

Racism and The Contemporary Dance World: How you and your dance company can be actively Anti-Racist.

Version 2.0

*A starting point for white choreographers, teachers and dance
artists.*

Introduction

This document started as a guide for white choreographers, teachers and dance artists shared as a social media post in June 2020. Since posting, the guide received a vast amount of feedback, comments and suggestions from dance artists around the world. The creators of the guide have listened and reflected on these responses, as well as researching further into the systemic racism present in the contemporary world. While this document is specific to the contemporary dance world, it has many points that can be transferred into many dance styles and other art forms.

A significant conversation had with many artists was around the need for this to not only be another guide or inclusion policy, but for this to be a starting point for dance artists to have conversations about their own practices and action the ideas discussed with their colleagues, peers and students. Therefore, the decision was made to change the message of this document from a 'guide' to a 'starting point.'

Another point raised was the temporary nature of this document and how to ensure this does not become a one time, performative action. Therefore, this document will be reviewed and updated annually to ensure anti-racist practices continue to develop, progress and support a better future for all dance artists.

This document has been co-signed by a collection of contemporary dance artists, companies, teachers and practitioners from across the contemporary dance world and at varying stages of their careers.

This document is a free resource for all to use and hopes to contribute to shaping an equal, inclusive and safe future for the contemporary dance world.

Avoid Tick-Box Culture

"Tick-Box Culture" can be recognised as bureaucratic and external impositions on professional working conditions/environments, which can be found in many organisations around the world or "an environment where people tick the boxes of what they think has to happen during a marketing campaign, but never ask for reasons why things are being done, or question whether they are having an effect." (Digital Europe, 2018)

Basically, companies will hire or advertise certain people as they "tick a box" for their diversity quota, rather than a genuine interest in that person's talent. We should hire someone because of their talent, necessity to job role and ability. Not because of the colour of their skin. Dancers of colour should feel welcome at our auditions, classes and workshops because of the environment we create, not because of a targeted artist call out.

Marketing and Tokenism

"When diversity is misrepresented in marketing, tokenism can cause negative reputation issues for brands. As a result, there is a call for elevated inclusive marketing practices in a modern society." - Chloe Medina, 2019. (Resource 13.)

When marketing your latest project, workshop or classes you need to make sure what you are promoting is an accurate representation of what people will actually see and experience. Using your only Black or Brown dancer to promote a cast of predominantly white dancers is a misrepresentation and what most would deem tokenism.

Rather than directly aiming to "diversify" your marketing content, you should be looking more closely at your marketing strategies. Are you only promoting your work at predominantly white schools, communities and companies? What actions are you taking to remove access barriers? Are you only "jumping on the bandwagon" when there is a trend or are you consistent in your efforts?

Costumes

2a. 'Nude' is not one colour:

