logically into a well-known feature of Americans' exceptionalism: Americans are considerably more likely than other Westerners to attribute poverty to poor people's own traits or will and are considerably less likely to endorse government intervention in economic inequality. (Fischer 365)

We have seen this ideology play out in real time during the COVID-19 pandemic, as an alarming number of Americans choose individual freedoms and unrestrained economic activity over the greater good. Americans tend to view issues as a matter of the individual, rather than a structural issue.

Another hallmark of dominant American ideology is stalwart nationalism. Nationalism is "a heterogeneous set of 'nation'- oriented idioms, practices, and possibilities that are continuously available or 'endemic' in modern cultural and political life" (Brubaker, qtd. in Bonikowski 4). The idea of American Exceptionalism feeds a culture where people feel a deep need to be the winner or the best at everything. While aiming to be the best at things is not inherently a bad thing, Americans have a hard time recognizing when the United States is not the best and end up ignoring the things that could be made better through critical analysis. While we have free speech in the United States, and are legally allowed to critique the government, there is a prevalent belief among people in this country that "if you don't like it, then leave!" This exact phrase seems to be bandied about during every election cycle, as if thinking critically and disagreeing with the way something operates is a reason to uproot your life. These entrenched ideas about what it means to be American may feel natural to us as American citizens but are not

intrinsic to the human experience. These ideals are due to the economic system we have in place, as we have married it so tightly to our identity as a nation.

Capitalism and the Arts/Humanities

Where do the arts fit into our contemporary American Capitalist society? Because the arts don't produce a more durable product, they are often treated as an afterthought in our society. It is often remarked upon in academic and educational circles that there is an emphasis on young people to go into STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) over arts-based careers. And the numbers reflect that fear – "By 2021, disciplines such as history, English and religion graduated less than half as many students as they did in their early 2000s heyday, relative to the overall size of the graduating student body" (Van Dam). In addition to the declining numbers of students, those who have graduated with humanities degrees tend to regret their decisions more than those who go into a STEM field. According to a recent Federal Reserve Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking, almost half of college graduates with a degree in the humanities or the arts regret their degree choice (Van Dam). While STEM is essential to the fabric of our society, arts and the humanities are just as important. However, in our neoliberal society, financial gain and material ownership define a person, and currently it is very difficult for a costume designer to achieve the same kind of wealth as an app designer.

We can see the neoliberal effect on the arts by looking at the history of The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The National Endowment for the Arts is a federal agency established in 1965 "founded on the belief that the arts have a role in the spiritual and economic health of the nation, and deserve government underpinning" (Bowley). George Yúdice argues that the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts was directly tied to Cold War ideology:

> The creation of the NEA… can be considered the denouement of a tale that begins in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when postwar intellectuals during the Truman administration fashioned a cultural program that would legitimize the United States' leadership role in the world, pitting artistic and scholarly freedom, as embodied in the new abstract art and in the rapidly expanding higher education system, against the totalitarianism embodied in the command industrial and cultural economies of the Soviet bloc. (20)

The freedom to create a robust culture free from government restrictions was exactly what the fund was created for. The NEA functioned largely without congressional oversight until the late 1980's, when conservatives called for more oversight to counter more 'radical' (queer) art[3] being created with the funds (Yúdice 18). Since then, the NEA has come under attack many times, particularly under Republican administrations, as many believe that the government should not be providing support to art, with the argument that if art is valuable, it will succeed in the free market (Bowley). Due to the backlash during the early 90s and the continued attempts to undermine the agency, the funding for the NEA has been variable over the past few decades.

Despite many attempts from the Trump administration to defund the NEA, the arts organization's budget has actually grown since 2017, when he took office. While it has grown, it is still a small budget compared to other government agencies; "Its $167.5 million budget for 2021 is still no more than what one city, New York, spends on its cultural affairs" ("Appropriations History", Bowley). While the NEA's existence is symbolically crucial to the place of culture in our society, logistically it has a relatively small financial impact on the arts

[3] In 1989 and 1990, there were two high-profile attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts: one against photographers Robert Mapplethorpe and Andrés Serrano in 1989, and another in 1990 against the "NEA Four": performance artists John Fleck, Holly Hughes, Tim Miller, and Karen Finley. All of these artists pushed the boundaries of acceptable gender behaviors and sexuality in their works. (Yúdice 18)

sector in the U.S. (Bowley). Many organizations, particularly non-profit theatre companies, rely on funding from corporate sponsorships or private contributions from patrons to operate.

According to Theatre Communications Group's 2020 iteration of their annual Theatre Facts survey, which provides an analysis of the funding structures of non-profit theatres across the United States, funding from federal sources accounted for only .3% of the average contributed income[4] (as a percentage of total expenses) for non-profit theatres in 2019[5] (Fonner et al 12). State and city/county funding was a little higher at .6% and 1.4%, respectively, but these numbers are all lower than corporations (2.1%), trustees (5.3%), foundations (12.4%), and other individual contributions (14.4%) (Fonner et al 12). The reliance on private funding sources to operate exemplifies the American neoliberal view of the arts in our society – it places the impetus on the companies to create a valuable product for the investors, whether that be economic or social capital.

In spite of the reputation that the arts are not as valuable to society as other sectors, the numbers paint a different story. According to Americans for the Arts' 2016 economic impact study, "Arts & Economic Prosperity 5: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts & Cultural Organizations & Their Audiences":

> In 2015, the nation's nonprofit arts and culture industry generated $166.3 billion in economic activity—$63.8 billion in spending by the organizations themselves, which leveraged an additional $102.5 billion in event-related spending by their audiences. The impact of this economic activity is significant, supporting 4.6 million jobs and generating $27.5 billion in government revenue. (2)

[4] Contributed income refers to any income outside of ticket or subscription sales (Fonner et al 6).
[5] While the report included numbers for 2020, I decided to highlight the 2019 numbers, since COVID-19 drastically changed the financial landscape in 2020.

The arts and non-profits sector accounted for "4.2% of the nations' GDP - a larger share of the economy than transportation, tourism, agriculture, and construction (1)." The TCG Theatre Facts estimates that nonprofit theatres in particular "added $2.1 billion dollars to the economy through compensation and payment for space, services, and materials, with other potential impact through patron expenditures at local establishments (Fonner et al 20).

If we think back to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital having equal weight as economic capital in a capitalist society, it's easier to see the importance of the arts in capitalism. Bourdieu describes cultural capital as the 'disinterested' form of capital that gives credence to the 'self-interested' form of economic capital:

> The class of practices whose explicit purpose is to maximize monetary profit cannot be defined as such without producing the purposeless finality of cultural or artistic practices and their products; the world of bourgeois man, with his double-entry accounting, cannot be invented without producing the pure, perfect universe of the artist and the intellectual and the gratuitous activities of art-for-art's sake and pure theory. ("Forms of Capital" 281)

In other words, there is no measuring economic success without the mirror of culture to affirm a person's place in the stratification of class and taste in society. Examples of this can be seen throughout American society; fashion, vehicles, hobbies, types of entertainment – these are all tied to class and the cultural capital that class engenders.

When referring specifically to entertainment and media, there is a clear distinction between what is considered "high-brow" and "low-brow" culture[6]. We refer to our 'low' culture

[6] The terms 'high-brow' and 'low-brow' have their etymologic roots in phrenology, a now-debunked pseudoscience relating brain shape to a human's intellect and mental capacities. Phrenology was unsurprisingly used to assert that

obsessions as our 'guilty pleasures,' assigning a level of shame to cultural products we deem as less intellectual. In academic circles, there is a clear divide in conversations about commercial Broadway spectacles, and what scholars and practitioners think of as "art," a high culture vs low culture war of our own making. As Susan Bennet writes in her article "Theatre and Tourism": "Like those who would dismiss the popular theatrical successes of the nineteenth-century theatre, be they melodramas or Shakespeare plays, historians and critics of contemporary performance have steered a course that veers away from analysis of the dramatic productions most theatregoers choose to see" (408). Those of us in academia tend to talk about musical theatre as the least intellectual form of theatre; a theatre that appeals to the lowest common denominator of society.

As a capitalist society, it is hard for us to see value in something that does not make a profit. This thinking influences what our general society thinks of as successful theatre; to be a success in the eyes of the general public is to be a long-running Broadway show that is turning a massive profit and can replicate itself into a road show. The centralization of Broadway/New York theatre has been solidified in recent decades with the increased globalization of cultural products. Andrew Lloyd Weber's mega-musicals exemplify the kind of commodification that can happen around theatrical pieces. His musicals from the 1980's (*The Phantom of the Opera, CATS*, etc.) started a whole merchandising culture around big musicals which turned them into tourist attractions with souvenirs. Cameron Mackintosh, the producer of *Les Miserables, Miss Saigon, The Phantom of the Opera*, and *CATS*, is the first person in the world to make a "10-figure fortune from musical theater," according to his Forbes profile ("Cameron Mackintosh"). Mackintosh was wildly successful at capitalizing on the ephemeral experience of a theatrical

'Caucasians' were superior to other races, and the language in turn was used to classify European culture as 'higher' than others (Levine 222-223).

production and extending it into merchandise and national tours that raked in mountains of profit. Mackintosh and Weber moved musical theatre productions into the larger cultural zeitgeist, ultimately centralizing musicals as the definition of "American Theatre" to those not in the field.

But it isn't just the big Broadway shows that are influenced by capitalist ideology and practices. The regional and educational theatres in this country follow the outline set by Broadway theatres in New York City, even though their financial situation is much different, and they tend to serve a much more local audience. I will explore this "trickle-down" dynamic in Chapter 3. From here on out I will be exploring how TYA in the United States is affected by American Capitalist ideologies; from TYA's historical roots in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, to a contemporary examination of theatre ideology.

Capitalism and TYA

Before jumping into some of the ideologies surrounding contemporary TYA practice, I want to look at the historical connections between capitalistic ideas and the beginnings of our field. I started this chapter talking about The Gilded Age and Progressive Era as the genesis of formalized capitalism in the United States. This time period isn't only important to the history of modern American capitalism; I think there is a distinct connection between this era and the creation of Theatre for Young Audiences as a field in the United States. This period saw the emergence of the settlement houses and the Junior League, two institutions frequently credited as some of the first theatre for young audiences activities in the U.S. (van de Water, "Constructed Narratives" 103). These two groups in particular are textbook examples of Progressive Era movements created to contend with the problems created by the increased industrialization caused by the Gilded Age.

The settlement house movement and The Junior League are two prime examples of Progressive Era movements created to temper the excesses of the Gilded Age's capitalist ventures. In other words, they acted as catalysts for intervention against the "free market," identifying and advocating against the choices made by businesses and politicians which allowed for the extreme stratification of economic classes. In terms of their TYA practices, they saw the need to distinguish 'children's theatre' from 'commercial theatre', and the opportunity to 'revolutionize' theatre and change it from something undesirable to something positive and moralistic. In a way, the language about this theatre being more amateur and less "commercial" was a brilliant marketing scheme from socialites and women of certain means to be able to do theatre without any disapproving glances their way.

However, this separation has set up a lineage of perceived difference between the larger American Theatre and Theatre for Young Audiences. Even while TYA operates as part of the larger theatre culture, incorporating similar practices and ideals, there is still a perceived difference between 'adult' or 'regular' theatre, and theatre made specifically for children. I believe this can be traced back to the Progressive Era and the deliberate choice to create a theatre practice that exists in a dichotomy with any other theatre. The alignment made with education during the advent of TYA in the United States has only gotten more ingrained in the field during the last century, creating an almost inseverable bond that engenders TYA-specific issues. I will dive more into TYA's alignment with education in the next chapter, but for now it is important to talk about how a purposeful distinction as a separate entity in the Progressive Era over a hundred years ago still affects the field today.

While this connection to the Progressive Era movements has certainly created a forward-thinking and empathetic field, there is no escaping the fact that TYA theatre artists and

administrators must still work within the bounds of a largely capitalist society, with plenty of deep-rooted ideologies to navigate.

The messaging of TYA

The most obvious way that capitalist ideology presents itself in Theatre for Young Audiences is through the messaging being communicated through the art itself. This is the messaging presented on the stage, with dialogue, relationships, design, and character. Carol Lorenz argues in her article "The Rhetoric of Theatre for Young Audiences and Its Construction of the Idea of the Child," that

> Theatre for the young has been a tool of enculturation that has reflected the philosophy, ideas, and aesthetics of society's dominant hegemonic institutions with the goal of persuading the young to accept society's ideologies in order to produce future generations of like-minded citizens whose ideas and values will reflect what the current generation values most. Plays for the young have also reflected the philosophical and social debates regarding the nature and purpose of childhood, the rights of the child, and the responsibilities of adults and the young toward each other. Many playwrights writing for the young, especially during the first half of the 20th century, have consciously or unconsciously been influenced by these pedagogical debates and have, as a result, consciously or unconsciously created a theatre that has provided the young with narrow lenses through which to structure, categorize, and evaluate their experiences and construct their ideas of self. (96)

The nature of theatre for young audiences has traditionally been about being "integration propaganda" (as Lorenz puts it), which educates the audience members on how to be contributing members of society. In the 20th-century United States, that primarily meant that

plays focused on the ideals of family, traditional gender roles, and clear delineations between good and evil (Lorenz 100). From our standpoint, it is easy to see as well that these "ideals" come from a white/Eurocentric view of society. While TYA has certainly moved away from the moralistic theatre of the early 1900s, there is still much more of the education ideology in theatre for young audiences than is present in "regular" theatre.

I would argue that commercial TYA is still teaching young audiences how to be good 'citizens', and in turn, teaching children how to exist in our neoliberal capitalist society. Citizenship is a word you hear a lot growing up in the United States, usually in the context of rewarding good behavior in elementary schools, even though that is not an accurate representation on what constitutes being a 'good' citizen:

> Citizenship has traditionally referred to a particular set of political practices involving specific public rights and duties with respect to a give political community. Broadening its meaning to encompass human relations generally detracts from the importance of the distinctively political tasks citizens perform to shape and sustain the collective life of the community. (Bellamy 19)

Citizenship at its core refers mainly to the responsibility of participating in the democratic processes of a country, and the rights conferred to the citizen by participating in this process. The narrative in the United States around citizenship focuses on how much each citizen's vote/voice matters, as if each vote has an equal weight. In the United States, the rights of citizenship have been limited throughout the country's history by those in power:

> Internal exclusions have included those designated as natural inferiors on racial, gender, or other grounds; or as unqualified due to a lack of property or education; or as disqualified through having committed a crime or become jobless, homeless, or mentally

> ill. So, in most established democracies women obtained the vote long after the achievement of universal male suffrage, before which many workers were excluded, while prisoners often lose their right to vote, as does – by default – anyone who does not have a fixed address. Many of these internal grounds for exclusion have been dropped as baseless, though others remain live issues, as does the unequal effectiveness of the right to vote among different groups. (Bellamy 26)

This does not even cover the exclusion of immigrants and asylum seekers who live under the choices made by those who are allowed to be a citizen (Bellamy 26). Instead of focusing on the importance of citizenship in the political sense, TYA narratives promote what we laud as the ideals of the American citizen in the abstract (even if those do not line up with the reality of being a citizen in the United States). While the stories have become more nuanced over the last few decades, I think that theatre for young audiences in the United States still primarily produces plays that have some kind of 'lesson' at the center.

Many contemporary plays produced for young audiences have particularly 'American' themes of individuality, independence, and self-reliance, even if the story isn't necessarily focusing on these values. According to a TYA/USA report on the 2019/2020 Most Produced TYA Plays and Playwrights, many of the top 11 productions[7] highlight these values: In *Matilda*

[7] The top 11 produced TYA plays of the 2019/2020 season were:

1. ***Roald Dahl's Matilda the Musical***, Book by Dennis Kelly/Music and lyrics by Tim Minchin: **6 productions**
2. ***A Charlie Brown Christmas***, By Charles M. Schulz. Based on the television special by Bill Melendez and Lee Mendelson. Stage adaptation by Eric Schaeffer: **5 productions**
3. ***Elf the Musical***, Book by Thomas Meehan and Bob Martin, Music by Matthew Sklar, Lyrics by Chad Baguelin: **5 productions**
4. ***Ella Enchanted: The Musical***, By Karen Zacarías, Music by Deborah Wicks La Puma, adapted from the book by Gail Carson Levine: **5 productions**
5. ***Pete the Cat***, Book and Lyrics by Sarah Hammond, Music by Will Aronson, Based on the Pete the Cat series of books by Kimberly and James Dean: **5 productions**
6. ***The Best Christmas Pageant Ever: The Musical***, By Jahnna Beecham & Malcolm Hillgartner Adapted from the book by Barbara Robinson: **4 productions**

the Musical, our hero Matilda is defiantly independent, having to adapt to horrible circumstances at a young age, and eventually relies on her individual talent to save the day; in *Ella Enchanted the Musical*, Ella possesses a special gift of "obedience" that she eventually breaks free from; and in *Elf the Musical*, Buddy the humanoid elf uses his particular brand of Christmas joy to convince others around him of the magic of the season ("Most Produced"). These three heroes follow a typical "hero's journey" and end up solving their problems by utilizing what makes them individual and therefore, special.

In addition to celebrating individualism, the three titles listed above are also adaptations of popular movies. This trend of adapting titles for the stage is not a positive one in terms of promoting stories from under-invited audiences, or for diversifying the teams that create TYA in the U.S. While scholars in TYA like to focus on the original scripts that push boundaries, a 2020 Center for Scholars and Storytellers and TYA/USA study found that only 25% of TYA productions in the 2018-2019 season in the United States were of original stories not presented before in a different medium (Ruggiero and Uhls 13). The remaining 75% of productions were of plays adapted from fairy tales or from other media, like television shows, movies, or books. The same study found that "Original content productions most consistently achieved a gender balance, across playwrights, directors, and actors" and they "had more POC (person of color) playwrights, directors, and actors than Adapted Titles and Fairy Tales/Fables" (Ruggiero and

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7. ***Dragons Love Tacos***, By Ernie Nolan, Based on the book by Adam Rubin with illustrations by Daniel Salmieri: **4 productions**
8. ***Ghost***, By Idris Goodwin, Adapted from the award-winning novel by Jason Reynolds: **4 productions**
9. ***Go Dog Go!***, Adapted by Allison Gregory and Steven Dietz. Composed by Michael Koerner. Based on the story by P.D. Eastman: **4 productions**
10. ***The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe***, Adapted by Joseph Robinette, based on the book by C.S. Lewis: **4 productions**
11. ***The Very Hungry Caterpillar Show***, Created by Jonathan Rockefeller, based on the books of Eric Carle: **4 productions**

Uhls 18). This study is a glimpse at the reality that faces both American theatre for young audiences and "regular" theatre – it is hard to prioritize original storytelling in an economy that rewards adaptations of already well-known entities. The 11 most produced TYA titles in the 2019-2020 season were all adaptations of stories written for a different medium ("Most Produced"). I believe the reason for this focus on adaptations and well-known narratives is commercially driven, engendered by a culture that undervalues the theatrical arts so companies must rely on established audiences of other media to survive.

