

FIVE BLACK ACTRESSES SHARE...

Entertainment Industry **MICROAGGRESSIONS & THEIR SOLUTIONS**

**A MUST-READ FOR: TV & FILM DIRECTORS
WRITERS / PRODUCERS / CASTING / UNIONS
EXECS / EDITORS / AGENTS / MARKETING /
MAKE-UP & HAIR STYLISTS**

Dear Entertainment Industry,

This letter is about representation.

This letter is about hope.

This letter is about dreams.

And this letter is about the tiny little ways in which those things are kept at arms length from the black community, in the Tv & Film biz.

From damaged hair, to stereotypes, to insensitive writing, smaller roles and even smaller checks; we've been out here showing up through it all, waiting for our day in the sun.

We believe that day is close upon us, and we want to help you - help us. Read on, share and act.

Sincerely,

Five Black Actresses ❤️

DEAR CASTING...

THOSE CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS!

#1 Challenge castings & character descriptions that have coded language, such as “sassy” or “urban”: if you mean Black, say Black. The goal is to move past conflating race with personality traits, and to move away from defaulting to whiteness when no race is specified. ~ *Krysta G.*

#2 Call out casting directors who use offensive / racially insensitive character descriptions, for example, ‘She looks like she can be a field slave’. Just ask for what’s needed - such as ‘African American / Black with dark-skinned complexion.’ ~ *Dee Dee S.*

#3 Be thoughtful of language used in casting & client meetings. For example, making statements such as “Looking for an ‘All American’ type,” and intentionally excluding Black people from that category, is insulting. Black people are American. ~ *Fox M.*

BE AN ADVOCATE FOR US.

#4 Black folks grow up with the saying that “we have to work twice as hard to get half as much.” So, consider working twice as hard in pitching and advocating for your talent from underrepresented groups. Aim to consciously work against their biases. ~ *Krysta G.*

#5 Negotiate more adamantly for your marginalized talent. Producers use coded language to refuse appropriate compensation to “unknowns.” (“Doesn’t have enough credits,” for example). Of course we’re unknown, Black people and other marginalized individuals are systematically shut out from opportunities. Knowing this, the argument that an unknown “doesn’t have enough credits”, is no longer valid. Help us get credits! Be nosy about how other creatives are being compensated, and if the role-size is comparable, demand your talent be compensated the same. ~ *Krysta G.*

LOOK AROUND - WHO'S ON YOUR TEAM?

#6 Always have Black people on your teams so that they can be part of decision-making and narratives. Have them in your writer's room, as your director, editors, in your agencies and as showrunners. For every open position, don't just hire someone you know, or a friend-of-a-friend, do the outreach beyond your immediate circle to seriously consider Black creatives. ~ *Fox M.*

#7 Take a good look at who's leading your organization and who's getting promotions. If Black people and other marginalized individuals are not represented in your leadership, make room for them - and don't put them ONLY in a "Diversity and Engagement" position. We are experts in other fields, too, and are capable of making organizational decisions that go beyond our lived experience. ~ *Krysta G.*

#8 Look beyond highly-accredited colleges for talent: not everyone has the opportunity (see the effects of 'systemic racism') to get into these highly-coveted institutions. What counts is what people have done with what they have. Our valuable perspective is what's missing, and will contribute to the success of any project. ~ *Fox M.*

HOLD YOUR COLLEAGUES ACCOUNTABLE.

#9 Have the hard conversations with your business partners - at all levels. If your colleagues aren't evolving - or worse, resisting - make it known they should rethink certain choices to keep getting work. The same goes for your roster: drop talent that isn't in alignment with the company's values. If you employ a known bigot - that says something about you, too. Imagine how your marginalized talent must feel having to show up for meetings with known bigots. ~ *Krysta G.*

BLACK HAIR POLITICS - THIS IS IMPORTANT.