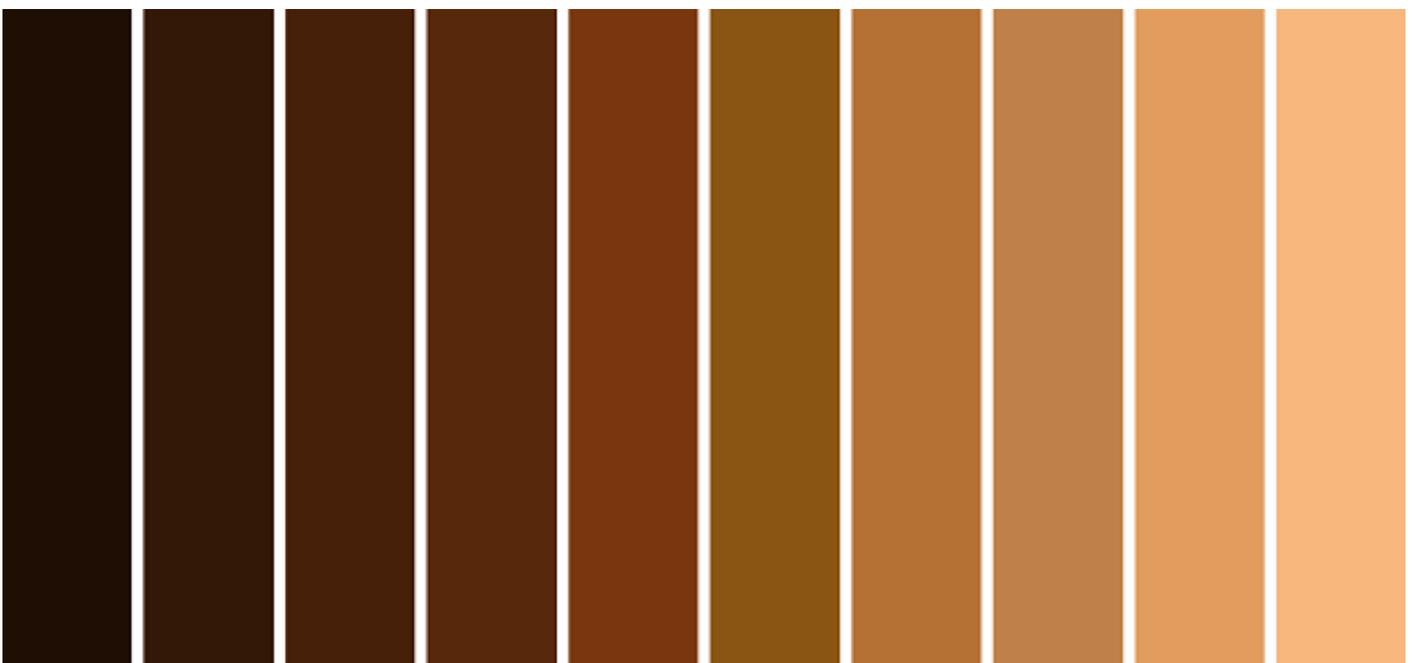
Many contemporary dance choreographers feel the need to create a "Nude Illusion" with costume designs for their work. This could be because they want the focus to be on the body rather than an elaborate costume. Whatever your reasoning, we need to understand that nude is not one colour. There are approximately 7.8 Billion people on the planet and therefore there are approximately 7.8 Billion shades of nude.

This message applies to dance schools/institutions too. If you are going to have stock costumes for your students that include a nude illusion, you need to have a full range of nude shades. It is 2020, it is not good enough to only act when requested.

2b. Hair and Makeup

As with clothing, your hair and makeup decisions need to be made with all of your dancers' individually considered. Unless it is a solo, you cannot have one design for all. If you are aiming for one cohesive look, you need to explore all the ways you can achieve your desired look with the various methods available to you, not just applying the same method to every dancer.

When bringing in a hair stylist or MUA for a production, you need to do your research. Do they have experience working with all types of hair? Do they have the resources to work with all skin tones?



Education

Many companies now have youth companies, training programmes or another form of educational outreach initiative to support the next generation of dance artists. Too many dance schools refer to Ballet as the 'foundation' or 'origin' of dance, however Ballet was only originated in the 15th century. The exact origin of dance is impossible to find, but some of the earliest evidence of dance forms date back to 6000 BC in India.

We need to be ensuring our curriculum is diverse and updated regularly. It is not good enough to only teach our students about Black choreographers/dancers during Black History Month and then only reference white choreographers the rest of the year. Dance is a global practice; Kabuki, Capoeira and The Atilogwu Dance are just three of the many wonderful traditional dances/ forms of dance out there. Don't be lazy, keep educating yourself even after your degree. Also, when discussing with our students about career paths or projects, our suggestions/advice should be on the student's; ability, ambitions, and potential. Not the colour of their skin.

Understanding Language

This point is inspired by Valerie Ebuwa's "Sometimes We Have To Review The Reviewer" which has many of transferable points to be made for both reviewers and anyone who is speaking about dancers of colour. Firstly, words such as "Sassy," "Urban," and "Exotic" are not interchangeable for "Black" or "Brown."

Secondly, we know that contemporary dance works are often informed by a range of dance practices, when discussing choreography being inspired by styles originated by POC (such as Voguing, Kathak or Butoh) make sure you have done your research and you acknowledge the style's history. Remember 'Cultural Appreciation' and 'Cultural Appropriation' are not interchangeable.

You can read the full article by Valerie via the link on the resources page.

A Diverse Team

A common misconception in the arts sector is that having a diverse cast for a performance equals being a diverse company, however we need to look further than just the performative elements of the arts world and contemporary dance is no exception.

The majority of dance organisations, schools, and companies have all/mostly white leadership teams, directors and board members.