Ideology: Theatre as a non-essential commodity

Unfortunately, theatre in the U.S., both "regular" and TYA, is seen to many Americans as a non-essential extravagance, more of a hobby than a career. While other countries, like Finland and Ireland, have national theatre systems funded by the government, many American Theatre productions rely on ticket sales and private funding to exist (Fonner et al). With the lack of government funding for the arts, theatres and productions live or die based on how many people purchase a ticket and their ability to fundraise money from people and corporations. Even grant funding applications often ask for the number of people who will see it, as a gauge to determine if your project is worth the money. On the whole, American society devalues arts and arts education, likely due to the perceived lack of monetary value the product brings. As Nick Rabkin and E.C. Hedberg wrote in their 2011 report on Arts Education in America for the National Endowment for the Arts:

> The early disinclination to consider the arts as serious academic subjects continues to this day. The arts are widely assumed to be expressive and affective, not cognitive or academic. Despite growing awareness among some educators and cognitive scientists that many of the fundamental processes of art-making are profoundly cognitive —

> reinforcing the building blocks of all thought — and despite the enormous discipline required to master arts skills and make high-quality art, the arts are often associated with play and luxury, not with the work ethic and discipline associated with school and academics. (42)

This characterization of arts education has led to it being cut out of public education little by little. This of course limits education in the arts to those that can afford private instruction, but it also contributes to a society that places a decreasing value in the arts. Rabkin and Hedberg studied the correlation between childhood education in the arts and later participation in the arts (including as audience members) and found that "participation in arts lessons and classes is the most significant predictor of arts participation later in life, even after controlling for other variables" (9). As the arts are removed from the education system, we are likely to see declining participation in arts in the adult population, leading to an even smaller share of the cultural zeitgeist.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exaggerated this dynamic, as people were sorted into essential and non-essential workers. While a worldwide pandemic will naturally highlight the medical professionals, there was something demoralizing about our entire industry being shut down with little to no attention paid to the entertainment sector. More than demoralizing, it was economically devastating to the arts sector. According to a study from Americans for the Arts,

> In year one of the COVID-19 pandemic, few areas of the U.S. economy were harder hit than the performing arts: Performing arts presenters and performing arts companies joined oil drilling/exploration and air transportation as the steepest-declining areas of the U.S. economy in 2020. After adjusting for inflation, the value added by performing arts

> presenters (including festivals) fell by nearly 73 percent between 2019 and 2020. (R. Cohen)

Arts organizations have been the slowest to return to pre-pandemic operations and employment numbers. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of "Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation" jobs "dropped from 2.5 million to 1.2 million between February and April 2020" (qtd. in R. Cohen). As of September 2022, arts jobs have rebounded to 2.3 million, which is still down from pre-pandemic numbers. Unsurprisingly, BIPOC institutions and individuals were hit harder and had a more difficult time returning to work during the pandemic. According to the same Americans for the Arts survey, "BIPOC organizations were more likely to report that they lack the financial resources needed to return to in-person programming than non-BIPOC organizations (55% vs. 38%)," and BIPOC artists had higher rates of unemployment than white artists in 2020 due to the pandemic (69% vs. 60%) and lost a larger percentage of their creative income (61% vs. 56%) (R. Cohen).

Even as the arts sector rebounds from the pandemic, there is still a lingering fear from what happened to the industry in the early days of the pandemic. In my day job working in publicity and recruitment for a large liberal arts institution's performing arts department, it has been easy to track the shift in public opinion locally through the comments made by prospective students and their parents. I overheard two students in the hallway comment on their acting class the other day – in response to a lower grade than expected, the student exasperatedly complained to his friend that "Acting isn't a real job anyway; at least not one that can get you a Rover…you gotta know somebody to make money doing that." While the view that acquiring a job in the performing arts is difficult is nothing new, there has been a sharp increase of students who comment on the instability of the field, surely a consequence of society's response to the arts

during the pandemic. We have also seen a drop in applications and enrollment in all three of our areas (Music, Theatre, and Dance). This has led to more data-driven questions and answers about job placement and inquiries about double majoring in a more "stable" field of study.

Is there a way to reverse this thinking? Or are we always to be relegated to non-essential status? It's hard to imagine an American society that prioritizes the arts without major ideological shifts.

Ideology: Romanticizing the Art/Cycles of Mistreatment

Many theatre artists see themselves as outside of the traditional economic sphere, which makes it harder to work against some of the more engrained ideas surrounding how theatre should be done. Artists are frequently seen as operating outside of the normal capitalist structure, mostly due their own positioning as non-compliant. Patricia Ybarra describes this as an "'against the grain' stance that both artists and humanities academics engage that coalesces with activist opposition to mainstream apparatuses of political power" (334). Instead of being seen as a profession, it is painted frequently as a lifestyle choice, or a 'calling'. Many theatre makers I have interacted with over the years talk about the work as something they 'must' do, and that it's "not about the money." Meanwhile, this kind of thinking creates a cycle of underpayment for all theatre artists. Many times, this cycle involves unintentional mistreatment of collaborators, as the culture in theatre is to work around the clock on something that you 'love' to make it the best it can be. Exploiting labor happens more than we like to think in theatre.

An issue that has been a topic of conversation in the field recently is the practice of unpaid/underpaid internships. Often the first step in a career in theatre is an internship at a theatre company. However, many companies use "the promise of education, the prospect of learning by trial and error, but in practice this is often a cover for grunt work and exploitation"

(Merrill). Theatre companies, both large and small, have been relying on the labor of un/underpaid internships for years, making these opportunities and connections only available to those who have family financial support. Producer/manager Brídín Clements wrote about this phenomenon in a post for *HowlRound*:

> The expectation of unpaid internships is a barrier for young people from distressed communities to gain work experience and subsequent entry into the performing arts administration workforce. So, internships are primarily going to people of a certain socioeconomic class, and those young professionals are coming out of the experience with an upper hand against their competition. And we wonder why there is a lack of diversity in performing arts administration.

This kind of practice reinforces the cycle of white, middle/upper class supremacy in theatre circles by making the entry-level positions required for advancement exclusive to those who don't have to work to support themselves. Our society does not have the kind of safety net needed for people from lower income backgrounds to take these internships. In short, exposure doesn't pay the rent.

Ideology: "The show MUST go on"

Overworking un- and underpaid interns is all part of a larger attitude towards working on theatre production, which trickles down to all levels of theatre in the U.S. An insidious culture of overworking and pushing through has been concealed under the common phrase "the show must go on." In every show I've ever worked on, this concept has come up in one way or another, usually to advocate for extra hours or coming to rehearsal and performances while sick or injured. Our merit as artists in the American model is often about how much of our life we are willing to sacrifice to make the show the "best" it can be. But who is defining "best" in these

situations, and should they be the ones doing so?

I have a personal work anecdote to this point. Since 2015, I have worked at Interlochen Arts Camp, located in Northern Michigan. The camp offers programming in Creative Writing, Dance, Film & New Media, Interdisciplinary Arts, Music, Theatre, and Visual Arts for campers in grades 3-12. I began my work there on staff as a Costume Designer for the Junior Musical program and the Dance program. My second year I moved "up" to be the Costume Designer for the Intermediate Musical Production and the Intermediate Acting Company production. Both productions featured 20-25 cast members, with a combined costuming budget of $1,000. This position paid $2,250 plus meals and a housing stipend of $5 a night (they charge for staff housing and my nightly share was $10). This stipend breaks down to $375 a week, or $9.38/hr. when assuming a 40-hour workweek. I alone oversaw the design, construction, and running wardrobe for the two productions (There was a volunteer who would come in 1 day a week and help me for two hours).

Even with the included cafeteria lunch, this position barely paid an acceptable wage for the number of tasks assigned to it. This, however, was all information that I had before accepting the job – the real issue became apparent once rehearsals began. The understanding of the costuming expectations varied drastically between myself, the shop manager, the technical director, and the director of the musical production program. After expressing a few times calmly to the director that we didn't have the budget or labor to do 4-5 unique costumes for each of her 25 students, she complained to the technical director and the director of the theatre program that I was doing a poor job. She expressed to me that she "often works overnight while at camp to make sure the production can be the best that it can be." It also came out that the designer who worked in this position in the years prior "would work overnight sometimes to make sure the

costumes were of the highest level." This was said to me as if this was a desired trait in a designer in this setting, the ability to put aside health and all other aspects of life for the sake of the product.

While this is a single story about a single incident of worker exploitation, it is not uncommon in both the amateur and professional theatre worlds to encounter this attitude towards labor and value. There is a prevailing culture in the arts, especially in theatre, that your value to the art form is directly tied to the amount you are willing to sacrifice to create. A recent movement has emerged to combat an aspect of traditional theatre practice that overworks theatre artists, especially stage managers. The concept of "10 out of 12s", or the practice of technical rehearsals occupying 10-hour workdays with only 2 hour-long breaks, is a widely accepted practice. According to NoMore10OutOf12s.com (a website dedicated to the movement to eradicate structures that overwork theatre artists):

> For over 80 years, 10 out of 12 technical rehearsals and six-day workweeks have been seen by theatre workers as mandatory in their schedules. In trying to uphold the spirit of 'the show must go on,' theatre practitioners in professional and academic settings have repeatedly pushed themselves far beyond their physical and mental limits, jeopardizing both their health and their future… [This way of working] is particularly harmful to BIPOC artists, disabled artists, as well as artist caregivers trying to grow their families. By continuing to uphold this structure, we are literally forcing people out of this field as well as barring entry to the next generation of workers who can bring new life to it.

For a field that prides itself on being inclusive and outside of traditional work structures, there are aspects like long tech days and 6-day weeks that actually align the field closer to capitalist ideology than "normal" jobs. While on the surface the phrase "the show must go on" hints at a

camaraderie within a production, it places responsibility on the individual to keep the train on the tracks.

Actor Andy Lucien wrote about his 'break-up' with the American Theatre in a blog post for the Lark in 2018. In the post, Andy talks about performing with an increasingly painful back injury, which would get worse with each rehearsal and performance:

> So why did I do it? I liked to think I performed every show due to the absence of understudies. It was more than that, however. It was something deeper. When it came to performance, which is my passion, I believed in five words more than anything else: *The show must go on*. Those words motivated me so much that despite being utterly unhappy and drenched in pain after every show of that production, I had believed, and had it ingrained in me, that the importance of the show was paramount. Any sacrifice I made for that or any show was in service of something noble, something greater than myself. These were the things that I had been taught when I started acting 14 years ago.

Like Andy, this attitude was ingrained in me throughout college and any production I've been involved with since. While none of my college professors would ever admit to encouraging injured students to perform, I would say it's because the option was never offered to us. It was not custom to have understudies in our program, so the pressure to be well and perform was high.

Why do theatre artists put up with these conditions? It's because we are taught, through training and societal beliefs, that the only people who can make a (financial) living doing theatre are the people who "want it badly enough." It is not uncommon as a theatre artist to be made to believe in an artificial scarcity in the field; that there are a limited number of jobs for theatre makers, and that number can't be expanded. While it is absolutely true that there isn't an

unlimited amount of theatre jobs that can provide a living wage, there are more theatre-related professions and positions than widely believed.

Moving forward

While it is respectable work to be finding the ways we can change from within the field, there is a certain ceiling that exists due to capitalism, and our country's obsession with it. Many theatre artists I know are aware of this and understand that the ideal theatre culture does not exist within capitalism. This is not to say that we should start a revolution in the streets tomorrow, but it does suggest that we should be focusing more on the decisions made regarding economic policy in the U.S., and potentially shifting some of our efforts towards promoting more socialist policies and systems. I think a way to move away from ideology regarding the "productive value" of theatre is ultimately the best way forward. We need to prioritize people over profit and the concept of the show (the product) being more important than the people creating it.

At a national gathering of TYA professionals during the pandemic, I heard a Black colleague I deeply respect talk about the attitude towards diversifying the field. "It's not pie," she said simply – a short quote meant to be a "Eureka!" moment for the audience. It was supposed to be a refutation for those among us who talk about positions in the field as a zero-sum game; that if a White person is replaced with a Person of Color, then that White person loses their job and is pushed out. "No, no, it's not pie." There is no reason to think of jobs and resources as a pie that everyone is trying to get a piece of – a pie that has a set number of slices to give. We should adjust our mindset to believe that there is room for everyone to be theatre makers in this country. While I understood and appreciated the intent and sentiment, I thought to myself "well, that's not really true, is it?"

The theatre field in the United States is not pie –but it also kind of is. While most of the field and the artists in it would love an infinite amount of pie to serve up to everyone who is interested in participating; the reality that we must face is that making theatre in a capitalist society like ours does limit the amount of pie that exists. Switching away from our dessert metaphor, there are only so many resources and financial support being put toward the arts in this country, which does limit the amount of people who can sustain a living in the field. If we ignore the 'pie', also known as the structural issues caused by capitalism, we are accepting the limited number of opportunities for artists as an immutable fact.

CHAPTER 2: The Problematic Marriage: Education and TYA in the United States

More often than not, theatre for young audiences in the United States is seen by people outside the field as a tool of education only. From this point of view, children's theatres and shows marketed for youth are programmed as a way to educate younger audiences, either through content or through teaching them to be good future audiences. This viewpoint influences the way the field operates, even if most of the people working in professional TYA are aware that it isn't all about teaching audiences a lesson. Because professional TYA companies have to exist within the American capitalist society, many choices have to be made to cater to other social institutions present in this country, and the education system is one of the largest influences on how TYA operates in the United States. Especially in the United States, theatre for young audiences is inextricably linked to education due to the historiography of the TYA field and the standardization, privatization, and commercialization of the education system throughout history.

As Roger Bedard lays out in his 2003 article in *Youth Theatre Journal,* "Negotiating Marginalizations: TYA and the Schools," the TYA field has long been held at the mercy of the schools in the United States, as school groups make up most of the audiences for TYA companies. As Bedard states, this relationship is particularly one-sided: TYA needs the schools, but the schools do not need TYA to survive (90). This leads to an unhealthy relationship that "is one of the important 'ordermaintaining' dimensions of the TYA field-one through which it coheres and invites definition as a marginalized culture" (90). In other words, our relationship with schools and the larger education system defines and restricts what we can do as a field. Bedard elaborates further on this dynamic: "To maintain this relationship, theatre companies, as viewed historically, must engage in an interplay of signification that projects an image of

something other than a traditional theatre company- '*a theatre-but-not-theatre*' -that lodges comfortably within the school culture, supports the dominant ideologies of the schools. And minimizes problematic aesthetic interrogations of these ideologies" (Bedard, "Negotiating" 91).

Like Bedard, I believe that our field's relationship with schools and the education system works against our ability to create theatrical productions that question entrenched ideologies in the United States. Since Bedard's article on this subject in 2003, seventeen years have passed, yet it seems not much has changed in terms of TYA's entanglement with the education system in the U.S.; In fact, recent social and political dynamics seemed to have tightened the coils. This chapter will focus on those dominant ideologies presented by schools in the U.S., and explore the possibilities that are present when TYA does not have to rely on the schools to sustain itself. We will look at the historical relationship between TYA and Education, the history of marginalization in the U.S. Education system, and the current problems TYA companies and artists face while having to navigate this complicated relationship.

Historical Roots of TYA in the United States

Before I dive into the problems present in the dynamic between TYA and the educational system in the United States, it's important to understand just how deeply rooted education is in the history and ideology of our field. Manon van de Water explores in her article, "Constructed Narratives: Situating Theatre for Young Audiences in the United States'', the relationship is historical, and historiographical in nature:

> The dominant social, ideological, cultural, and economic forces at the end of the 19th century created a climate that provoked the urge to label and define the field. The influx of immigrants, the establishment of settlement houses, the spread of child-centered educational ideologies, and crusades against the use of children in professional theatre

> established the necessary material circumstances under which a theatre specifically for children could be conceived. (103)

The field of theatre for young audiences in the United States emerged as a separate entity at this time, defining itself as different, and morally superior, to the professional theatre of the time. This thread was then carried throughout the 20th century as the field of theatre for young audiences expanded and defined itself as a distinct field with its own history, theory, and criticism. The main difference between the 'seedy, professional' theatre of the time and the 'wholesome, amateur' theatre for children was the emphasis put on the educational value of a production. No one did a better job of distancing with this premise than the Junior League.

Regarding the relationship between education and TYA, the most important development was the settlement house movement and the creation of the Junior League, founded by a group of debutantes in New York City in 1901 to promote work in the area's settlement houses (Bedard, "Junior League" 35). The Junior League was created by Mary Harriman, the favorite and oldest daughter of railroad tycoon E.H. Harriman. Harriman, a daughter of industry during the Industrial Revolution, was not satisfied with the typical debutante life. Harriman attended Barnard College in New York, where she met Nathalie Henderson and other well-off young women and created the Junior League, after hearing lectures about Jane Addams and the Hull House in Chicago (ajli.org). The Junior League quickly grew to include many young women looking for an outlet for their volunteerism, and soon Junior Leagues popped up in other cities in the United States. The Junior League worked with the ever-growing immigrant population to help them acclimate (and assimilate) into American culture. Their work primarily consisted of educational activities, such as "teaching art, calisthenics, dancing, and singing to children in the settlements, and working to improve the literacy, nutrition, and health of their young

beneficiaries" ("Mary Harriman", ajli.org). According to Roger Bedard, the Junior League started producing plays as early as 1912, and these activities grew out of the other artistic ventures the League was pursuing with their students ("Junior League" 36). The Junior League ended up expanding their theatrical offerings throughout the first half of the twentieth century to include touring to schools, growing the expectations for educational content in theatre for young audiences.

While there was theatrical activity for children before this point in history (as noted by Laura Gardner Salazar in *Spotlight on the Child*), the socioeconomic politics of the early 20th century established the Junior League's activities as the first "legitimate" theatre for children in the U.S. Professional theatre was seen as "commercial" and as morally corrupt, which prompted those involved with children's theatre to define their work as "amateur," placing themselves at the other end of a binary. As Manon van de Water lays out in her book *Theatre, Youth, and Culture,* Constance D'Arcy Mackay continued this ideological thread in her 1915 how-to manual: "While the interacting social and aesthetic forces demanded a definition that clearly separated children's theatre from theatre for adult audiences, they also enforced another separation: children's theatre should not be associated with 'commercial', 'professional', and subsequently, 'bad' entertainment" (12). Unfortunately, this binary is still alive and well in how we think about theatre for young audiences today. While most TYA practitioners know differently, TYA is often thought of as the amateur precursor to more professional, adult theatre, but now "professional" is a positive identifier, insinuating a level of quality that "amateur" theatre lacks. The TYA field is still stuck on this binary of amateur vs. professional, and it is not doing us any favors. I will talk about this dynamic more in a later chapter.

Important to this chapter on education is the language developed to "other" the field of theatre for young audiences in the United States during this time, the gender and race dynamics present in the Junior League's relationship with settlement houses, and how these amateur performances were/are used to construct the narrative of theatre for young audiences today. Placing settlement houses and the Junior League at the center of our national TYA narrative is telling, as privileged white women have shaped the field throughout its limited 'history.' Constance D'Arcy McKay, Charlotte Chorpenning, Nellie McCaslin, and Winifred Ward are frequently cited as the arguably most influential people in our TYA history, and are all white women. This is not to say that there is anything wrong with being a white woman in theatre for young audiences (I myself am white and identify as female), but it is hard to ignore that race, class, and gender have played a part in the creation of our field. I argue that our relationship to the education system is a major contributing factor for the continued issues regarding diversity and inclusion in theatre for young audiences. Before we look into these issues, it's important to understand the trajectory of education in the United States, and how racism, classism, ableism, and sexism are baked into the foundations.

