

TCG Fall Forum 2008

Radical Shifts: Governing Ahead of the Curve

Plenary Session: *Diversity in 360°*

A panel discussion of shifting demographics and the way theatres are adjusting to be more inclusive and reflective of the communities they serve with Tim Bond (producing artistic director, Syracuse Stage), Mia Katigbak (artistic producing director, National Asian American Theatre Company), Peter Lobo (deputy director, Population Division of the New York City Department of City Planning) and Paul Nicholson (executive director, Oregon Shakespeare Festival). Moderated by Casey Baltes (assistant director of artistic programs, TCG).

Sunday, November 9, 2008

Casey Baltes:

Good morning everyone, I hope you're all fully caffeinated. I'm privileged to moderate this panel, especially now, as the cultural ground has completely shifted beneath us, it's particularly timely and with all of this economy talk, I think this is going to be the "uplifting" panel. We're here today to discuss shifting demographics and the way theatres are adjusting to be more inclusive and reflective of the communities they serve. And I would like to add that we should discuss how we are challenging the communities that we are serving. I'd like to be diligent and discuss this in four aspects: from the audience, the art, the board and the staff. I understand that diversity means many things to many people—it can be a very broad definition—but for purposes of the precious hour that we have today and leaning on the particular expertise of the panel that we have today, I think that we are going to focus this conversation specifically on racial and ethnic diversity. I'd like to introduce the panel to my left, we have Peter Lobo, the deputy director of the Population Division of the New York City Department of City Planning; Paul Nicholson, the executive director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival; Mia Katigbak, the artistic producing director of National Asian American Theatre Company and founding member of the Consortium of Asian American Theatres and Artists; and Tim Bond, producing artistic director of Syracuse Stage.

I think normally I'd start off this session by culling together research that I've found on shifting demographics but instead I'm going to leave that to our resident expert, Peter Lobo, who's going to tell us a little bit about what he has found in his demographic research on immigration in New York and the United States.

Peter Lobo:

I want to start out by explaining why cities are so dynamic from a demographic perspective and then talk about the effects of this dynamism. Let's take New York City for example. Between 2000 and 2006, 630,000 immigrants came to New York City. During the same period, 770,000 people left New York, resulting in a net loss of 140,000 people. So, immigration is extremely important to New York because it shores up our population. But despite immigration, more people will actually leave New

York City than will come in. But thanks to kids born in New York, our population has grown by 200,000 and we are at 8.3 million people today. Given these dramatic in-flows and out-flows, you are actually dealing with a different population each year and that really complicates things in cities. Now, most dynamic cities have these robust in-flows and out-flows and those that don't, tend to fade away. If you look at Detroit, for example, our fifth largest city in 1950 with a population of 1.8 million, it declined by half in 2006—partly because it wasn't able to attract immigrants. Just five percent of Detroit's population is foreign born, compared to 37 percent in New York City. Dynamic cities are evolving, ever-changing and challenging to deal with but the alternative is much worse.

Now, immigration also increases our diversity because we have people from all over the world coming here. If you look at the foreign born population in the U.S.—about 36 million—Mexico accounts for 36 percent of the entire foreign born population and we've got people from everywhere in this population and Mexico accounts for 50 percent of this population in Houston and Chicago as well. New York is unique in that our top group—Dominican Republic—accounts for just 10 percent of our immigrant flow. So even though immigrants stream to New York City, it is extremely diverse. Now immigrants shore up our population directly but also indirectly by having babies. The essayist E.B. White said, "Those who come to New York give the city its passion." And let me tell you that immigrants are a pretty passionate bunch. Over one half of all kids born in New York City are born to immigrant mothers. So, you take the immigrant population and you take the U.S. born kids and that equals 60 percent of our population. You really can't ignore that population. Now, with immigrants increasing from non-European sources, the percent of whites in the country has fallen from 88 percent in 1970 to 66 percent today. In New York it stands around 35 percent.