When creating/developing your team for different projects don't only focus on hiring a diverse cast of dancers, you should be creating equal inclusive opportunities and employment for; composers, costume designers, lighting designers, tour managers, photographers, videographers, dramaturgs and producers etc.

Anti-Discrimination Clauses

Not only are anti-discrimination clauses legally binding and strengthen equality, these also lead to create safe spaces for all and allow for higher quality working. Anti-discrimination clauses are proactive way of letting your dancers know they are able to have safe, non-judgemental way of speaking out against discrimination.

As someone in a position of power you are responsible for everyone in your company/team/class if someone comes to you with an issues related to discrimination whilst performing, teaching or any other form of working for you it is your responsibility to take action. It is also imperative that you understand what discrimination is in resource 12. is a concise document to support you in this.

Responsibility

It is not our dancers, students, collaborators, colleagues or audience members of colour's responsibility to educate us on equality and diversity, inclusive practices, and racism. There are plenty of resources out there for us to read, listen to and watch to educate ourselves. It is our responsibility to speak up, speak out and do better, BE better. To continuously question our practice and improve it.

A United Effort

We as individuals need to take responsibility for dismantling systemic racism in the dance world and play our part in the wider movement towards an equal inclusive future.

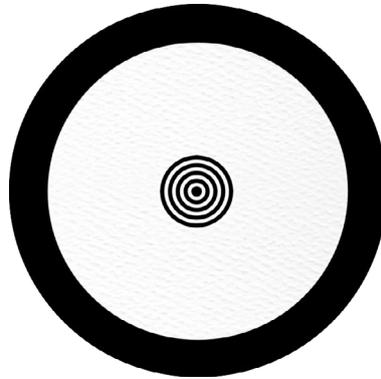
A united effort is needed and therefore contributors to this guide and fellow contemporary dance companies, artists and organisations have been asked to add their signature to this document in recognition of our shared responsibility in ending the inherent structural racism in the contemporary dance world.

This is not intended to create any contractual obligations between the parties involved, instead as a symbol of our united effort against racism.

Signatures

David West

David West (Dance Artist,
Artistic Director of EQDC)



Jason Mabana

Jason Mabana
(Choreographer)

jmd
Jason Mabana Dance

Michael Keegan-Dolan
(Choreographer and Director)

**TEAC
DAMSA**

Louise Richards

Louise Richards (Executive
Director, Motionhouse)

Motionhouse
Est. 1988

Signatures Continued

National Dance Company
Wales (Dance Company)

national **dance**
company **wales**
cwmni **dawns**
cenedlaethol **cymru**

Julie and Simone (The
Playground Team)

the playground



Executive Director
Studio Wayne McGregor

ENYMCWANE



Taylor Han (Dance Artist)

Thomas Page Dances (Dance
Company)

Thomas  **Dances**
Socio - Political Ideas in Movement

Resources

1. <https://www.eis.org.uk/Anti-Racism/NewAnti-RacistEducationResource>
2. <https://vimeo.com/388175543> (Racism and Contemporary Dance)
3. <http://www.run-riot.com/articles/blogs/sometimes-we-have-review-reviewer-written-valerie-ebuwa>
4. <https://www.iabdassociation.org>
5. <https://www.balletcafenaturals.com>
6. <https://serendipity-uk.com/>
7. <https://vimeo.com/319312029> (Body Data - Valerie Ebuwa)
8. <https://balletblack.co.uk/the-company/equality-resources/>
9. <http://seattledances.com/2020/06/recognizing-systemic-racism-in-dance/>
10. https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/72945/6/06_chapter%201%20historical%20origins%20of%20dance.pdf
11. http://www.era-comm.eu/UNCRPD/kiosk/speakers_contributions/111DV67/Lappalainen_pres.pdf
12. https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/ea_legal_definitions_0.pdf
13. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bb0e3e39d41494a22d-8c045/t/5e1a81793ff3900c13806664/1578795391073/WHERE+MARKETING+AND+DIVERSITY+MEET+-+CHLOE+MEDINA+%281%29.pdf>
14. <https://www.ascl.org.uk/ASCL/media/ASCL/Help%20and%20advice/Leadership%20and%20governance/Implementing-Fair-and-Transparent-Recruitment-Processes.pdf>