Role of Education in the United States

I have already talked about the "education system" many times in this chapter. When I use this phrase, I am referring to the compulsory primary and secondary schooling commonly referred to as 'K-12' education. K-12 education refers to Kindergarten through 12th grade in the U.S., often the focus of much debate and legislation, as it affects every child/family in the country. While the education itself is compulsory for all children, the education can be obtained at a public or private institution, or at home with the proper certifications (homeschooling). The

difference in methods can lead to disparity between the quality of education, as I will explore later in this chapter.

As mentioned in my introduction, I will be looking at education in the United States as what Louis Althusser refers to as an Ideological State Apparatus. According to Althusser, an Ideological State Apparatus is: "a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions… [that] contribute to the same result: the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e., of capitalist relations of exploitation" (110, 117). Althusser lays out the multiple institutions which fall under this category (churches, family, cultural, etc.) and how they have historically contributed to how the ruling class maintains power in capitalist societies. Althusser argues that 'the School' occupies the "dominant position in mature capitalist social formations," and refers to it as the "educational ideological apparatus" (116). In other words, schools and the curriculum set forth by the State exist to train future citizens to exist within the capitalist system.

> Schools (and the education system at large) do this in a multitude of ways:
>
> It takes children from every class at infant-school age, and then for years, the years in which the child is most 'vulnerable', squeezed between the Family State Apparatus and the Educational State Apparatus, it drums into them, whether it uses new or old methods, a certain amount of 'know-how' wrapped in the ruling ideology (French, arithmetic, natural history, the sciences, literature) or simply the ruling ideology in its pure state (ethics, civic instruction, philosophy). (Althusser, 118)

While Althusser was writing about education in 1970s France, much of this statement still applies to contemporary American education. Primary and secondary students in the United States learn the "know-how" about how their society functions through assigned readings and

lectures and through interactions with their teachers and peers. They then take this "know-how wrapped up in the massive inculcation of the ideology of the ruling class that the relations of production in a capitalist social formation…are largely reproduced" (Althusser 119). Schools play a massive role in capitalist societies to keep the same people in roles of power (those who own the means of production), and the same people under the thumb of those in power (the ones who provide the labor). In the United States, students are taught this dynamic through various lessons in 'American-ness', which includes healthy doses of eurocentrism, nationalism, and individualism. Over the course of our two-and-a-half century history as a country, education has radically evolved, yet has maintained its status as an elitist institution. A distinction without a difference.

The United States can trace its mandated education policies back to when the Massachusetts Bay Colony (England) made some level of education compulsory in 1642. This education was highly religious, focusing on Puritan ideals (As Althusser notes in his essay on ideology, the Church used to be the primary Ideological State Apparatus). While we often associate the teaching profession with women, the teachers here were often young men who were using teaching as a way to their 'real' careers in religion or the law (which were close to the same thing in the colonies) (Urban and Wagoner 71). The beginnings of contemporary, secular public education came about as part of the education reform movement in the mid-1800s, led by Horace Mann. Mann advocated for the separation of schools from religious ideas, and for the standardized training of teachers. This time period also saw the dramatic increase of female teachers, as people realized women would do the same job for less money, creating a pattern of low pay for teachers which carries on to this day (Urban and Wagoner 93).

Education today is mandatory for all children in the United States, with specifics regarding age and duration being left to the individual states to decide. It is a system that almost every person living in the United States interacts with at some point in their lives, yet the educational experiences vary widely across states, regions, and even cities. These differences are not only due to the varied age and duration mandates mentioned above, but also to the ways schools are funded and managed. Approximately 82% of the nation's children attend public schools, which are funded by local taxes; approx. 5% attend charter schools; around 10% attend private institutions, usually funded by an outside institution (i.e., Churches) and tuition fees; and approx. 2% are homeschooled ("School Choice"). While the education system in the United States has become more nationalized over the past few decades, steep differences still exist between the quality of education attained, which can primarily be attributed to geographic/socio-economic status.

History of Marginalization in American Education

Why is looking at the history of the education system important?

Historically, education has been used as a way to shore up the ideology of the ruling class by embedding the rules of the society into every facet. As an important 'order-maintaining' apparatus for the state, the United States Education system creates and upholds the dominant capitalist ideology present in this country. American capitalism, as it exists now, depends on the extreme stratification of people, which is conducted by the classification of citizens into easily identifiable groups. Speaking in a theoretically pure form of Capitalism, these groups would only be based on how much money those people possess. In the United States, class marginalization works hand-in-hand with a myriad of other marginalizations to ensure limited mobility. Power here is not just tied to money, it is also tied to the different facets of your identity.

The prevailing mantra is that ‘Knowledge is Power’; that an accumulation of education leads to a coordinating amount of power. It implies that a lack of power is directly related to how hard you worked or how many years of education you possess, which is not how the system works at all. As Leonardo and Grubb write in *Race and Education*:

> Rather than “knowledge is power,” the simple inversion that “power is knowledge” argues that the ability to control knowledge about people is a way to control them. What does this mean? Controlling knowledge is a way to define how a racial group and its history are understood. Because people act based on the knowledge they presume about others, curricular knowledge produces racial actions. If students are encouraged to believe in history as based on uncontroversial sets of facts, they conceive of racial events as essentially fixed and given. Therefore, understanding history as a process or perspective becomes an exercise in futility because history could not have worked out otherwise or be interpreted differently. (25)

Power is Knowledge is a much better statement to describe how the United States education system has been used to train people in national ideology. It has produced cycles of power and inequality that continue in a circular fashion, with little room to escape the inertia. This is reflected throughout the education system in the United States, as it prepares people to live in this kind of stratified society. It is no surprise then that our education system continues to feed into this ideology to this day, from the content chosen as the standard curriculum, to the practice of tracking students based on their perceived post-secondary plans. This section will explore the historical and contemporary facets of the United States Education system that uphold capitalist power structures.

The clear limitation in even bringing this topic up is the wide range of scholarship that pertains to this subject, and the limited space I have to write about it. However, I think studying this relationship is worth it, and hopefully more scholars will take up this topic. To that end, I will be utilizing Zeus Leonardo and W. Norton Grubb's excellent text *Education and Racism: A Primer on Issues and Dilemmas* as my main source on the topic of marginalization and education in the United States. These texts all point towards the same main problem: the American education system marginalizes students who are different from the so-called 'typical' student.

The Historical Problem

American education is largely molded to the "typical student," but what does that mean? I would argue that students labeled as typical, are just the ones who happen to fit into the assumptions of the education system. This would mean students who do best in an authoritative environment with a clear hierarchy present in the classroom between the teacher, those who excel, and those who do not. Historically, formal education was only designed for one kind of student: land-owning white males, which paralleled what the country counted as a citizen. It should be unsurprising that these seeds of exclusion have grown into a tree where white supremacy and the patriarchy are the deep roots. "Typical" is not used as an identifier for 'most' of the population in this situation; it is used as an identifier for those in power who are working endlessly to maintain that power. It names the student we see as the 'default' American citizen, a designation shaped by centuries of power dynamics. It sorts students into the 'haves' and the 'have nots.'

Education itself used to be the tool which those in power wielded, as it used to be only for white children, and in some cases only the rich, white, and male students. In colonial New England, schools mimicked those back in England:

> For all their openness, colonial Americans created educational institutions and arrangements that were essentially hierarchical, class bound, and markedly uneven in terms of opportunity. With only a few exceptions, education remained authority oriented in pedagogy and purpose; it was intended to reinforce the religious, ethnic, and political traditions and institutions of those in control. (Urban and Wagoner 44)

Depending on geographic location, students of all genders may have access to basic education that focused on reading scripture but writing education and any kind of secondary or higher education was reserved for the male children of wealthy families. This ensured that those in power could pass their power down, with no threat of interruption.

Education was also used as a weapon of assimilation, dating back to the first settlements in America when settlers demanded Native American children become 'civilized and Christianized': "This meant undergoing a new and different kind of education, adopting new customs and manners, and embracing new spiritual doctrines and practices. Those native inhabitants who were not killed by guns or disease or who were not immediately driven from their lands were henceforth to be educated for life and death on new terms" (Urban and Wagoner 6). Education was used as a weapon against the indigenous people of this land to erase their culture and limit the transfer of knowledge between generations. This continued throughout the 19th and 20th centuries in a more formalized setting with the Indian Boarding School. Many of these schools were funded by the Federal government, which "targeted Indian and Native Hawaiian children as part of U.S.-Indian relations and U.S.-Native Hawaiian relations to enter the Federal Indian boarding school system, coinciding with Indian and Native Hawaiian territorial dispossession (Newland). In a 2022 report from the U.S. Department of the Interior, Assistant Secretary Bryan Newland found that "between 1819 to 1969, the Federal Indian

boarding school system consisted of 408 Federal schools across 37 states or then-territories, including 21 schools in Alaska and 7 schools in Hawaii" (6). These schools

> …deployed systematic militarized and identity-alteration methodologies to attempt to assimilate American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children through education, including but not limited to the following: (1) renaming Indian children from Indian to English names; (2) cutting hair of Indian children; (3) discouraging or preventing the use of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian languages, religions, and cultural practices; and (4) organizing Indian and Native Hawaiian children into units to perform military drills. (Newland 7)

The bedrock of these schools were manual labor and corporal punishment, effectively setting Native Americans to fail in an industrial economy and breaking their will to continue on their cultural traditions. Even more crucial to the evisceration of the Native cultures was the death of at least 500 American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children at these institutions, a number that is still increasing as the U.S. Government investigates burial sites located at these schools (Newland 9).

When mainstream education did become more available to marginalized populations in the mid-20th century, communities and the government tried everything in their power to make sure that white students still had the upper hand. Southern Private Schools emerged after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling desegregated schools as a way to keep white students away from students of color:

> The 3 decades following the advent of serious school desegregation in the late 1960s, private school enrollment in the South grew in importance, whereas it generally declined elsewhere…Both the timing and location of the growth in private schools strongly

> suggest that the surge in demand was motivated by a desire among Whites to avoid public schools with sizable proportions of Black students. (Clotfelter 91)

In the Northern United States, 'White Flight' from metropolitan areas created predominantly white suburbs, which remain racially segregated to this day. Jonathan Kozol writes in the introduction to his book *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*:

> The struggle being waged today, where there is any struggle being waged at all, is closer to the one addressed in 1896 in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, in which the court accepted segregated institutions for black people, stipulating only that they must be equal to those open to white people. The dual society, at least in public education, seems in general to be unquestioned. (4)

Since formal desegregation, marginalizations within the education system have morphed to become more subtle, and in some ways harder to point out. The following section looks at the main problems in the United States education system, including the divide between private and public schools, curriculum representation, issues of cultural relevance, and tracking practices.

Private Schools vs Public Schools

To this day, private schools perform an important role in keeping the classes stratified in American society. Families can buy their children a "higher quality" education while maintaining distance from poorer students, creating an early divide in education quality. Generational wealth is not only in the money passed down, but through the connections that exist and are maintained through these exclusive institutions. This trend continues into higher education, which is also stratified due to wealth and connections. Due to their private status, these schools face fewer restrictions in terms of what they can teach, as they do not rely on reaching assessment goals for funding (although they may be beholden to other ISAs like The

Church, who may have different restrictions). Financially, they are more stable as they are not beholden to the same financial restrictions as public schools, and often cater to a richer clientele overall.

On the other hand, public schools are beholden to local, state, and national policies and trends, even some that aren't directly related to education, such as redlining and the flight of white people to the suburbs of metropolitan areas. These trends and policies shift financial resources away from schools that have a higher population of poor students, as school funding is directly tied to property values and prices (Semuels 2016). As Leonardo and Grubb state, "Schools are located in the political economies of cities" (55), meaning public schools can have vastly different financial resources from each other, even within the same geographic region. Kozol explains that:

> …the property tax is the decisive force in shaping inequality…Typically, in the United States, very poor communities place high priority on education, and they often tax themselves at higher rates than do the very affluent communities. But, even if they tax themselves at several times the rate of an extremely wealthy district, they are likely to end up with far less money for each child in their schools. (67)

The different funding levels cause there to be an uneven number of resources, and an uneven number of resources leads to an uneven quality of education. The government, while mandating a public education for all of the nation's children, does not guarantee and equal public education: "…the state, by requiring attendance but refusing to require equity, effectively requires inequality. Compulsory inequity, perpetuated by state law, too frequently condemns our children to unequal lives" (Kozol 69).

An example of this kind of disparity is laid out in a 2016 *Atlantic* article by Alana Semuels that covered the case *Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding (CCJEF) v. Rell*, which argues that inequality in state funding is unconstitutional. Semuels' article focuses on the disparities between schools in higher-income cities in Connecticut, like Greenwich and Darien, and lower-income cities like Bridgeport and New Britain. Greenwich spends $6,000 more annually on each individual pupil than Bridgeport, even though they are located in the same county, and this difference translates into a myriad of issues that can lead to student failure: "Connecticut recently implemented a system called NextGen to measure English and math skills, college and career readiness. Bridgeport's average was 59.3 percent…Greenwich, by contrast, scored 89.3 percent." This is just one specific example of a larger issue:

> Nationally, high-poverty districts spend 15.6 percent less per student than low-poverty districts do, according to the U.S. Department of Education. Lower spending can irreparably damage a child's future, especially for kids from poor families. A 20 percent increase in per-pupil spending a year for poor children can lead to an additional year of completed education, 25 percent higher earnings, and a 20-percentage point reduction in the incidence of poverty in adulthood. (Semuels 2016)

A difference in educational funding can lead to drastically changing a student's prospects for life, yet little has been done to change the way public schools are funded in the United States, since schools are considered a State issue, and not a Federal one. Individual states have made changes (usually after lawsuits like the one brought forth in Connecticut), but the last time it was brought to the Supreme Court (*San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez, 1973*), the court decided "that there is no right to equal funding in education under the Constitution." The federal government does help fund public schools, but the lion's share of funding (Approx. 90

percent) comes from state and local taxes (Semuels 2016). So when we talk about the United States Education System, we are really talking about a myriad of 'localized, market-driven' systems, with some shared ideological values (Urban and Wagoner 73). This decentralized system based on property value means that students with families that have wealth and property (or allowed proximity to students with wealth) will always have the advantage over students whose families do not own property, or have the money to send their children to a private school to avoid underfunded public schools in urban areas.

Curriculum

Curriculum is the content chosen by educators to meet the standards set forth by their administrators and the government. Standard curriculum for students in the United States consists broadly of reading, writing, math, sciences, social studies, and art. Teachers have some power when choosing what to teach their students but have faced increasingly stringent national and state standards that limit their freedom. As Leonardo and Grubb state

> It is more than what kind of knowledge most counts, but what kind of children, or citizens to be more precise, schools are going to produce. The curriculum is not only about processing information, but processing people as well. From the individual 50 states to the nation-state, curriculum defines central aspects of the social function that schools serve for society at large. The curriculum has the tendency to reproduce existing social relations and arrangements, but it may also challenge them. (15)

School curriculum is a powerful tool that can be used for political gain.

It is through curriculum setting that students orient themselves within the framework of the United States. For white, male students, the curriculum reflects (and often overstates) their

contributions to society. For those who have been historically marginalized, the lack of material represented in the curriculum paints a picture of 'lack':

> In the act of ordering information and narrating history, knowledge becomes racial and race becomes part of the system of knowledge. This implicates knowledge in the racial project, knowledge which is no longer innocent or waiting to be discovered…For example, when history textbooks construct knowledge about racism as mainly a problem of extremist hate groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan or neo-Nazis, they promote a way of knowing that neglects the general system of White advantage in law, business, and national governance. Knowledge selection tells the story of race. (Leonardo and Grubb 16)

The story of race that is told in the United States favors Eurocentric ideals of achievement, and frequently pushes minority populations to the periphery.

In this selective curriculum, the United States is painted as the center of righteousness, justifying all of its past actions and decisions as the natural order of how things were always going to happen. According to Leonardo and Grubb, "Curriculum setting is part of race creation rather than just reflecting it. It is not a mirror, but a prism that bends the story of race for particular reasons" (16). Particularly in America, education tends to center white people as the 'heroes' of the 'protagonists' of history, relating historic events of marginalized people as side plots to the main throughline of whiteness. Examples of this include: sanitizing the Civil Rights Movement of its violence and duration; the centering of the English colony as the main origin story of the United States, and minimizing the violence white people committed against the indigenous peoples of America. More subtle examples include focusing on and romanticizing pioneer/explorer stories in literature, singing/playing music by the white 'masters', or having a

selected "diversity" story which exists out of the 'main' plot. This way of organizing the curriculum not only places non-white history and literature as lesser than, but also enforces racist ideas that are used by those in power to shore up their power.

Socially-Relevant Education

In addition to issues of representation in education, students taught by teachers outside of their race can have issues with learning, due to the different culture of the teacher. Leonardo and Grubb explain that after the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling,

> Whereas with Jim Crow, Blacks were sent to the back of the academic bus, post-Brown education was like a bus where people may lawfully integrate, but are at a loss regarding how they might interact. The overt racism of the first was replaced by the well-intentioned but incomplete solutions of the second. Education in the United States was challenged by the uncomfortable realization that schooling remained largely non-relevant to the cultural worldview of many students of color. (35)

We as Americans are still dealing with the incomplete solution of forcing students of color into a non-relevant educational structure. "For children of color, a culturally non-relevant education represents another layer of injury that White students do not experience" (38). This is due to the fact that our education system uses the white middle-class student as the default or 'unmarked' student, and view marginalized students with a 'deficit perspective.'

Because most teachers in the United States are now White women, their understanding of students are limited by their own cultural expectations of 'success' and 'ability.' As Leonardo and Grubb state: "…. Despite the best of intentions, teachers may still perceive students of color as lacking certain cultural competencies by virtue of being different or non-mainstream" (58). The teachers then set the goal of teaching the 'correct' cultural practices to these students,

reinforcing the idea that White institutions and values are the best ones, instead of taking an approach that celebrates all cultures. This contributes to the idea in education (and the broader United States culture) that the White middle class is culturally arbitrary. Leonard and Grubb state: "In U.S. Public education, cultural reproduction happens when school rituals cater to middle-class sensibilities," calling upon Pierre Bourdieu's theory of 'cultural capital' talks about the cyclical connection between possessing the 'favored' culture and economic position: "By tracing the conversion of economic resources to cultural power, Bourdieu made it possible to talk about the transmission of skills, habits, and dispositions already central to the schooling process" (61). According to Leonardo and Grubb, a major facet of the reproduction of culture in the United States education system is the preference of students who have 'expanded codes' versus 'limited codes.'

Drawing on Basil Bernstein's study of social class and language, Leonardo and Grubb talk about how middle-class children possess the 'preferred language practice' by their ability to call upon their inherited expanded codes: "…middle class children are encouraged to ask for information, whereas working-class kids function in a linguistic environment where adults assume shared meanings with them, needing little extrapolation. The middle class expands children's linguistic repertoire and the working class tends to limit it" (62). This early difference in how knowledge is shared has far reaching consequences for the working-class student:

> From the sheer number of words learned in early childhood during routine interactions in everyday life, compared to working-class kids, middle-class children live in an academically enriched environment the closely resembles school culture, preparing them even before they enter school. By the age of five, middle-class kids know several thousand more words than their working-class counterparts….middle-class kids enter

> kindergarten well ahead of their working-class counterparts. For many of the latter, catching up never happens and the gap is even wider by high school. (62)

Importantly, middle-class families teach their children how to ask questions and have expanded exposure to literacy and mathematics activities in the home which sets them up for better success in the classroom. This gap is often insurmountable for working-class students, who often just fall behind in elementary school, and then are placed in tracking programs when they get to middle school that limit their prospects.