#10 Familiarize yourself with the politics of Black hair. This is obviously a much larger conversation that requires quite a bit of education, but as someone whose job it is to represent and advocate for Black talent - invest the time to get familiar with Black hair *before we're on set.* ~ *Krysta G.*

PLEASE - STOP DAMAGING OR JUST IGNORING OUR HAIR ON SET.

#11 Mandate that the Hair & Makeup Union train their hairstylists on all types of Black hair textures & techniques. Many people in the Black community have been humiliated, told their hair is 'difficult', or had their hair damaged on set due to the lack of skills of hair stylists. Having the texture of Eurocentric hair be 'the norm' tells us we are less than. Also, hair & makeup needs to be experts on all skin tones, not just lighter skin tones. ~ *Fox M.*

#12 Producers need to hire Black hair stylists for their productions and have at least one on set at all times. ~ *Lezlie M.*

#13 Hair stylists have a duty to educate themselves about natural hair & all the styles that come with it: braids, locs, weaves, fades & wigs. Makeup artists have a duty to have the tools to make Black actors look great on camera. If production needs a certain hairstyle, then production needs to arrange and pay for it - from a capable, informed stylist. It's unacceptable that Black talent have to arrive on set hair & make-up-ready, or show up with their own supplies "just in case," while non-Black actors just get to show up. If Shonda Rhimes can make sure her actors have good wigs, then everyone else can too! Educate yourselves about the implications of hairstyles on Black women and how these styles serve the story & character. Check out this article: ShondaLand.com ~ *Krysta G.*

LISTEN, RESEARCH & LEARN.

#14 Every part of the industry needs to take a sensitivity training course on systemic racism. Visit RaceForward.org ~ *Ashlei S.*

BUT IS YOUR PROJECT REALLY DIVERSE?

#15 Be cautious of casting a Black person in the ONLY service-oriented role centered around a white protagonist: “maid / limo driver / janitor,” or in a slave story, or in a violent role. These roles fall into racist stereotypes and caricatures of who we are, dehumanize us and potentially remind us of trauma. The world is influenced by TV & Film so think beyond the status quo. We are people with real lives, goals, joys & pains - we are more than the background in white stories. ~ *Fox M.*

#16 Write character descriptions AND submit us for things across the board; for example, doctors, therapists, nerds, etc. ~ *Ashlei S.*

#17 Start hiring American Black actors first for parts over English Black actors. And require a Black leading role for every show - every single one. ~ *Lezlie M.*

#18 Agents - go to your Black LGBTQ+ clients to play LGBTQ+ roles. Who better to understand these character's narratives? ~ *Ashlei S.*

#19 Having one Black person in the background of a scene who doesn't speak - does NOT COUNT as “Diversity”. ~ *Fox M.*

#20 Doing these action items once - is ‘performative’. Making them second nature is how you can become an ally. ~ *Fox M.*

SO... DOES YOUR PRODUCTION PASS THE *DUVERNAY TEST?

- ✓ Are there two named characters of color?
- ✓ Do they have dialogue?
- ✓ Are they not romantically involved with one another?
- ✓ Do they have any dialogue that isn't comforting or supporting a white character?
- ✓ Is one of them definitely not "magical?" (Where a Black character with supernatural powers appears in a plot only to enrich a white protagonist).
- ✓ Are any characters of color whitewashed, or played by actors of a different ethnicity?
- ✓ Do the characters of color pursue their own goals separate from the white characters?
- ✓ Do the characters of color primarily talk about race?
- ✓ Do the characters of color fulfill harmful, simplistic, or downright racist stereotypes?
- ✓ Is the director, writer, and / or creator representative of the story's culture?

* The 'DuVernay Test' isn't a real test as of yet. American film critic, Manhola Dargis, coined the term in honor of filmmaker, Ava DuVernay. The idea is to elevate the standard of how people of color are portrayed onscreen. [Vox Article](#)

PASS THIS ON & LET'S KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING!

THANK YOU TO THESE
AMAZING CONTRIBUTORS!



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