Tracking and Testing

Tracking, or sorting students into different educational paths is common in the United States and is often referred to as "second-generation segregation" (Leonardo and Grubb 75). Tracking can manifest in a few different ways: within-school tracking, among-school tracking, and tracking due to residential segregation (Leonardo and Grubb 75). While many argue that tracking is a beneficial practice to high-achieving students, it can also negatively impact a student's education if they are placed into a track based on class, race, and/or gender stereotypes.

The most common form of tracking is within-school tracking, where students in the same school are placed into tracks based on their perceived ability, which is based on

> Objective as well as subjective reasoning—test scores on the one hand, teachers' racialized perceptions of students on the other. In the past, the most common form of tracking in high schools has been based on presumed occupations, where college-bound students in the academic or "honors" track are separated from those in a "general" track of watered-down academic offerings, or from other students allocated to vocational tracks of some sort. These include retail and wholesale trade, agriculture, home economics for

> girls, industrial or technical education largely for boys, and other large occupational groupings. (Leonardo and Grubb 76)

These tracks, often set around middle school, define a student's education level until college. In my school, I was in the 'more intensive' track, aptly labeled 'College Prep,' thus sorting our entire grade into those destined for higher education and those who will not reach that level. These determinations were not made in consultation with parents or students. As I witnessed myself, this kind of sorting can lead to internalized attitudes about oneself, and often separates students out who would benefit from being in a classroom with students with expanded codes. Educational resources and the more experienced and better credentialed teachers are also usually given to the 'higher' tracks with the more 'promising' students.

Among-school and among-district tracking is similar to within-school tracking, but it sorts students into different specialized schools like vocational schools, charter schools, and college preparatory academies. This is more common in metropolitan areas where there are a lot of students, and where it is more likely that people live in racially segregated communities.

> In the United States, a common form of racial segregation exists between central cities and their suburbs, with central cities and inner suburbs predominantly lower-income, African American, and Latino; while outer suburbs are predominantly white and middle class. The causes of racial segregation are many and varied. They include economic segregation, in which only upper-income families can afford housing in certain high-cost communities; zoning, in which some communities place limits on the number of moderate-income housing units; redlining, in which banks refuse to lend in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods; and the location of publicly subsidized housing. But whatever the mechanism for racial and economic segregation, the end result is the

> separation of different classes and races into different communities. (Leonardo and Grubb 82)

Tracking maintains hierarchical structures between classes and races, also shored up by standardized testing.

Testing can also heighten and create class and racial divisions. Testing in U.S. Schools originated from a very Capitalist mindset – the 'efficiency movement' (or Taylorism) of the early 1900s, which scrutinized inputs and outputs in businesses.

> Schools began to mimic Taylorism in every way they could, including the measurement of inputs and outputs as if schools followed a factory model of production with raw materials (uneducated students) transformed into finished products (students with greater knowledge) through a production process. (Leonardo and Grubb 123)

Testing was treated as the easiest way to 'scientifically' measure whether a classroom was operating at its least 'wasteful' in terms of resources. As Leonardo and Grubb point out, testing is not as simple and scientific as it looks, and it can exacerbate racial and class differences present in an educational environment: "In test after test, low-income, Black, Latino, and recent immigrant students score worse than middle-class and White (and often Asian-American) students, and the tests reveal racial and ethnic gaps that appear to be relatively fixed" (131). However, the issues remain unfixed, and the stereotypes persist and become self-fulfilling prophecies. Additionally, test-based accountability can 'exacerbate' these issues (131).

Accountability systems, where schools, districts, or teachers are held accountable in some way for their student success or failures on tests, became popular in the 1980s and 90s, before becoming a national headline in 2001 with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). This act put in place a federal accountability system in place of the individual state accountability systems

that preceded it. In theory, the act was designed to create more equity in classrooms across the United States; instead, it put in place a punitive system where schools and teachers were punished for systems of inequality outside of their realm of control, and ultimately fed more money into White, middle-class schools (135). NCLB has also led to "teaching to the test" approaches to education, which favor repetition and drills of material instead of a more conceptual approach to learning, which limits the amount of applicable education in schools (136). Mary McAvoy, theatre scholar and former K-12 teacher, shared her experience with NCLB:

> Quarterly, spreadsheets of our third-and-fifth-grade students' practice test scores were displayed on the overhead projector during staff meetings. Teachers were openly scrutinized for student performance under the guise of supporting student achievement, and we all perpetually worried that our school would finally bump up against our federally mandated achievement targets, and we would be taken over by the state. (237)

When NCLB was passed in 2001, states were allowed to set their own standards, which led to the lowering of standards year after year to make sure as many students as possible could reach them. NCLB expired in 2007, and was replace by a new reform initiative, Race to the Top (RTTT). Whereas NCLB used disciplinary measures to achieve student success, RTTT was more geared toward rewarding schools who adapted the use of "high-quality classroom practices already in tested in the nation's best school systems" (McAvoy 238). RTTT "offered states a chance to win hundreds of millions of dollars if they evaluated teachers by the test scores of their students, closed or shook-up schools with low test scores, increased the number of privately managed charter schools, and adopted the Common Core State Standards" (Ravitch).

The Common Core State Standards, often referred to as just the "Common Core," were developed in 2009/2010 to address the variability in education standards between states. Developed by two non-profits- the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governor's Association- the standards were adopted by 46 states at one point (Nelson). The Common Core standards still use standardized testing to measure student academic success, and by many accounts has not worked in changing America's place in the international landscape (Ravitch). As of 2022, only 36 states still use the Common Core standards.

Education and TYA Today

As much as the TYA field would like to think we are a separate entity from the education system and the schools, I think it is much more fruitful to identify the ways in which the problems from education have seeped into the operations of our field.

In her article "TYA as Cultural Production: Aesthetics, Meaning, and Material Conditions," Manon van de Water applies Ric Knowles' theory of cultural production to the theatre for young audiences field:

> Performances are part of a semiotic process between the performers, the performed, and the audience. In the late 1970s and 1980s it was widely recognized that the theatrical event relied on three crucial factors: the larger social and theatrical contexts within which performances occur, the semiology of audience response, and the relationship between the theatre and the life it represents (Knowles 16-17, qtd. in van de Water 19)."

Here we are focusing on one part of Knowles' factors: the larger social context of education at play in the United States and how it influences the conditions of production, the performance text, and the conditions of reception (van de Water 19). Using Knowles' theories, we understand theatre production and reception to not stand alone as independent and untouchable entities, but

as a set of malleable and fluid choices tied to the social and historical moment that it is produced. And because it's mandatory for children to attend or receive some level of schooling, the education system plays a large part in that historical and social framing.

A few TYA scholars and artists have written about the tension between TYA for aesthetic purposes and TYA for educational purposes. As Maria Ines Falconi writes in her 2015 article "Theatre for Children: Art or Pedagogy":

> In theatre for young audiences, it is difficult for us to understand theatre as an independent artistic work - that is, where the creator freely relates to the viewer, with no ulterior motive other than communication, understood as the transmission of emotions, thoughts, and aesthetic values. Rather, when we speak of theatre for children and youth, we are convinced that ulterior motives not only exist, but rather are "mandatory." We MUST have a message, we MUST have a lesson, we MUST teach, we MUST, in the end, establish from the stage what is good and what is bad. We consider the child and the teenager as "incomplete" viewers; they are "developing" viewers. In this way, the theatrical work distances itself from art and draws closer and closer to pedagogy. (159)

Matt Omasta, in his 2009 article "The TYA Contract: A Social Contractarian Approach to Obligations Between Theatre for Young Audiences and Their Constituents" posits that "a primary role contemporary American [U.S.] TYA companies play is that of the pedagogue" (107). Omasta's article explores theatre for young audiences through the lens of social contract theory, looking at the "normally implicit yet mutually understood agreements" between theatres and their constituents" (103). Omasta convincingly argues the main agreement between TYA companies and their constituents is the expectation that this kind of theatre will educate children in one of three ways: first is teaching "Theatre: How to create and appreciate the live performing

art;" second is educating audience members about "Social Issues and Diversity: Citizenship, social justice, and respect for a plurality of people and cultures;" and finally, "Traditional Curriculum: Reading, R-iting, and R-ithmatic" (107). Theatre that falls outside of education in one of these three ways then violates the unspoken contract. Omasta points out that the balance between the Contract's parties is unequal; schools hold more financial power than theatre companies, and in turn they both hold more than the young audiences they target as audience members (105). In addition to playing the role of the pedagogue, Omasta argues that companies must also "construct childhood in a manner that aligns with the paradigms of the dominant class" (114), which often falls into a 'mandated universalized identity for children [that] constructs young people as imaginative" but not necessarily as "critical thinkers" (111). Omasta points out the issue with this universalization of childhood, as it "posits a white, middle-class, heteronormative reality" (111). In my view, these contracts that we enter into with schools are written with upholding American capitalism and its ideology in mind.

As touched on earlier in the chapter, the field of theatre for young audiences in the United States has always chosen to align itself with the education system and continues to do so today. While there was commercially-driven TYA in the United States before the Junior League and the early 1900's, the 'field' has defined the beginning point of its narrative to be these educational theatre endeavors. We hold up educational theatre experts as the icons in the field (Winifred Ward, Constance D'Arcy McKay), and the research that fills our journals is overwhelmingly about theatre as an educational tool (i.e., *Youth Theatre Journal*). As van de Water writes, "it can be argued that the marginalization of theatre for young audiences is not so much a product of the lack of growth and maturity in the field, but rather of the narrative construct of its history, that with its ideological and aesthetically destructive discourse emphasizes an ontological

relationship between children, education, and 'appropriate entertainment'" ("Constructed" 105). As a field, we have actively chosen to be a part of the education system in the United States, either through unspoken contracts or through our own historiography.

If we are tying the success of our entire field to the education system, we must acknowledge that we are also beholden to the myriad of marginalizations that happen due to educational policy. As the education system and schools now function as the main Ideological State Apparatus, as Althusser states, then theatre functions as part of the cultural ISA, which encompasses all literature and arts that work to shore up the ideology of the state. The various ISAs work in tandem to teach American Capitalist ideology to citizens, and that can manifest in multiple aspects of our theatre for young audiences practices. In subsequent chapters we will look at how our ideology affects the production process and how companies market their services to consumers. For now, we will look at two phenomena in the United States TYA directly related to our relationship with the education system: education departments and season selection.

I want to preface this section of the chapter by stating that my production experience with TYA has been mostly limited to acting in touring University productions at my undergraduate and graduate institutions, as a director and costume designer for a summer arts camp, and as a graduate assistant for a large TYA play development festival. All of these experiences have happened in the Midwest region of the United States, with the exception of the play festival, which takes place in Washington, D.C. While I feel like I have a wide range of experiences to draw from in terms of production experience, my statements about what I have personally observed may only reflect one region of U.S. TYA.

Education Departments & Classes

To me, the most obvious phenomenon that can be connected to the connection of TYA and education is the existence and power of education departments at theatre companies. Children's theatres almost always have an education department, and many times the education department employs more people than the production side. In the United States, most audience members are introduced to theatres for young audiences through their class offerings, not their productions. As Omasta describes in his article, in the eyes of the community, education is seen as the main aim of these companies ("Contract"). This can be a hard expectation to overcome, especially in a country that does not fund theatre productions at the national level. "Part of the problem of theatre for young audiences' persistently marginalized status is that it often needs to commodify the mythical notion of its educational and social significance, in order to legitimize its right of existence and obtain the necessary funds. Even "adult" professional theatres find it useful to stress their educational outreach component and connections with schools and social institutions when applying for funds (van de Water, "Constructed Narratives" 107)." In my experience observing TYA companies, most of their messaging to the community is about the education of their audiences, versus any kind of artistic enrichment or aesthetic value.

I believe the focus on classes and productions as education materials is an attempt to legitimize TYA and children's theatres as an important part of the community. Because theatre does not reliably receive national funding as a cultural institution in the United States, TYA in the United States has consistently had to tie itself to the education system, a system seen as "more essential" in this country (though also undervalued by society). This dynamic has been strengthened in 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic has shuttered theatres from holding traditional

performances, but education programs at theatres have continued to operate, as parents seek activities for their children to participate in, even if it is an embodied practice on Zoom.

Unfortunately, these offerings, whether in-person or virtual, usually only benefit middle class households (and in turn, children with expanded codes). Classes offered by theatres usually cost a pretty penny, and theatres can only afford to offer so many scholarships. Additionally, students from working-class backgrounds and families are less likely to sign up or even know about these classes, as involvement in formal training for performing arts is usually reserved for the middle and upper classes. As I write this, the COVID-19 pandemic has furthered this divide, creating even more barriers to low-income and marginalized populations. Access to technology has emerged as a major issue in the enrollment of some children in these education classes, and an increase in families with less expendable money as many now rely on unemployment.

Season Choice (Theatre Curriculum)

Every theatre for young audiences production I've been involved with has asked the question: "How do we sell this to schools?" This question usually leads to a discussion about how to sell the production to the teachers, principal, or PTA who have precious little money (and time) to give away. How do we make a production worthwhile enough to teachers that they bring their students? This is a question unique to shows billed as theatre for young audiences, as the schools make up a large part of our audience. As Omasta states: "making curricular connections can lead to significant increases in both contributed and earned income" ("Contract" 110). While theatres technically and financially operate apart from schools, without school audiences and education programs, most TYA companies would fold due to lack of financial support. This reliance on the schools for operational funds leads to play choices that can have a negative impact on progress for marginalized voices in the field.

Due to funding restrictions in education, teachers are more likely to book a tour or take their students to see shows that have some connection to the curriculum in the classroom: “From the point of view of the teacher, for example, it is understandable that they choose works that simplify their task or works that do not force them to address issues for which they have no answer. It is even understandable that they look to the theatre to help address subjects that should be taught in the classroom. For the teacher, the theatre is typically not an end in and of itself, but rather just a tool to facilitate their work” (Falconi 159). This is due in large part to the focus placed on teachers over the last few decades to ‘teach to the test’: “schools are in fact seeing field trips and assemblies more and more as distractions from that which they are accountable: tests (Bedard, “Negotiating” 9). This in turn encourages companies to select pieces that can easily connect to education standards to help them sell to schools. “The revenue generated by touring to schools justifies the efforts of education directors to include department of education content standards in their show’s teacher resource packets” (Omasta, “Contract” 110). These resource packets, along with “backstage tours, post-show question and answer sessions, and subsequent classroom visits from the artists” help in “demonstrating the educational validity of a theatre production” (Hanson 199). It is financially beneficial for companies to perform shows based on existing material, and due to the lack of federal funding for theatres, it’s unlikely to change dramatically anytime soon. “For now, though, the Contract is more concerned with mutual benefit than with egalitarianism” (Omasta, “Contract” 112). Theatre companies are more likely to benefit financially from performing pieces based on recognizable titles and stories.

According to a 2019 study conducted by The Center for Scholars and Storytellers at UCLA in partnership with TYA/USA, 74% of works produced in the 2018/2019 season were based on existing intellectual property, and only 26% were original narratives (Ruggiero and

Uhls 6). Looking at titles that were performed three or more times, 90% of those titles were adapted titles (Ruggiero and Uhls 16). The same study found that original content productions "had the most diverse and equitable landscape in terms of both gender and race (Ruggiero and Uhls 6)." The study's authors said it best: "When the theatre industry provides space to create original work, a more diverse and equitable landscape is created, as opposed to when the industry relies on existing source material" (Ruggiero and Uhls 18). The study does not draw many conclusions about why most of the works produced were based on existing works, but I strongly believe it is connected to the Contract Omasta wrote about in his article, where TYA is often seen to play the part of the pedagogue ("Contract").

Taking on the role of the pedagogue does not allow companies to teach whatever they want. Constituents expect that companies will teach 'appropriate' material, which usually reflects a middle-class sensibility. While most theatre artists in our field (certainly the ones that I have interacted with) have a strong desire to use their work to explore diverse social issues and create stories that represent different child representations, the Social Contract that companies have with their community and their constituents limits the amount and type of progressive work that can be done. This of course varies from location to location, and theatres have various levels of flexibility in this sense depending on what role they play in their community. While curriculum has started to reflect the myriad of cultures and identities present in the United States, the 'cultural arbitrary' is still the white middle-class, and that is reflected in the choice of plays performed.

Looking Forward

If we accept ourselves as a tool of education, then we accept that we are part of a larger system that is currently not fair and equitable at all. From my time in the field getting to know

the people who do this work day in and day out, I know there is nothing more TYA artists want than to provide a fair and equitable experience for students, both in the classroom and in the theatre. Identifying issues within ourselves is never an easy journey, but I believe identifying and accepting the connection between these institutions will produce a more fruitful conversation regarding our dependence on school audiences and in-house education programs, and how we can achieve a more equitable environment.

Unsurprisingly, I believe there is only so much we can do beyond the conversation until we run up against the wall that is American Capitalism and its ideology. In countries with a more socialist economic system, or at least provide regular funding for cultural institutions, theatre for young audiences can be more progressive in the kind of work it presents. In the Netherlands, theatre for young audiences does not focus on how it can be connected to education, but rather as a standalone art that can be a medium for societal change, although school audiences do play an important role. Manon van de Water writes in *Theatre, Youth, and Culture* that:

> Theatre for youth in the Netherlands, albeit rooted in a similar traditional construct as in the United States…has been for the past few decades at the forefront of experimental theatre in form and content. In this theatre, the 'story' proper is not necessarily the most compelling element, but rather the thought, image, or association. Likewise, there is not always a 'natural' or 'consistent' development of dramatic action from the characters and their situations. Rejecting linear structure, and following instead the 'logic' of the emotion, association, and the unconscious, Dutch theatre for children and youth gives a sense of agency to the spectator in that each can make up their own particular story, association, and interpretation, rather than claiming a priori notions of ethical universality. (30)

Dutch TYA has not been historically positioned as inherently educational in nature, which means that Dutch "TYA was able to develop into a highly sophisticated art form, not in the least because of the comparatively generous funding situation and limited ideological constraints" (van de Water, *Theatre, Youth, and Culture* 30). This theatre stands as a testament to the kind of work that can be developed without the pedagogical expectations we have in the United States.

Like van de Water and Bedard before me, I think we need to be more critical of the history and historiography of our field. It is not a predestined outcome that we have such a close connection to education, and exploring the possibilities of what things could look like if we weren't reliant on funding from schools for our existence. We need to be okay with diverting our own history, and really talking about the issues of representation and motivations of TYA icons throughout our history, and act on that. Right now, it feels like we aren't examining at a high enough level the whiteness and classism of our history, and how it has been excused throughout the years as just "how it was." We need to remember that the drama practices we hold up as the beginnings of our field were explicitly designed to be in opposition to the 'commercial' theatre of the time (a.k.a theatre used to gain money in a capitalist society), or to assimilate immigrant children into American culture. These early 'pioneers' used the trappings of education as a way to expand white supremacy, even if this was not their goal. The continual unexamined exaltation of these figures only contributes to this unintended goal. Rather, theatre could be used to raise difficult but pertinent questions regarding race, class, and marginalization and open up a way for discussing these questions.

Engaging with our connection to education can also open up areas of research that move us forward as a field. I think an interesting question that arises from this relationship is how difference manifests in the dynamic between expanded and limited codes in our audiences. If we

aren't teaching students with limited codes how to question their education like those with expanded codes, then we are missing out on those children being able to consume art in a meaningful way. We talk a lot about art and theatre being a venue for students to think critically about the world around them, but I've never seen any theatre reckon with this kind of code gap between classes, making me think that attending the theatre and being asked about it after is probably just another opportunity for working-class children to feel behind, as they are less likely to ask questions or connect the piece to something in their life. (This could possibly be approached with a theatre criticism workshop – like a pre-show activity, but more geared towards teaching the audience member that it's okay to ask questions, and that not everyone is going to have the same opinion about something). It would be interesting to study further how the dynamics of expanded codes and limited codes manifests in who gets involved in the performing arts early on, and who succeeds in creating through art. This is potentially a good area of interest for those who study Theatre for the Very Young, as these codes are formed early and can have a huge impact on a person's life.

Another dynamic I did not fully explore in this chapter is how text-centered theatre for young audiences is in the United States due to the connection with education in the U.S. This is related to how the schools view TYA and the contract made between them and companies; they see theatre as a means to communicate and educate already existing academic curricula. This focus on text as the dominant aspect of United States TYA is also due to the alignment of the TYA field to the larger field of American Theatre, which is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: Issues Associated with TYA's Relationship to the larger American Theatre

"Theatre folk often pick up the ball—we see a ball is dropped and so we pick it up—but maybe we don't have the time to identify why the ball dropped."

-Kit Ingui, Managing Director of Long Wharf Theatre

The field of Theatre for Young Audiences lives a strange existence in the United States. In many ways, the field operates as an independent entity from the larger theatre ecosystem. We in the field refer to theatre for young audiences in relation to 'regular' theatre, contributing to the idea that TYA exists as an Other to 'normal' theatre. On the other hand, theatre for young audiences is a part of the 'American Theatre', as it is defined by the same parameters and ideology as its 'adult' counterpart. This tension created by being the 'theatre-but-not-theatre' mentioned by Bedard that places our field in between 'real' theatre and the education system creates some odd roadblocks and challenges for TYA practitioners and scholars alike (Bedard "Negotiating" 91). In this chapter I will look at the issues created by theatre for young audiences being viewed as a subfield of the larger theatre culture in the United States. This includes looking at theatrical training and education in the United States, as well as issues present in professional practice.

As I will argue in this chapter, the drive towards professionalization in theatre for young audiences in the United States ties the field to the capitalist ideology and hierarchical power structures present in the greater American Theatre ecosystem. Because larger theatre is tied to the 'free market' of capitalism, I believe that the process frequently upholds racist, classist ideas that bolster the cultural hegemony of the ruling class. Like many facets of our culture, the aspects

of our field might not come off as blatantly racist or classist acts, but they build up over time and together create an environment that is the antithesis of the field's goals. This chapter will look at:

1. Commitment to Order-Maintaining Narratives on Stage and in Criticism
2. Issues of Inequality in Theatre Education and Training
3. Commitment to Hierarchical Power Structures in Theatre Practice

These three areas cover many of the issues that I see regarding TYA's relationship to the larger American Theatre scene. First, we must explore and establish TYA's position in American culture, and why it is hard to shift public perception of the field.

TYA as a Subfield of Theatre

As mentioned before, theatre for young audiences in the United States occupies a unique position in the creation and reinforcement of ideology among citizens. It is both considered education and cultural, two distinct ideological state apparatuses, as defined by Althusser. This chapter will explore where TYA fits into the larger cultural environment in the United States.

I wrote in my chapter on Education that theatre for young audiences was formed as the moral opposite of commercial theatre. The goal was education, perhaps entertainment, but NOT performing for money, which was seen as unseemly. In the decades following the Junior League's theatre programs in settlement houses, TYA practitioners and scholars consistently framed the field as different from other theatre in the United States by reiterating the centrality of education and morality in theatre for young audiences. As Manon van de Water explores in her article "Constructed Narratives,"

> …theatre with and for children was soon associated with educational objectives, in addition to its primarily amateur status. These objectives and the notion of 'appropriateness' of theatre for and by children created new aesthetic criteria that did not

> necessarily reflect the aesthetic development…of its adult counterpart. An increased need was felt to define this phenomenon aesthetically. (103)

Van de Water goes on to explain how theatre makers and educators established their separation from professional 'adult' theatre:

> In 1915, Constance D'Arcy Mackay…published How to Produce Children's Plays… [in which] Mackay weaves the history of children's theatre into the narrative of appropriateness, closely tied to educational values - both in form and content. (103)

Mackay's conception of the field influenced later theatre makers and writers, like Winifred Ward, whose 1939 Theatre for Children, advances the idea again that children's theatre should be 'amateur' in nature, and Nellie McCaslin, whose 1971 history of the field reiterates these same values by saying that "children's theatre is historically situated 'outside and independent of the adult professional theatre (qtd. In *Theatre, Youth, and Culture* 11). Van de Water characterizes this phenomenon as "traditional positivism in a narrative of progress" that effectively marginalized U.S. TYA from the 'regular' theatre (*Theatre, Youth, and Culture* 11).

While theatre for young audiences as a field positioned itself against the 'adult' American theatre for decades, defining TYA in the United States now as anything other than high-quality and professional would be a mistake. Much of the TYA work being produced now is at the same level of artistic merit as anything labeled as "adult" theatre. This shift from defining the field as amateur to embracing professionalization marks a significant change in the field, with as many drawbacks as benefits. The move towards professionalization seems to parallel the shift 'adult' theatre had after the first World War and the Great Depression, when American Theatre became less about Vaudeville and spectacle, and more about serious, realistic plays that dealt with real social issues (Savran 105-106). The impact of films on larger society also helped acting to no

longer be seen as a seedy profession to the general public by the middle of the 20th century. Professional is no longer a dirty word - in fact, it is now the ideal - and being labeled as 'amateur' now is one of the worst things a theatre production could be called. Today, theatre for young audiences in the United States has its own ecosystem of artists that create in many of the same ways that 'regular' theatre does. Still, TYA does not garner the same amount of attention as the larger theatre scene.

In *Theatre, Youth, and Culture*, Manon van de Water theorizes that this marginalization is connected to Bourdieu's theory about the relationship between the cultural field and the 'field of power', "where economic and political capital is situated."

> The cultural field is situated within the field of power because of its symbolic capital that conveys information about the codes associated with economic classes, but it is outside of dominant fields of power because of its low economic capital. If we place theatre within the cultural field, and we posit TYA as a subfield of 'adult' theatre, then the hierarchical construct and the lack of agency of the child audience both in producing cultural products and in appreciating cultural products and reading its 'codes' is theoretically explained. Add to that the notion of *belief* in the art work as an art work, and thus subservient to and less valuable than larger fields of power like the economy, and we can theorize that one of the reasons TYA is marginalized in many cultures is because of this three-pronged lack of belief in TYA as art, the lack of agency of the child audience, and the notion of children as incapable of actively contributing to societal production and change. (44)

This marginalization of TYA is shored up by the narratives presented in contemporary TYA, as well as the lack of scholarship and recognition TYA receives from the general Theatre field.

Commitment to Order-Maintaining Narratives on Stage and in Criticism

There is a strong commitment from the "regular" theatre ecosystem to keep theatre for young audiences separate from 'adult' theatre. You also never see any theatre for young audiences productions nominated for Tony™ Awards (with the notable exception of *A Year with Frog and Toad*, which originated at the Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis before transferring to Broadway in 2002). Many outside of the TYA field still view theatre for young audiences as 'less than' "regular" theatre. This is characterized by the general lack of critical response to TYA, the lack of scholarly coverage in the major American publications (such as *Theatre Journal* or *American Theatre*), and the absence of any designated theatre for young audience productions from the major award ceremonies. It just isn't even part of the conversation. To borrow from linguistic studies, theatre for young audiences operates as the 'marked' in contrast to the 'unmarked' 'regular' theatre, and this status relegates TYA to the diminutive position of the larger theatre scene. However, many of the accepted practices and institutional structures of theatre for young audience companies mimic the practices and structures of "regular" theatre, so that perception is the outstanding factor in play.
This perception of TYA as 'different' from regular 'adult' theatre is fueled by the view of how children function in our society.

The final of Roger Bedard's 'tensions', the perceived adult/child binary ideology is extremely influential in the United States. The current conception of childhood in the United States walks the line between viewing the child as close to nature and freer than adults, and the tendency to view children as adults-in-training who need protection and guidance (Jenkins 18-19). The idea of the child as an innocent figure in society emerged over the course of many

centuries, with a few significant shifts. Henry Jenkins tracks the origins in the introduction to *The Children's Culture Reader*:

> The idea of the child as innocent first took shape…within pedagogical literature, helping to justify a specialized body of knowledge centered on the education and inculcation of the young; this ideal rationalized the learned class' expanded role and efforts to police the culture of the young. (16)

The commitment to protecting childhood as a sacred time in a person's life in the United States solidified in the second half of the 19th century, particularly during the rapid industrialization of the Gilded Age: "The rising middle classes directed increased public pressure against child labor, placing new emphasis upon the child's sentimental value and pitting the ideal of the untarnished "child of God" (and Nature) against the horrors of working children" (Jenkins 19). The labor laws created during this time have endured and strengthened as a way to protect children.

In addition to the continued view of childhood as a protected time, children now occupy a contradictory space of being perceived as separate from adult issues and politics, while actually being the center of many political arguments:

> This dominant conception of childhood innocence presumes that children exist in a space beyond, above, outside the political; we imagine them to be noncombatants whom we protect from the harsh realities of the adult world…Yet, in reality, almost every major political battle of the twentieth century has been fought on the backs of our children, from the economic reforms of the Progressive Era…and the social readjustments of the civil rights era…to contemporary anxieties about the digital revolution. (Jenkins 2)

Children are often directly affected by these policies, yet they have no way to meaningfully contribute to those decisions.

TYA scholars and practitioners have been talking about how societal expectations for children and childhood shape the practice for a while now. Acclaimed TYA playwright Susan Zeder, when interviewed by *American Theatre* about why TYA is seen as outside or different from regular theatre, said

> The whole issue of the disparity between TYA and Theatre for Adults is related to how we view and treat children in our society as a whole. I believe this careens between misguided attempts to "protect" innocent young minds from ideas and images too advanced for their tender psyches, and the exploitation of the "youth market" for commercial purposes. Many of our preconceptions about the kinds of material considered "appropriate" for young audiences are based on adult fears and phobias and a serious underestimation of the capacity of children to deal with complex issues, deep emotions, and a worldview that is far more sophisticated than many adult gatekeepers give them credit for. Both of these societal forces have had an impact on TYA in terms of form, content, how work is made, and how it is perceived. (Halpern)

As Zeder states in the interview, our views on childhood lead to adults making decisions on what is "appropriate" for children, which in turn reifies societal views on childhood. In TYA, what gets produced is actually dependent on what the adult gatekeepers determine to be "appropriate" at any given time. Ideas about "appropriateness" are a recurring problem in the creation and dissemination of theatre for young audience plays in the United States. There is no fast and hard definition of what counts as appropriate in society, and the parameters shift constantly depending on the surrounding cultural ecosystem. It can also be aggressively different by regions in the United States, a side effect of the sheer geographical expanse of this country. Even within regions and states, there can be drastic differences in what is acceptable to the adult gatekeepers.

In my first chapter on capitalism, I briefly talked about the kind of stories presented on stage from a commercialism/citizenship standpoint. On an even simpler plane than those ideas, popular TYA reinforces the expected adult/child relationship through the stories presented on stage. More than just shoring up the position of children in society as figures that need to be protected, TYA teaches audiences ideas of discipline in a multitude of ways:

> Control enacted upon child characters may create an expectation for and acceptance of institutional and relational control…In addition, the children in the audience experience similar control exercised over them as the colonized imaginary is built; they are granted only certain knowledge from certain perspectives while watching the play, and their bodies are being disciplined as they are required to sit quietly in theatre seats. Essentially, they are trapped: They cannot leave (assuming they have been taught social conventions around respecting the actors or simply admonished not to speak during the performance), nor can they (usually) change seats or distract themselves with food or drink. (Chappell 11-12)

Even though adult audience members are also trained to be 'docile' in this way, children usually have less agency in their theatrical participation.

With the differences of perception and audience experience cast aside, the logistics of creating professional theatre for young audiences is largely the same as regular 'adult' theatre. The playwrights, directors, designers, and actors involved in the creation of TYA often work in 'regular' theatre as well. The next sections will reference American Theatre as a field. While the field is not a monolith, I will be talking about common issues that come up during the education of theater artists and their subsequent careers.

Issues of Inequality in Theatre Education and Training

Like many things viewed as non-essential, arts education is usually reserved for those with financial resources. While many educators and parents have advocated for increasing the level of arts education in public education, many districts have to cut these programs when their budgets do not meet their expenses. With the shift towards standardized education in the United States, the emphasis in elementary and secondary education is towards succeeding on these tests which in turn can increase their financial support. This leaves many students without access to education in the performing arts, shifting arts education from a public good to a private commodity to be bought.

This privatization of arts education is closely aligned with the privatization of education (discussed in chapter 2) and other previously public goods. With the turn towards neoliberalism in the final decades of the 20th century, funding for government-backed art was slashed in the United States, and this had an outsized effect on marginalized populations. Between 1982 and 2008, access to arts education in schools remained relatively stable for White populations, but drastically declined for African-American and Hispanic populations (Rabkin and Hedberg 16) (see Appendix B). By 2008, "African-American and Hispanic students had less than half of the access to arts education than their White peers ("Arts Education Navigator" 21).

The uneven access to performing arts training starts young with classes at theatres, which cost money and/or an understanding of how to apply for scholarships. Classes at the Children's Theatre of Madison, where I briefly taught, costs on average $120 for a 6–8-week class that meets one hour a week. This price is very fair for the service CTM is providing, but it is out of reach for many children and their families. Without access to arts education in schools,

especially theatre classes, the only way students can get this kind of education is through a private company.

Financially privileged students have access to these classes in addition to any private music lessons or dance classes. They can also afford to attend summer camps and intensives that provide them with the tools and connections to have a shot at a career in the performing arts. The summer camp that I work at, Interlochen Arts Camp in Northern Michigan, costs anywhere from $1,675 for a one-week Intensive program, to $9,950 for a 6-week program[8]. While Interlochen does offer Need-Based Scholarships, it requires a separate application that requires uploading tax forms and only students in a program longer than two weeks can apply ("Tuition & Financial Aid"). The path to professionalization in the field (earning a sustainable, living wage only within the artistic field) is often bought in these classes and camps. These classes are not a guarantee that a person will succeed in their chosen field, but it can give a leg up in terms of teaching "professionalism" also known as "how to act" which can automatically earn you preferential treatment in competitive theatre spaces (like auditions).

The richest students have access to arts boarding schools, where they form networks consisting of teachers with professional connections, and with other privileged students. Looking again at Interlochen, their academic year boarding school costs $70,950 a year, or $40,175 for local students who do not require housing[9]. Interlochen does offer Merit scholarships, which they say range from $2,500-$15,000 in addition to need-based scholarships, but average amounts are not listed on their website. Some exceptionally talented and savvy students and families may be able to access these schools with scholarships, but that entry fee isn't the only cost involved with

[8] 2022 Summer Tuition Costs. https://www.interlochen.org/summer-camp/admission/tuition-and-financial-aid
[9] 2022 Academy Tuition Costs. https://www.interlochen.org/arts-boarding-school/tuition-and-financial-aid

sending a child to boarding school. Even with a full tuition and housing scholarship, students are usually still on the hook for the materials of a performing artist (special clothing, recording devices, shoes, etc.). While the school may have a program for covering these items, there is an emotional labor in having to ask for these 'favors.'

After high school, students looking to make a career in the arts face another financial roadblock: college tuition. In theatre performance especially, there are a few "prestigious" schools where everyone wants to go: Carnegie Mellon University, New York University's Tisch School for the Arts, and the University of Michigan are a few examples. These schools are exclusive, in that they require multiple rounds of auditions and callbacks, and usually cost more than a "less prestigious" school. The education at these schools is not necessarily better than other colleges and universities, but the networks that have been created by alumni and the faculty can provide insider knowledge and connections that can help their students achieve the elusive 'success' in American Theatre.

For many students without financial resources or families with no background in the arts, the knowledge of these programs and the audition process is not readily accessible information. Personally, I am a first-generation college student who grew up in a family that was not involved in the arts at all. I was exposed to music and theatre in my public school (I luckily grew up in a wealthy school district that had not cut art programs) and had teachers that went out of their way to help me pursue opportunities outside of school. My junior high and high school choir and show choir director personally funded half of my camp fees for Showchoir Camps of America one year and helped me find a ride to the camp in Ohio, as my parents could not afford the gas for the 5-hour trip. Even with that help from my choir director, I was still behind others I knew who could afford private voice lessons and longer arts camps like Interlochen. While I was

interested in musical theatre and had experience with singing and acting at school, my lack of experience with dance was clearly going to hold me back. There were no dance offerings at my public school, so when I was in high school I saved my earnings from my summer job to pay for one class at a local studio. Entering a dance studio as a 17-year-old is almost an act of futility, as many of the students had been dancing their entire lives. I was behind in my knowledge of technique, and I quickly realized the money I saved to pay for the classes was not enough to cover the materials needed to participate (shoes, leotards, costumes, etc.). I dropped out after 3 months.

This effectively ended my hopes to go into musical theatre - many musical theatre programs have a pre-screening process that requires a dance audition on video, which is then used to cull the auditionees down to a manageable amount. It is very understandable why this is done, as musical theatre requires a high proficiency in dance; the issue here is that formal dance education is an extremely classed activity in the United States, therefore limiting access to higher education in the area to those whose families could provide them with the training.

Even getting to a point where students want to study the arts in college is difficult. Students choose not to formally study theatre in college due to the potential lack of earnings compared to other majors. Personally, I did not pursue a degree in theatre at the start of my college career, as I did not think it would be “worth it” financially compared to the other areas I was interested in. Students who come from less financially stable backgrounds are more likely to choose a field where a living wage can be made, as they have no safety net in place, and cannot get a footing in a profession that requires years of unpaid internships or benefit-less jobs before finding any kind of stability.

American Actor Training

If a student does choose to study theatre in college or graduate school, they are usually held to standards put in place by white (and often male) theatre artists of the past. American universities and conservatories usually teach some derivative of Stanislavskian acting technique. Konstantin Stanislavski (b. 1863- d. 1938) was a Russian acting theorist and teacher who is developed the first system of actor training (Hodge xviii). His approach to actor training emphasized trying to achieve a "creative state" rather than an "actor's state", meaning that actors should aim for experiencing the action of the play on stage instead of worrying about trying to recreate on stage (Stanislavski 262). Stanislavski strived to establish a set of steps that actors could follow to achieve this outcome of living the part onstage; "experiencing becomes the means by which he turns his System into a theory of artistic creation and a practical way to distinguish actor as artist from actor as entertainer" (Carnicke, 129).

Actor training in the United States now pulls from four of Stanislavski's 'descendants' - Sanford Meisner, Stella Adler, and Lee Strasberg, who were all members of The Group Theatre in New York City in the 1930's, and Uta Hagen, who trained with members from The Group Theatre. These four acting teachers filtered Stanislavski's works through their own ideas of what made a great actor to create an American acting style colloquially referred to under the umbrella of "Method" acting. Although their approaches and emphases vary widely, Stanislavski's idea of experiencing a role carries through these acting methods.

Many theatre programs are situated around the idea of cultivating 'talent' within these acting methods, although there has been plenty of scholarship questioning the methods of teaching and assessing 'talent' within the American Method. Rosemary Malague writes about her own training in *An Actress Prepares: Women and "The Method":*

> The training was a struggle; it was at best demanding, at worst demoralizing and demeaning…The woman who offered herself as a victim or sexual object was the most marketable actress…the successful men in those classes also conformed to a model…Just as the women of the class were rewarded for their figures and fragility, so were the men rewarded for their muscles and masculinity. (5)

Even though my undergraduate acting training took place approximately three decades after Malague's, this dynamic was unfortunately still alive and well in my acting classes. The actors who were praised (and cast in large roles) were usually those who performed along traditional gender and ability lines. Additionally, the American Method of actor training centers a Eurocentric point of view, alienating cultural specificity from non-White actors:

> …most acting classes in the United States of America operate within a Eurocentric theoretical framework of performance, while ushering actors through the exploration of emotionality and embodied renaissances. Often times, in the majority of U.S. acting classrooms, just like in other subject areas, Whiteness overtly and covertly pervades the texts and linguistic structures, and those who do not share a White lineage or hue are de-centered, misaligned, and exiled from a theatre history that they rightfully co-constructed. (Luckett and Shaffer 1)

While there are certainly acting teachers who take a more inclusive approach to their pedagogy and include alternate theories and methods of actor training in their classrooms, many programs still exclusively teach Western acting styles.

Undergraduate theatre training usually focuses on only the production element of theatre, usually completely divorced from historical or theoretical analysis: "The assumption behind such a curriculum is that the most important thing in theatre is talent, that is, natural skill or aptitude

that will be refined through training…often understood as something innate" (Bonin-Rodriguez and Canning 16). While some more progressive programs (like University of Texas-Austin's Performance as Public Practice B.A. degree) have moved away from the talent-based model, many schools still employ this ethos for training, including my undergraduate program. Out of the issues present in this subjective kind of education, I will focus on two that have stayed with me: the idea of an "actor neutral" stance, and the related idea of "professionalism" in educational settings, both which emphasize an ideal of 'control'.

As a performer, I have had multiple acting teachers talk about the state of physical being that is "actor neutral". Often this term is used to describe a stance that is ready to take on a 'character', flexible and receptive to the work at hand. Carrie Sandahl, in the 2005 book *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, traces this idea of body neutrality back to the Industrial Age:

> What I want to stress in this abbreviated genealogy is that the concept of neutral emerged in the late-nineteenth-century industrial age, an age when bodies were studied and trained for efficiency, standardization, and normalcy. Words that recur in this eclectic collection of training methods include control, efficiency, balance, and symmetry. Whatever the acting style, the notion that actors' bodies should first be stripped of individuality and idiosyncrasy as a prerequisite to creating a role undergirds them all. Bodies are considered damaged physically and emotionally from the process of living, and those bodies capable of cure are suitable actors. Disabled bodies, though, cannot be cured. They may tremor, wobble, or be asymmetrical. Implicit in the various manifestations of the neutral metaphor is the assumption that a character cannot be built from a position of physical difference. The appropriate actor's body for any character, even a character that

> is literally disabled or symbolically struggling, is not only the able body, but also the extraordinarily able body. (262)

While Sandahl focuses their critique on this idea of "neutral" in relation to disabled actors, there is also underlying racism, sexism, and sizeism in this practice. Like many things in theatre and the performing arts, achieving "actor neutral" is subjective to the teacher or director instructing the actor. That person carries with them biases from their education and experiences.

As a college student, I accepted the idea of "actor neutral" as a learned state, and that the ability to be neutral enough to be "versatile" was the ultimate goal of any actor. Of course, now I know that bodies are not neutral; our bodies are continuously communicating for us. My personal battle with neutrality has always been my size. While I am right about average size for an American woman, in theatre spaces I have always taken up too much space to be deemed neutral, and have been reminded on multiple occasions of my specific 'look' and what that would mean for me if I ever tried to pursue acting as a career, with one college acting professor telling me that I "wouldn't get cast in anything until my 40s, so I might as well pursue something else." This idea of neutrality is often the stripping away of traits that make us human or trying to hide or overcome things about ourselves that we should be highlighting.

The idea of being neutral extends beyond the outwardly perceived qualities of an actor. Stella Adler, one of the teachers included as part of the American Method, extended the idea of neutrality to apply to almost every aspect of a person's life:

> I demand quiet. Get rid of everything. Get rid of the newspaper. Get rid of the pocketbook. Get rid of the lipstick. If you do, you'll find a weight has been taken off you. If you like, you can mix your dates up. You can even double-cross people on the outside. You can say you can't go to a party because ... I don't care. But you can't miss a class.

> Don't for any reason, except death, stay away from class. Don't get a cold. Don't get a backache, and don't go to your psychoanalyst. It doesn't belong in the theatre. You must have 100 percent health. You have to be healthy and know that you are. Actors don't sneeze on the stage. They don't catch pneumonia. They don't get chills. They don't itch, and their feet don't hurt them. They don't have lumbago. Nothing happens to them. Health is something you owe yourself and your profession. I've been an actress all my life and I've never had a headache. You must not give in. This must be the one area in your life that is totally controlled. (17)

Here Adler connects the (unrealistic) idea of living in a neutral state, with the demanding expectations of being 'professional' at all costs.

Another recurring theme in theatre training and production of all levels is an idea of "professionalism". Being "professional" in theatre, or any other craft or trade for that matter, is usually referring to the expectations of a work environment and relationships. The idea of 'professionalism' comes up more in the performing arts (and athletics), since these activities can be done as an unpaid hobby without compensation, so there is a real financial distinction between someone who is acting for fun and someone who is a professional actor. Teaching professionalism in collegiate level actor training when students are not financially compensated lays the groundwork for actors to be undercompensated and mistreated when they do become professionals. Instead of valuing their labor contributions as labor, they are taught that their labor is not what is being exchanged for capital, but their compliance. The idea of professionalism is used to control students into 'behaving' according to their teacher's guidelines of what that means. Since most teachers of acting have been white males historically, many of the standards that are taught and internalized as 'professional' favor white heteronormative patriarchal society.

People in my classes were lauded for being ‘versatile’, when what was actually being remarked on was their supposedly ‘neutral’ body; the unmarked traits of White, Male, Cisgendered, and Slim or Fit. Any deviation from these unmarked neutrals was a roadblock to be overcome, rather than a trait that added to our value.

Commitment to Hierarchical Power Structures in Theatre Practice

Many of the practices and ideals being touted as ‘professional’ in theatre training of all levels are rooted in a commitment to hierarchical structures and control. From who can make a living wage in theatre to who productions are designed for, this section will explore how much of theatre practice is designed to prioritize certain ‘chosen’ voices and easily dismiss voices that do not assimilate to the grand American Theatre narrative. I will first move through the traditional ‘order of operations’ for a theatrical production, and then look at production models that have subverted this order to prioritize traditionally marginalized voices. While this order of operations does not always apply to every production, the following are the typical steps from beginning to end of a production:

1. Administration chooses a piece to be workshopped or produced
2. Administration and Marketing communicate choice(s) to the public; audition calls go out
3. Administration hires production staff
4. Director establishes ‘vision’
5. Director makes vision clear to designers
6. The production is designed
7. Actors are chosen at auditions
8. Actors rehearse

9. Production

While this order of operations does not always apply to every production, this general theatre hierarchy is the main focus of this chapter. Each step of the theatre production timeline influences the others in ways that are largely unexamined by recent theatre scholarship.

For this chapter I will be drawing on data from two recent reports: first, the Asian American Performers Action Coalition (AAPAC) 2018-2019 Visibility Report: Racial Representation on NYC Stages; and secondly, the Center for Scholars and Storytellers report with TYA/USA entitled "Exploring the Landscape of Live Theatre for Young Audiences in the U.S." Both studies are numerical analyses of theatre productions: The AAPAC study focuses on the 2018-2019 theatre seasons in New York City, both from Broadway and the 18 largest non-profit theaters (Bandhu and Kim 123). The CSS and TYA/USA study analyzes the 2018-2019 season from institutions affiliated with TYA/USA, which includes 50 theatres across 26 states (Ruggiero and Uhls 8). While these studies are not representative of the United States as a whole, I think they both provide important insights about the status of American Theatre, and how the TYA field reflects the trends set by "adult" theatre.

Administration/Funding

Over the past few decades, both the theatre for young audiences' field, as well as the larger American Theatre scene, have become increasingly diversified in terms of the stories being told and the actors on stage telling those stories. However, two studies from 2019: the Asian American Performing Arts Coalition study (Bandhu and Kim), and the Center for Storytelling/TYA/USA study (Ruggiero and Uhls) highlight that that increased representation on the stage did not reflect what was happening on the administrative side of things. These studies

bring up questions about performative representation instead of true inclusion and will be a focal point during this chapter.

What voices and texts get chosen for production is determined first by those who hold the capital/labor to pay for a project. This is obviously true at the professional level, with producers and/or artistic directors making decisions about seasons, but also at the community and educational levels, where there is usually one person or a small group of people making the decisions about what audiences will see. Typically, the full-time staff members at an institution make season decisions one to two years out from performances. This decision could be a collaborative decision between the Artistic Director, Managing Director, and other executive members of a theatre, and could include input from the Board of Directors (which often includes people with little to no theatrical background, but who are influential in some way or another). In educational theatre, these choices are usually made by the theatre faculty of the university or college. Markedly missing from these conversations, however, are the theatre artists who will end up creating the work, like the actors and designers.

Even in a cultural landscape that is striving for more representation of the global majority on stage, leadership roles are predominantly held by White people. In the Asian American Performers Coalition of America's study of New York City theatre and BIPOC representation in the 2018-2019 season, the authors of the study highlight that 100% of the NYC non-profit theatres included in their survey had White Artistic Directors and 88% of Board Members were White; on the for-profit side, 93.6% of Broadway producers were White and 100% of General Managers were White (Bandhu and Kim 28-31). This is in a city where only 32.1% of the population is White, showing a very outsized representation (Bandhu and Kim 13). These leadership positions are the ones in charge of the season selection each year, as well as the hiring

and firing of directors, designers, stage managers and actors. As the AAPAC study puts it: “Our expanded leadership stats confirm that almost every gatekeeper, employer, and decision-maker in the NYC theatre industry is White. These are the industry leaders we are relying on to de-center Whiteness, to hire and promote more BIPOC artists and administrators, to decolonize the workplace, and to institute anti-racist practices?” (Bandhu and Kim 8). While there are many White theatre administrators out there who strive for a more inclusive and equitable theatre landscape, at the end of the day most people in these positions will likely fall into self-preservation mode, and ultimately uphold white supremacy in order to maintain their positions of power. Leadership positions, in addition to controlling who gets hired and what stories get told, are also the positions most likely to make a living or better wage, with benefits for health insurance, dental insurance, retirement, etc., not usually offered to theatre artists who live contract to contract and relying on union-negotiated benefits. The theatre artists involved most directly in the production, and are the most visible to the public, are often the least compensated for their labor.

This use of diverse performers on stage to cover inclusion issues off stage is not a concept exclusive to theatre. Nancy Leong, in an article for the Harvard Law Review, defines Racial Capitalism as “the process of deriving social or economic value from the racial identity of another person” (2153). Leong explains the shift between the historical value of Whiteness above all else to a culture that aims for diversity. Leong writes that:

> Historically, whiteness both allowed possession of property and itself functioned as property, while nonwhiteness was a source of value only insofar as it allowed possession of a nonwhite person as property. That is, whiteness was valued in itself, while

> nonwhiteness provided whites with justification for deriving value from another person. (2158)

Leong traces the shift from nonwhiteness as a lack of property to nonwhiteness as social capital back to the affirmative action cases of the 1960s:

> Indeed, in 1977 the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights defined affirmative action as an effort 'beyond simple termination of a discriminatory practice, adopted to correct or compensate for past or present discrimination or to prevent discrimination from recurring in the future'… The first explicit judicial endorsement of diversity as a rationale for affirmative action occurred in *Regents of the University of California V. Bakke*. There, Justice Powell's opinion…rejected several rationales for affirmative action while specifying that the educational benefits of diversity could justify some race-conscious admissions programs. (2162)

Leong writes that nowadays nonwhiteness can be seen as a commodity, with diversity being a desirable end goal. Leong contextualizes this process within the current American economic system: "In a society preoccupied with diversity, nonwhiteness is a valued commodity. And where that society is founded on capitalism, it is unsurprising that the commodity of nonwhiteness is exploited for its market value" (2154).

This phenomenon is unfortunately common in today's society; Leong's article lays out example after example of racial capitalism, including an incident at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2001, when school officials photoshopped a Black student into a recruitment image to attract more tuition-paying students (2193). The officials claimed they had a hard time finding a good image that showed diversity on campus, which means they recognized that having diversity was a good thing but realized it did not exist enough in reality. While aiming to create

more diversity at the university is a good goal, using a single Black student's identity inauthentically to gain social status is never going to produce these results. Leong writes that:

> Striving for numerical diversity, without more, results in awareness of nonwhiteness only in its thinnest form — as a bare marker of difference and a signal of presence. This superficial view of diversity consequently leads white individuals and predominantly white institutions to treat nonwhiteness as a prized commodity rather than as a cherished and personal manifestation of identity. Affiliation with nonwhite individuals thus becomes merely a useful means for white individuals and predominantly white institutions to acquire social and economic benefits while deflecting potential charges of racism and avoiding more difficult questions of racial equality. (2155)

In the theatre world, we can see racial capitalism at play in the disparity between the diversity presented on stage versus the diversity represented in administration. Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) can gain social (and economic) capital by presenting diversity on stage, without examining their organization's practices and lack of diversity behind the scenes where decisions are made.

According to the AAPAC study of New York nonprofit theatres, 92.2% of all funding (148.8 million dollars) in the 2018-2019 tax year was awarded to Predominantly White Institutions, compared to the $12.6 million awarded to theatres of color[10] (Bandhu and Kim 36-37). As the study's authors, Pun Bandhu and Julienne Hanzelka Kim explain, the amount of "funding a theatre receives is a function of how much they are valued as well as the political

[10] The term theatres of color is a recent shift in terminology to highlight the differences between 'mainstream' theatre companies and those previously known as culturally specific theatres. "There has been a shift to foreground the racial identities of what have often been called mainstream theatres, by naming them as predominantly white theatre companies. This move has been forwarded by theatres of color and their allies in order to call attention to the fact that the majority of professional theatres in the United States appear to be race-neutral, but are in fact grounded in white European and Euro-American canons, are run primarily by white artistic and/or administrative leaders, serve primarily white audiences, and continue to receive disproportional funds for their programming" (Walseth 203)

capital they have with funders" (37). There is a bias towards PWIs when it comes to funding, both public and private, due to their size and budget, but

> this is why a behemoth organization with the most dismal diversity record receives an obscene amount of money for merely "wanting" to diversify its programming. In short, it is rewarded for its attempt over smaller organizations of color that have actually been doing the work for decades…If a theatre's worth is measured by its box office, the size of its subscription base, or the number of productions it puts up in a season, then American theatre will continue to perpetuate a caste system that puts BIPOC organizations several tiers below the regional behemoths (Peña).

Private and foundation giving in particular has favored PWIs, as they are more likely to engage in the traditional fundraising tactics that would attract big funders (like galas), whereas theatres of color do not have the staff or resources to expend towards that kind of function (Bandhu and Kim 41).

In the same AAPAC study mentioned before, the authors break down the racial makeup of directors, designers, and actors in NYC non-profit and for-profit theatre during the 2018-2019 season. While I will get into the specific data in the coming sections, it is important to note that as we move down the "chain of command", from admin to director to designer to actor, the representation numbers get better (although still not great). Companies can claim they are more diverse by only diversifying the least-paid, most vulnerable positions (actors), instead of examining their structures.

Playwright/What stories are told

In the United States, theatrical works are usually written by a single playwright, or a small team in the case of musical theatre. While there are workshop processes that plays can go

through that involve many different artists, the ultimate ownership (financial and symbolic) of a play comes back to the named writer(s). In a capitalist society, the centralization of private property is key to the perpetuation of the system. Capitalism is dependent on private property, as private property (and the laws that protect the right) is the mechanism in which the means of production are kept away from the workers/labor actually creating a product. While the ownership of intellectual property rights over a piece of dramatic literature is not the same as the ownership of a factory that makes money off the backs of undercompensated workers, it is still a form of property that can be leveraged to make a property through the sale of rights.

The capitalist need for properties to be owned by individuals has led to a theatre culture that is primarily text-based in nature. Since our culture of production here in the United States is defined by our individual contributions, it is harder to define who "owns" what if a piece is devised by a group of people. The centralization of text-based works can also be connected to the American preference for realism and traditionally narrative plays.

What's wrong with narrative plays? Not much – if you are part of the "traditional" theatre audience. Jordan K. Stovall, who is the director of Outreach & Institutional Partnerships at the Dramatists Guild of America, writes that:

> The "well-made play" has long been the standard in play analysis and writing courses around the country. We know the familiar diagram and terminology: a series of events, conflicts, and cause/effect actions that ultimately lead to some sort of climax, and finally a denouement. A series of unspoken rules have crept their way into our playmaking processes—a formulaic and understood approach to story construction, trickling down to producers, educators, literary departments, and selection committees. Why? We know it results in a safe bet for theatres, audiences, and stakeholders—

> something pleasing and commercially viable. We also know who it is pleasing and commercially viable *to*: the audiences that have long held the lion's share of the American theatre—audiences that are predominantly older, white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle- or upper-class. To be clear, this is not an attack on anyone who might fit those descriptors. It's just that when our audiences don't accurately reflect the populations of our country, we've run into a problem. (Stovall)

Stovall writes of the entrenched expectation of text-based work, especially in the United States. I experienced this first-hand while working for New Visions/New Voices Festival at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 2016 and 2018. The festival focuses on developing new TYA works from playwrights and companies from across the country. In 2018, one of the pieces deviated from the typical structure of the workshop week in that there was not a lot of text submitted for the piece prior to the arrival of the production teams hired to work on it. There was a lot of low-key panicking about what was going to be shown at the end of the week to the attendees, and comments about the creators not following the 'normal' process. During the showings at the end of the week, it was by and large the most imaginative, and most popular, piece. Unsurprisingly, the creators were BIPOC theatre artists who were creating their own set of rules for creation that ended up delivering the most impactful piece that festival.

Danilo Gambini, a Brazilian-born theatre director, talks about the dominant aesthetic of American Theatre:

> Once I started investigating the aesthetics of theatre in the U.S., I saw the predominance of realism as the basis of all practices. Which is not what it is in Brazil. I got enamored of this aesthetic because it's so beautifully executed, because it is the tradition of this land. But why is this perceived as the baseline aesthetic? I started reflecting about it and where

> it comes from. As we know, in theatre it comes from Stanislavski and Chekhov, and they have a very specific sensibility, that there is this ordinary-like level of relationships, and you have this river of emotions going underground. There are things you don't say, there are words that you hide, and super-objectives, and subconscious, and given circumstances—and the subterranean river and all of these components that make up the realism aesthetic are a very specific sensibility from a very specific white European culture. This style of theatre, from the Russia of 120, 130 years ago, was brought here and it became the predominant theatre form in America. It was a sensibility that both existed in and was learned by a very specific portion of our society. When the conversation became how do we "diversify" theatre, the initial impulse was not to diversify the aesthetic of theatre, but to diversify the colors of the bodies inside a white sensibility.

We think about diversifying theatre practice by bringing in under-invited populations into the white theatre practice, but this has just led to moments of disappointment from people of color when they can't reconcile their ways of creating with the dominant culture.

Stephanie Lein Walseth writes about the discourse in our society about what can be defined as "good theatre":

> While this rhetoric appears to equalize racial difference and draw artists of all colors together under the umbrella of universal narrative values, in practice it can function to enfranchise white privilege. This language, when left unexamined, can reify the canon of European and Euro-American dramatic literature, obfuscate the problematic post-racial politics of popular contemporary plays, conflate all plays that include racial issues into

> the same political philosophies and goals, and elide deeply conflicting dramaturgical principles and expectations between white theatres and theatres of color. (200)

Attempting to universalize the idea of "quality" in theatre can heighten the disparity in funding between those that are using it to gain social capital, and theatres of color who are the experts in their culture.

While the number of non-white playwrights is better than the theatre administration numbers, 80.5% of the 2018-2019 productions in New York theatre were by White playwrights, according to the AAPAC study (Bandhu and Kim 18-19). This number is paralleled in the CSS and TYA/USA study, where 80% of the playwrights were White in 18-19 (Ruggiero and Uhls 10). In addition to racial capitalism, another important phrase that will come up throughout this chapter is "culturally-specific," referring to plays and productions that are written about a group's lived experience. The CSS and TYA/USA study defines culturally specific productions as "the productions in which POC characters/communities/cultures were essential to the story's narrative and that without the inclusion of these characters/communities/cultures, the plot of the story would be drastically changed and cease to exist" (Ruggiero and Uhls 15). Separating these productions out from the whole in both the AAPAC study and the CSS and TYA/USA study highlights a stark contrast in who gets hired to tell what stories. According to the CSS and TYA/USA study, POC playwrights and directors were hired at a much higher rate when a company was doing a culturally specific production (69% and 49%, versus 8% and 7% for non-culturally specific productions) (Ruggiero and Uhls 15). With these numbers, it is clear that the choice of playwright is important to the increased diversity in other positions. However, we will see in the upcoming sections that a BIPOC playwright telling a culturally specific story does not ensure diversity in the production team.

Directors

There are few stereotypes in theatre as prevalent as that of the all-powerful director. In our theatre practice, we see the director as the one with the "ultimate vision", the one who will oversee all the different threads of a production and make final decisions on everything presented to the audience. Directors are usually the first person hired by the administration of a company after they choose a work, and are given primary responsibility of the production, and the power to hire the performers, and often, the designers. When I think of theatre hierarchies, the first thing that comes to mind is the hierarchy between directors, stage managers, and actors in the audition and rehearsal rooms.

Unsurprisingly, both studies found that the role of the director is usually filled by a White individual. AAPAC reported that 83.1% of directors in NYC during 2018-2019 were White; the non-profit theatres sat at 78.7%, while Broadway productions were directed by 93.8% White directors (Bandhu and Kim 22-23). The CSS and TYA/USA study showed that 85% of directors were White, a change of only 5% lower from ten years prior (Ruggiero and Uhls 11). However, what is surprising is that the number of culturally specific stories has increased, even when the director statistics have not gotten more diverse. This means that there is a good number of culturally specific productions being helmed by a White director: approximately half of all culturally specific TYA productions in 2018-2019 were directed by a White person (Ruggiero and Uhls 15). On the professional New York theatre side, the numbers were similar: "White directors helmed 53.3% of the productions written by BIPOC writers at the [NYC] non-profits and 100% on Broadway" (Bandhu and Kim 26). To me, this trend highlights the disparity between who gets hired in the power positions, and which bodies and stories are presented for social capital.

Designers

The category of designer covers many different departments: set, lighting, costumes, sound, etc. Designers are often hired at the same time or shortly after a director has been chosen for a production. While holding less recognized power than the administration and directors, designers can wield immense power over a production, including the casting. Production staff typically meet multiple times before casting to discuss the overall look and feel of a production. During these meetings, set designers and costume designers usually present renderings to the director/producers for approval. With the typical American timeline for productions, this designing before actors are cast is simply practical – to wait until after casting is complete to start designing is not an option due to the limited timelines.

While this choice to design prior to casting is practical, it is not without issues. Designing the set and costumes prior to knowing who will be interacting with the spaces and clothes can limit the expectations of the director on who they can cast. If a shop is already in the process of building a ladder-heavy set for a production, it is unlikely that an actor in a chair is going to be considered for a role in that show. Or on the costume side of things, research images and renderings could influence how the director sees which bodies can fit each role. As a costume designer myself, it is usually expected for me to have a general sense of what I will be building or sourcing for a production well before the bodies I'm meant to clothe are cast. Because I also have a background as an actor who has experienced type-casting due to my body size, I have tried to amend my practice to begin with the actor's body and needs, even if it means a shortened process. But this is not the norm.

Looking at the AAPAC study, designers in the 2018-2019 season were predominantly White, but showed more signs of promise than admin or directors, especially in the non-profit sector.

> Broadway was much more inhospitable to designers of color than the non-profits, by a staggering 19-point gap [73.3% to 92.6%]. Typically, directors have the most sway over hiring decisions for designers. Our data shows evidence of directors working with the same designers on multiple projects this season. This has a negative impact when White male directors consistently have shorthand with all-White, all-male design teams. (Bandhu and Kim 28)

In my experience, this kind of nepotism is extremely common in theatre, at all levels. Hiring on productions is often influenced by previous working relationships, making it hard to "break in" to the industry. A high-profile example of this kind of nepotism is the ongoing relationship between director Michael Arden and costume/scenic designer Dane Laffrey, who worked on both of Arden's Broadway productions (the 2015 revival of *Spring Awakening* and the 2018 revival of *Once on This Island*). Frequent collaborators, the pair met in high school…at the Interlochen Arts Academy.

Auditions/Rehearsal/Production

The last theatre artists invited to the production process are the actors. As the most visible profession in the theatre ecosystem, there tends to be more competition for the jobs offered. This idea of scarcity leads to an environment with strict adherence to the hierarchy presented; aka everyone is scared to lose their job, so they follow the director without complaint.

The entrance of the actors happens at auditions, a process that can be structured many different ways, but usually puts the director in the position of "selector" and the actors in the

position “to be selected.” In this hierarchical structure, there is no balance of power - the director has the ultimate say in who secures the job. Larger production will even refer to their auditions as “cattle calls”, drawing a comparison between actors and livestock up for auction, effectively dehumanizing the actor in the process. Actors of color face another layer of uncertainty when they enter a room – both conscious and unconscious bias from a production team likely to be primarily white. After the process of casting, those chosen as the actors for the show may be treated as collaborators in the process of creating, or they may be treated as props to be moved around the stage by the director depending on the team in charge. The scenic design, having likely been selected prior to the actors being chosen, is unlikely to undergo major revisions due to an actor. And costume fittings might involve comments from designers about your size and not many questions about how you feel or what you need from a costume in a role. Tech week involves lengthy days commonly referred to as 10-out-of-12s, 12-hour workdays with a 2-hour meal break.

Stemming from theatre education and training that instills the mentality of ‘the show must go on’, actors in uncomfortable positions usually take the path of ‘grin and bear it.’ In other fields we have human resource departments or labor unions and paths for conflict resolution, that while often not perfect, at least shift some of the power balance toward the employee. Kit Ingui, former Broadway company manager and current Managing Director of Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, Connecticut, talks about the lack of human resources (HR) in theatre settings:

> Reflecting on my time working on Broadway, I noticed HR by its absence. There were moments where someone needed the support an HR professional could provide and it was missing. If there was ever any intimidation or harassment in a workspace, or when

> somebody needed to be replaced for any number of reasons… Those are places where I'd notice something was missing, but I didn't know what it was.

This lack of internal conflict resolution structures leads to issues that are often ignored for the sake of the production at hand. While the theatre field struggles with internal human resource issues, it does have its own the labor union for actors and stage managers, The Actors Equity Association (AEA). While the AEA is a great resource for professional theatre artists, it does come with its own set of issues.

AEA was founded in 1913 to combat exploitation in the theatrical field, including uneven pay scales and unpaid labor for rehearsals[11]. AEA provides a lot of support for working actors and stage managers, including contract benefits live minimum salaries with overtime pay and work rules including rules about length of rehearsal days and safety and sanitation conditions ("Why Join Equity?"). Up until July 2021, membership in AEA was limited to those who secured a contract in an Equity house, those in the Equity Membership Candidate program, or those in AEA's 4 sister unions ("Join Equity"). These stringent standards unfortunately led to the union having a disproportion of white members. When the union introduced their Open Access policy in 2021, AEA president Kate Shindle explained the change in policy, stating that:

> The old system had a significant flaw: It made employers the gatekeepers of Equity membership, with almost no other pathways to joining…The entertainment industry is disproportionately white, including and especially theatrical leadership. The union has inadvertently contributed to the systemic exclusion of BIPOC artists and others with

[11] While Actors Equity Association has technically included Black actors in their ranks since their inception, it has not always been welcoming to Black actors trying to join its ranks. The April 1923 version of *Equity Magazine*, the union's journal, states that "Equity's policy has been that when colored performers act in white companies they come under our jurisdiction and should belong to the AEA, but when they perform in all-colored companies we don't seek their support because this group of people has many problems of which we know nothing and have at present no way of learning. As we don't wish to take their dues without giving something in return, we have always felt it would be infinitely better if they were to form a colored branch of Equity… (qtd. in Dewberry 1988, p. 32).

> marginalized identities by maintaining a system in which being hired to work those contracts was a prerequisite of membership. We hope that artists from all backgrounds will join us in building a union that uplifts the entire theatre community, especially those who have not felt included or welcome in the past. ("Actors' Equity Association Announces Open Access")

The new Open Access policy allows for any actor or stage manager who has worked professionally in the United States to apply for membership. Applicants no longer have to work specifically for an Equity house; they just have to submit proof that they were paid for their work as an actor or stage manager ("Open Access"). However, becoming an Equity member means you relinquish your right to work in non-Union gigs, which could result in a financial and career sacrifices. This policy is in place until May 1, 2023, by which time AEA hopes to have a more permanent solution for membership. Even with Equity protections in place at professional theaters, exploitation can and still does happen, especially for those who do not choose to join the union.

In addition to the difficulty of joining the union prior to this policy change, BIPOC actors also battle pay inequality and less access to jobs. 58.6% of the available roles in NYC in 2018-2019 went to White actors, which is an overrepresentation compared to the population of White people in NYC (Bandhu and Kim 12-13). When it came to roles that were not culturally specific (parts originally played by a White person or where the race is not important to the role), only 22.7 % of those roles went to people of color (Bandhu and Kim 14-16). On top of the limited number of roles for BIPOC actors, they faced a severe pay inequality compared to their White counterparts. In 2018-2019, NYC non-profit theatres, compared to every dollar spent on White actors, spent 0.71 cents on BIPOC actors. Broken down further, the numbers are even more

stark: for every $1 spent on a White actor, non-profits spent $0.53 on Black actors, $0.10 on Asian American actors, $0.05 on Latinx actors, $0.02 on MENA (Middle Eastern North African) actors, and $0.00 on Indigenous actors (Bandhu and Kim 46).

Looking Ahead

While there is no easy one-and-done solution for these issues, questioning and analyzing traditional theatre practices is a good place to start. In this vein, amplifying the voices of historically marginalized people can illuminate the changes needed for an equitable theatre practice. In her chapter on partnerships with Predominantly White Institutions in *Theatre, Performance, and Change*, Stephanie Lein Walseth calls for equitable partnerships with theatres of color to dismantle structures of white hegemony in theatre. Moving past just recognition for theatres of color, Walseth calls for a "redistributive analysis."

> A redistributive analysis can reveal how economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital are inherently intertwined, how capital can be converted from one form to another through hidden transmissions, and how this combination of factors tends to reproduce inequalities in the distribution of capital in the field. (202)

To truly provide an equitable theatre landscape, more funding needs to be redistributed to theatres of color, instead of PWIs producing culturally specific work for social capital. Ralph B. Peña, the Artistic Director of Ma-Yi Theatre Company, echoes Walseth's call for a redistribution of funds towards theatres of color:

> The funding community must recognize the value of smaller, community-focused BIPOC organizations and the work they do to bring theatre and arts services to those outside the purview of mainstream institutions. It is time to make significant investments in these smaller organizations to increase their capacities and develop a practice that does not

> make becoming more mainstream the ultimate goal. Most of these smaller organizations devote a significant portion of their energies to the task of survival, and while that might be a given in the nonprofit world, many of them will greatly benefit from redirecting more of their energies to their artistic practice instead of constantly treading water.

By putting more economic capital in the hands of historically marginalized communities and institutions, we can start to fight against the white hegemonic practices of traditional American Theatre.

While this section has focused on some of the issues associated with current theatre practice in the United States, it is not all bad news. My goal in this project is not to throw away the baby with the bathwater; instead, it is to highlight some practices that are commonly ignored or thought of as "just the way it is." The next chapter will focus on recent major movements for change in the theatre world in the U.S., and what the future looks like for American TYA. These developments have already dramatically changed the landscape of American Theatre, and, in turn, American TYA.

CONCLUSION/LOOKING FORWARD

> "Change is not only in the air, it *is* the air we breathe. Perhaps now, more than ever, *change* operates as a *doxa*, taken for granted as self-evidently and universally a good thing, in and of itself.
>
> -Woodson and Underiner, 2

The previous chapters focused mainly on how capitalist ideologies make theatre practice in the United States difficult, but I want to end this project by talking about the ways many theatre for young audiences companies, artists, and scholars have fought back against tradition to carve out new ways of making that challenge the hegemonic culture. While some ideological issues will remain steadfast in this country, theatre artists and other creatives have always been at the forefront of questioning pervasive narratives and carving out incremental change. Since beginning this project in 2018, a whole world of change has happened to society at large - a global pandemic has made us question what is important and what needs to change. These trends point towards a healthier theatre that values the makers more than the project.

This chapter will look at the recent calls to action to make theatre practice in the United States more inclusive and safer for all who interact with it, as well as the suggestions for new ways of creating theatre to achieve those goals. I will also highlight some companies and artists who are working against the issues laid out in the previous chapters.

Calls to Action

The murder of George Floyd in May 2020 at the hands of police officers in Minnesota incited a social justice movement unlike anything we have seen in decades. While the main focus of protests and marches after were aimed at reforming or abolishing police structures in the

United States, there was also a large cultural movement towards recognizing everyday structures of racism. Every organization, profit or non-profit, was pressured to confront insidious patterns of racism in their own ranks. The American Theatre was no different.

A collective of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) theatre artists released a statement and a series of demands in the Summer of 2020 titled *We See You, White American Theatre*, which calls for "a new social contract for our work environments that cares for and sustains our artistry and lives" ("Principles" 1):

> Our love of theatre has often meant surviving an industry-wide culture of fear poisoned by racism and its intersecting oppressions. But when we lift the veil of white supremacy, we know how best to support our theatrical expressions, our culture, and ourselves. We are resilient. We carry ancestral wisdom. And so we are ending a war we did not start. We call for transformative measures guided by principles of self-determination, presence, joy, access, protection, transparency, and integrity in the spirit of independence from our colonized past and present. ("Principles" 1)

Their work outlines the myriad of ways white supremacy is interwoven in our traditional, 'normal' theatre practices. Their "BIPOC Demands for White American Theatre" provides concrete, impactful changes that need to be made to theatre institutions across the country and "It is culled from years of discussion between members of the Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) theatre communities immersed in the dynamics of which they speak, and bears the contradictions of our many concerns, approaches, and needs." The statement and the demands were shared widely across social media and sparked an industry-wide examination of some of the institutions and people that 'define' the American Theatre.

Many of the demands set forth in the 31-page "Demands" document address issues laid out in the previous sections of this piece. In the section "Working Conditions and Hiring Practices," the authors respond to the practice of 10 out of 12 tech days and 6-day work weeks, calling them

> …Long-standing practices that are steeped in capitalist and white supremacist culture. When these practices are in place, the growing and nurturing of the BIPOC family structure is imperiled. Many BIPOC artists have been forced to make a choice not to have families. For Indigenous artists and other peoples recovering from genocide, these practices are extremely detrimental. (5)

Immediately following this statement, the authors demand that institutions

> Allocate more time to create work. Do not force us to produce in a way that is antithetical to the artistic process, leading to the hiring of the same people over and over again, such as those who have developed a "shorthand" with the director and/or choreographer. It is the product of an authoritarian structure that silences the agency of BIPOC collaborators to voice concerns that are being glossed over for the sake of expediency. (5)

The lack of creative time in the typical production timeline closes opportunities off to under-invited populations of directors, designers, and actors. This demand relies heavily on the institution/funders to increase the budgets for earlier rehearsals, so these cycles are perpetuated by those at the top that the hold the money.

Following in *We See You White American Theatre's* (WSYWAT) stead, leaders in the TYA community authored their own anti-racist manifesto: "Anti-Racist and Anti-Oppressive Futures for Theatre for Young Audiences: An Interactive Guide." Authored by the BIPOC in TYA Community, this report also included a statement and demands, but used the tools

associated with the TYA genre to take a slightly different approach. Whereas the WSYWAT's documents were very straight-forward and borderline aggressive (which I believe is well-earned), the TYA study utilizes a softer approach; the guide and calling-in aspects of the movement are much more education-leaning than WSYWAT.

The "Anti-Racist and Anti-Oppressive Futures" Guide begins with a preface that positions the work of anti-racism at the institutional and individual level:

> The following pages showcase a preface and four major sections that together intend to create space for reflection, present a container inside which Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) voices can be heard, and extend an invitation to field-wide transformation. Inside you'll discover a collection of non-negotiable demands for change, "thought questions" covering an array of topics, anonymous anecdotes from BIPOC TYA practitioners, external links to supplemental resources, an interactive glossary, and exercises that require your active engagement in community with others. (4)

The creators of this guide challenged all TYA companies and artists to engage with the work, either in teams or as individuals, and had accountability check-ins throughout the first year after its publication.

These calls for action, paired with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, have inspired theatre institutions to question their previously entrenched practices. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the national union for actors and stage managers, Actors' Equity Association, loosened their membership requirements. Theatre Communications Group opened their once member-exclusive job board, Art Search, to all with a free account, making it more accessible to those who could not afford the TCG membership fees. And the National Endowment for the Arts has created an Equity Action Plan in line with its Strategic Plan, which not only provides

financial support to underserved populations, but also aims to close the "gap between the availability of arts programming and actual participation in the arts" ("Equity Action Plan").

In addition to these national organizations, individual theatres are making changes to their practices. In an interview with *HowlRound*, Long Wharf Theatre's (New Haven, CT) Managing Director, Kit Ingui, outlines how they are transforming their theatre practice with the formal introduction of human resource initiatives:

> Long Wharf's previous artistic director was terminated because of his sexually harassing behavior…In the wake of that experience, there was a significant amount of trauma for the staff. They needed to feel safe moving forward to work at Long Wharf. And the culture that was identified out of that termination, the fear-based culture that existed at the theatre because people were afraid that if they offered their opinions or perspective, they would experience harassment or be shut down or bullied… We had to do something about that. Attention to HR helped us put policies and practices in place that address that type of toxic culture.

As mentioned previously, theatre companies have not historically had a human resources specialist, let alone a whole office. Ingui and her team have prioritized Long Wharf's staff by implementing people-centered strategies such as: creating job descriptions with clearer expectations, robust employee review processes, and salary benchmarking their positions (Ingui). These considerations seem simple, but are drastic changes in theatre workplaces that have historically prioritized the end product over the worker producing it.

In addition to reducing long tech week rehearsals, many theatres have also adjusted their work weeks from 6 days to 5 days a week, allowing their staff to have more days off and time to rest. While this sometimes results in less time for preparation, many artists say their work is

better when they have the extra time for rest. In an article by Jerald Pierce for the *Seattle Times*, 5th Avenue Theatre's Head Carpenter Laurel Horton talks about the reduction in hours:

> Though there's a bit less time and a bit more stress, which Horton said is something everyone is working on and feeling their way through, Horton added that these schedule changes have received incredibly positive responses for allowing theater makers time to rest and see their families. During tech rehearsals for 5th Avenue's production of "Beauty and the Beast" this year, Horton found time after rehearsal to go to a concert or a play, "and I can tell you that, in my whole career, that has never happened before." "I think we're less exhausted," Horton added. "We can work safer. I would say that more skilled workers are interested in working for us at this point because they can see that they can have lives and go home and see their families."

We are starting to see a sustained movement towards better equality in theatre, but there is still so much to overcome. Many of these changes won't be made overnight; they will be the result of long-term, sustained efforts by administrators, artists, and institutions who prioritize the "long game" over the short-term issues.

TYA Scholars, Companies, and Artists Breaking the Mold

In our specific field of theatre for young audiences, there has been a clear move away from didactic theatre teaching morals to audiences and move towards TYA in the European style, which involves more abstract and/or movement-based work which is more open to interpretation. This is particularly apparent in newer original pieces, rather than those adapted from other mediums. While the traditional theatre for young audiences production still relies heavily on adapting other materials for the stage, new subfields of TYA are subverting the normal narrative.

A fairly recent development in theatre for young audiences is known as Theatre for the Very Young (TfVY), which also includes the smaller field of Theatre for Babies. This field focuses on the creation of theatrical works designed specifically for humans aged 0-5 (as defined by the American Alliance for Theatre and Education's Theatre for the Very Young Special Interest Group). Because of its position outside of the educational complex in the United States, TfVY does not have to adhere to some of the more traditional boundaries of the field. The work tends to be non-narrative in structure, focusing more on audio/visual elements to entertain and engage; "Many of these shows can be defined as post dramatic, abandoning traditional dramaturgies in favor of a cocreated experience derived from play" (Fletcher-Watson 130). There is also not as strict of a hierarchy between performers and audience members; the shows aim to be interactive and flexible to the needs of the child and their caregiver(s). Lauren Jost, Founding Artistic Director of Spellbound Theatre, a company exclusively creating Theatre for the Very Young in New York City, writes in *TYA Today* about the difficulties and opportunities associated with creating theatre for this age group in the United States:

> Live performance for 6–18-month-olds is a popular staple of TYA programming across Europe, including theater, dance and opera designed especially for the infant audience. Audiences are building relationships with venues from birth, and creating memories through arts experiences as early as possible. In the United States, however, this age group remains underserved. The challenges of programming for this group are substantial, but so are the benefits.

While more companies are starting to create TfVY productions, the process for developing these works is not supported by the traditional processes. As the WSYWAT demands pointed out, time

is a crucial aspect when it comes to creating theatre that goes against the traditional structures that have excluded new voices. Jost writes

> In addition to more traditionally developed original scripts and adaptations, many theaters developing work for children ages 0-5 borrow from the practices of ensemble-devised theater. Even when one or two artists take the lead in creating a new work, the development process is often trial-and-error, kinesthetic and sensory, and involves bringing young children into the rehearsal room. This experimentation process feeds into our script development, which can often take 1-2 years. To ensure quality at the end of this process, we TVY artists need time and space to gather, observe, and get feedback from our peers and mentors.

This time frame for development, paired with the intentionally small audience sizes, means TfVY does not garner the same grant funding and support as other TYA productions that have higher earning potential. There is also the newer field of Sensory Theatre, for those on the Autism spectrum and beyond. This field shares many similarities with the Theatre for Very Young field; removing traditional narrative structures is one of the main commonalities.

Looking Ahead: Change

When I first started going to TYA or Theatre Education events and conferences, I noticed that many of the artists, scholars, and educators in the field only talked about the positives of the field, and that any criticism of the practices and institutions were minimal, if they existed at all. While this is also true of the larger theatre system to an extent, this positivity took on a different edge due to the ideological connection to education. I, being a naturally critical and pessimistic person, was put off by this environment at first. How could anything ever get better if no one was asking the hard questions? After a few years in the field, I figured out it was a protective strategy

– so many in the field must justify their existence daily to be able to operate in this capitalistic society, so of course they only focus on and talk about the positives.

In the four years since beginning this dissertation in 2018, so much has happened that has opened the door for marginalized voices within the theatre community to talk about the barriers holding them back. As a field, it feels like we are moving away from practices like unpaid internships, 10 out of 12 tech days, and relying on individuals to carry productions at great costs to themselves. Overall, theatre makers are increasingly invested in how their work feeds into social revolution; put more broadly, change. This dissertation is written and offered in the same spirit of change and transformation. But how do we define and measure change?

Stephanie Etheridge Woodson and Tamara Underiner write in the Introduction to *Theatre, Performance, and Change* that:

> In one form or another, change is the prerogative of artistic innovation, the imperative of activist performance, the goal of our teaching, and the implicit object of theatre and performance historical studies. We feel keenly the way change structures the conditions for performance at all—as motivation (a social issue, say), or constraint (a budget cut). (2)

This dissertation exists on the understanding that change based on shifting societal expectations is a desirable end goal. That when presented with a problem, the natural thing is to shift in some way to resolve the issue.

The field of theatre for young audiences often talks about the idea of "change" through theatre: changing a young person's life, changing perspectives, and so on. Measuring change is difficult though, particularly in a field like theatre that is ephemeral and localized. In the conclusion to their book on performance and change, Woodson and Underiner borrow from

Animating Democracy's "Continuum of Impact" to answer the age-old question "What difference does art make?"

> According to this heuristic, arts and culture use the actions of animating, informing, influencing, expressing and engaging in order to produce impacts in the following domains: *Knowledge*—what people know; their awareness and understanding; *Discourse*—how people communicate, through deliberation, dialogue, and media; *Attitudes*—what people think and feel; their values, motivations, and vision; *Capacity*—what people have and can do, including social capital, leadership, creative skills, and civic engagement; *Action*—what people do, ranging from participation to mobilization; *Policies*—what change is sustained, in terms of systems, conditions, access, and equity. (343)

I have found that most theatre artists, particularly in the TYA/Drama in Education fields, have historically been more concerned with measuring change in terms of the individual student/audience member, focusing on their reception of knowledge, their ability to communicate, and how they apply their knowledge and skills to think creatively. The other two measures listed here, Action and Policies, are not traditionally centered in assessments of change in our field, but I believe that these two are the most crucial to combat the issues listed in this dissertation.

The movements toward racial and class equity in theatre the last few years have been a great example of how theatre artists can enact action plans and policy-based change. However, it is my belief that real, lasting change can no happen until the structures of capitalism in the United States are contended with in a meaningful way. In response to the Black Lives Matter protests around the U.S., theatre scholar Michael Kobialka writes that

> This moment forces me to realize that these new policies are implemented only insofar as they avoid discourses about capitalism itself and its regimes of industrialized opinions manufactured for every taste, as evidenced by the ongoing discussion about the use of body cameras. This discussion bypasses the structural racism produced by the regimes that made body cameras necessary in the first place; and, on the other hand, obliterates any active strategy of transformation since posing a question of, for example, "privacy" is already a part of the status quo that keeps police and social groups seen as forces of negation within the limits of the established system. (174)

Solutions like eliminating 12-hour tech days and choosing more diverse stories and people does improve the lived experience of many theatre artists, but this does not contend with the structures that caused these issues in the first place. "We are encouraged, in our economic consumption, in our outreach activities, and symbolic political participation in virtual petitions, or demonstrations officially permitted by the police, to ignore our own impotence while the system causing that experience remains intact" (Kobialka 177).

Towards an Anticapitalist Theatre Practice

The only way to permanently counteract the issues caused by the capitalist system in the United States is to take an anticapitalist stance in our practices and our ideals. Taking an anticapitalist stance does not need to look like what Marx envisioned in Capital; there does not need to be a precipitating event that allows for the wholesale overthrow of the capitalist system. In his book, *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the 21st Century*, Erik Olin Wright lays out "Five different strategies" that "have historically been particularly important in anticapitalist struggles: smashing capitalism, dismantling capitalism, taming capitalism, resisting capitalism and escaping capitalist" (38). The first 'strategic logic' – smashing capitalism – is the dramatic

overthrow that Marx envisioned, and that historical communist revolutions have followed. Dismantling capitalism also involves a full replacement of capitalism with socialism, but over an extended period of time, using the state's power to facilitate the transition (Wright 42). Taming capitalism uses state policies to reduce the harms caused by capitalism but does look to replace the system with anything else (Wright 45). Resisting capitalism "seeks to alleviate the harms of the system but does not attempt to capture state power. Rather, it seeks to affect the behavior of capitalists and political elites through protest and other forms of resistance outside of the state" (Wright 50). And finally, escaping capitalism is any attempt to live outside of the rules and structures of capitalism. Wright organizes these five logics into a matrix along two defining lines:

> The first is straightforward: is the primary objective of the strategy to neutralize harms or to transcend structures? Taming capitalism and resisting capitalism both try to neutralize harms. Smashing, dismantling, and escaping capitalism all attempt to transcend the structures of capitalism. The second dimension is more complex. It concerns the way a strategy is oriented toward what might be called the "level" of a social system. (53)

Wright uses the metaphor of games to describe the difference in strategies. While smashing capitalism would be changing the game played altogether (as Wright's metaphor goes), dismantling capitalism would be more like changing the rules of the game, as would taming capitalism; and resisting and escaping capitalism are more like different moves within a game. Organized along those two dimensions, Wright's formulation looks like this:

		Objective of struggle	
		Neutralizing harms	**Transcending structures**
Level of the System	**The game itself**		*Smashing*
	Rules of the game	*Taming*	*Dismantling*
	Moves in the game	*Resisting*	*Escaping*

From Wright, Erik Olin. *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the Twenty-First Century*. Verso, 2019. pp. 55-56.

While smashing capitalism is the most talked about form of anticapitalism, Wright posits that the most effective form might be one that combines dismantling, taming, resisting, and escaping – a form he calls eroding capitalism.

Eroding capitalism challenges capitalism by building "more democratic, egalitarian, participatory economic relations where possible in the spaces and cracks within this complex system" (Wright 60).

> Some of these emerge as adaptations and initiatives from below within communities. Others are actively organized or sponsored by the state from above to solve practical problems…Eventually, the cumulative effect of this interplay between changes from above and initiatives from below may reach a point where the socialist relations created within the economic ecosystem become sufficiently prominent in the lives of individuals and communities that capitalism can no longer be said to be dominant. (62)

For theatre makers, this logic of eroding capitalism provides the best path forward, both in the short term and the long term.

The logic of eroding capitalism involves both 'changes from above' and 'initiatives from below'. Changes from above would primarily constitute state-level changes, like the introduction of a Universal Basic Income (UBI), or a national healthcare system. Both of these changes would significantly alter the labor landscape in theatre and beyond, but these kinds of state-level changes are difficult to achieve quickly, especially in the United States where individual responsibility is a central ideology. Specifically in theatre, increased funding for the arts and/or the establishment of a national or federal theatre initiative would go a long way to meter some of the issues surrounding private funding mentioned in Chapter 3. While the United States did have a nationally-funded theatre initiative in the Federal Theatre Project, it was short-lived (it only operated from 1935-1939 before its funding was cut) (Dossett 5-6). However, in those four years of federal support, there was a marked increase in the number of non-White theatre makers who could make a living, and there was a development of new audiences that had not been reached by the privately-funded theatre scene:

> Black and white audiences, many for the first time, came to watch black- authored dramas, performed by black casts, in integrated theatres…location, as well as the availability of free and low-cost tickets, meant that Negro Unit productions attracted black, white, and ethnic Americans who had never before seen a live performance in a theatre setting; group bookings by labor organizations and neighborhood social clubs meant that many audience members experienced theatre as an extension of their community or workplace, a place to meet old allies, forge new friendships, air grievances, and voice ambitions. (Dossett 9)

The Federal Theatre Project also allowed for Black Americans to center themselves in performances, in a theatrical landscape dominated by White renditions of Black characters and stories:

> Black performance communities confronted the white gaze by adapting traditional forms and creating complex new roles for black heroes. In folk dramas, domestic tragedies, black realist dramas, Living Newspapers, and melodramas, black dramatists pushed generic boundaries and explored what it meant to be a black hero in American culture. (Dossett 10)

Bringing back some variation of the Federal Theatre Project may help in creating a more equitable theatre ecosystem, if executed properly. However, given the pushback the original FTP faced and the constant attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts, this seems like an unlikely scenario in the short term, even if it is an honorable long-term goal.

Instead of focusing all of our energy on the changes that could be made by the state, it is likely more practical to enact changes on the local/institutional level. By rethinking our institutions and practices in our theatre ecosystem to align more with anticapitalist values, we can contribute to the eventual transition away from harmful capitalist systems. These changes would constitute what Wright labels as “initiatives from below” since it doesn’t need to involve the state, and they are already at play - with the changes in labor practices at theatres, like the reworked tech days and elimination of unpaid labor by interns. The *We See You White American Theatre* demands alone are full of practical changes that theatres can enact that emphasize the trio of values Wright mentions in his book: equality/fairness, democracy/freedom, and community/solidarity (9). All of these movements speak to a community and solidarity-based

ethos, where people are advocating for equality/fairness for others, even if they don't stand to gain anything as an individual.

Ensuring that our theatre institutions and programs are moving to a more democratic nature could be the most important shift of all. The more democratic the process, the closer it is to socialism (where social power reigns supreme), which means it is moving away from capitalism (where the economy reigns supreme) (Wright 68). The typical professional theatre setup in a capitalist society, with a board of directors motivated primarily by profits and their own interests, limits the amount of power the actual theatre makers have in decisions that acutely affect their lives. By redistributing the power evenly to all stakeholders in a project/institution, the anticapitalist goals of equality/fairness and community/solidarity are more likely to flourish. This could involve participatory budgeting, where all stakeholders get to have a vote in how an institution's money is spent, or enacting co-determination policies, so all workers have a say in the high-level decisions of an institution and/or its board (Wright 82, 114). Democratizing our spaces as much as possible might just be the best way to fight capitalist tendencies in theatre practice, as well as create brand new ways of being.

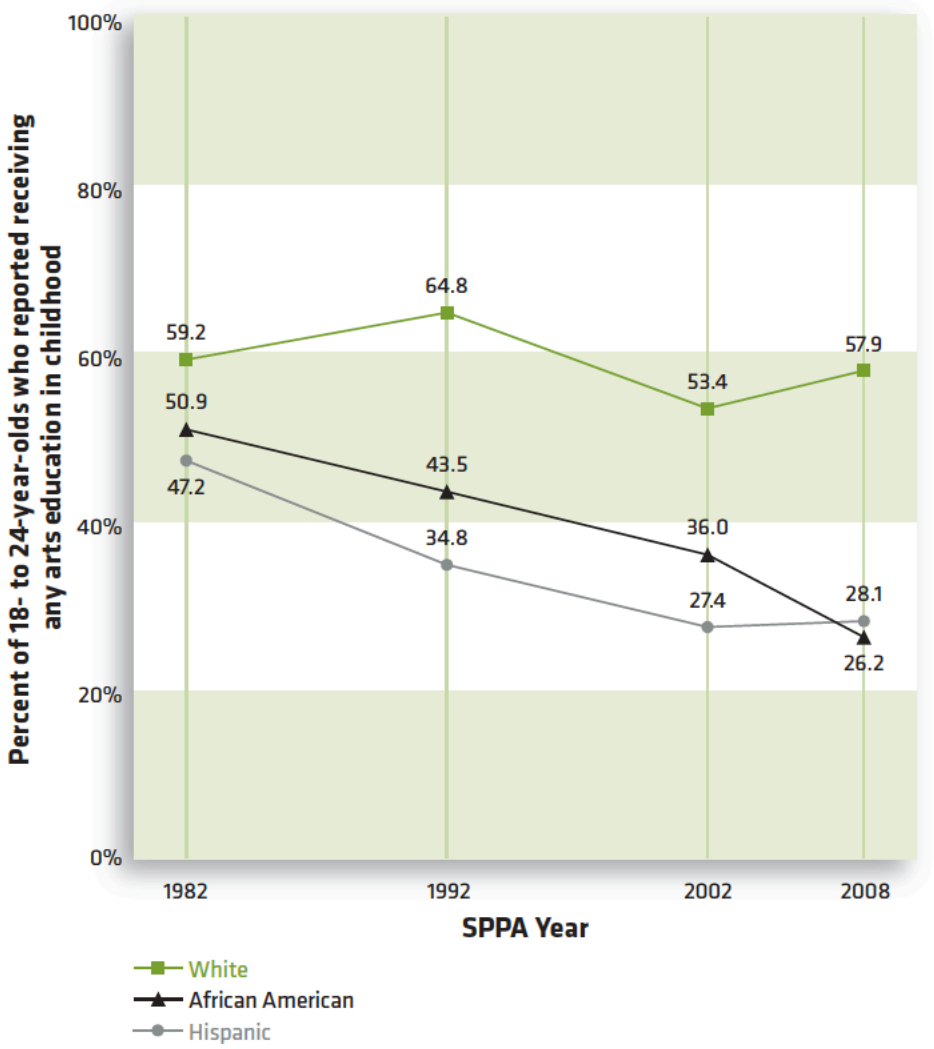
Educational theatre spaces may be the best place to start enacting anti-capitalist logics. Even while bureaucracy might feel like a wet blanket on substantial changes sometimes, places like universities and colleges have a lot of space for small incremental changes that can chip away at capitalist practices and ideologies. While education has been increasingly privatized, it is still a place partially subsidized by the government, giving it a little more breathing space financially, which in turn allows for more space to be risky theatrically. Individual teachers (in colleges, high schools, elementary schools, and beyond) also have the opportunity to democratize their spaces, and to focus on values of community and solidarity in their pedagogy.

The hope then is that students continue those practices and ideals outside of the classroom as they move into their careers, and into the rest of their lives as citizens. Many theatre teachers already push for these ideals in their classes, so the big difference is a unified goal towards dismantling the capitalist structures at large, so that their efforts reach beyond their classroom and enact lasting societal change.

APPENDIX A

FIGURE 4

Percent of 18- to 24-year-olds who received any arts education in childhood, by race/ethnicity and SPPA year[7]



Source: 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2008 waves of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

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