But it's interesting to take a look at the racial distribution of the population by age. This is New York City: (*Refers to a Powerpoint presentation.*) 35 percent white, 28 percent Hispanic, 25 percent black, 10 percent Asian and two percent multi-racial. No one group dominates the racial landscape in New York. But look at the population that are 65 and older, we have about a million elderly and it's half white. That age group represents the cities demographic past. Look at the population under 18, two million with just over a quarter white, a third Hispanic, 28 percent black, 10 percent Asian and two percent multi-racial. That group represents the cities' future and as this group gets older, the city overall will be even more diverse than it is currently. The same thing is true with the U.S. population—300 million—it's about 66 percent white. If you look at the population 65 and older, it's 88 percent white. If you look at kids in the U.S. today, kids are only about 57 percent white. By 2042, if you look at the projected population of the entire country, it's going to be a minority white by that time. And you certainly cannot ignore the majority of the population.

A couple of other points: most of the growth in the country is going to be in the south and the west. We have over 300 million today, we expect to reach 375 million by 2030 but the Midwest and the Northeast is only going to account for about 12 percent of the growth. Most of the growth is going to be in the west and the south. Finally, we are an aging society. (*Refers to the Powerpoint presentation.*) This is the baby-boom group, 35 to 54, that's the population in 2000. By 2030, the youngest baby-boomer is going to be 65. The total elderly population is going to increase from 35 million to 70 million and the elderly are going to account for a fifth of our population. That's going to change our politics, our economy and the cultural scene. I can assure you of one thing, by 2030, 90 will be the new 60. (*Laughter.*) I'll end on that high note. (*Applause.*)

Baltes:

I'm going to start off by asking each panelist a direct question and at the end, I think we'll have some time for questions. Mia, did anything that Peter said surprise you and with regards to the shifting demographics in the Asian American population with ethnic and cultural identity, how has that affected your consortium's governance?

Mia Katigbak:

Actually, it kind of shored up the importance of what we are doing with the Consortium. One thing that was interesting to me, in terms of the presentation that Peter gave us, was that I always thought that New York was the capital of the United States (*Laughter.*) Looking at the representation of the distribution of Asian Americans in the country and where they are in that pie chart, you've separated them: the Vietnamese, the Filipino, the Chinese, which accounts for quite a huge percentage overall of the nation, and when you look at New York, it's not quite as representative of the country. In terms of what that represents, it validates what we've tried to do by putting the Consortium together to make that representation a bit more known among ourselves and also nationally.

The Consortium was conceived at a convening that TCG organized in 2003 at White Oak for theatres of color, to figure out the state of our art in the nation. There were six Asian American theatre companies there. We started to talk, possibly for the first time, in terms of national presence of Asian American theatre. In 2004, East West Players put together the first National Asian American Theatre Conference. Out of the planning for that conference, we included five more theatre companies to be more representative of the country and of the different kind of theatre that we were all doing. What we decided was that we would have a very first Asian American Theatre Festival. Almost every conversation that we had—panels, forums, meetings, at the bar—two consistent themes always came up, which were identity and theatre.

This past year, through the generosity of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, we created a strategic plan and formalized this organization, which is now the Consortium of Asian American Theatres and Artists (CAATA). I was taken with something that was in Casey's email that said the only thing that is constant is change. Well, we set about to embed the philosophy of change in the charter of the organization because the world is constantly changing and shifting. As theatre practitioners and philosophers, we have to be able to accommodate that change and not be consistently reactive but creative and innovative about addressing these issues. Knowing that the picture of the country is what it is, it's a really helpful thing to know.

In the makeup of the board, we are very conscious about making sure that the board membership represents this diversity from around the country, so it's just not geographic diversity, but as we saw from the national pie chart, Asian and Asian American is not just one thing—one big monolithic thing—the Census Bureau recorded at least 36 different cultures. So, if we're talking about the combination of ethnicities and cultures, it's a very rich and un-ignorable factor in the way that the country will develop in terms of our diversity.

One interesting thing that we found out from Emilyya at TCG, was that there was a study from the Brookings Institute that predicted that the mixed race aspect will greatly increase—they're talking about babies born—and what that particular aspect will then do to our art and theatre-making. Change again—the constantly shifting definition of Asian American and theatre. Theatre we all know about, but Asian American has gone through a change from early in the century when it was Chinese and Japanese and Pacific Islands as well, and now we are north of Russia, west of Turkey, all the way south to Australia, so it's a very dynamic and fascinating ongoing discussion.

Baltes:

Paul, Oregon Shakespeare Festival has had a strong commitment to diversity initiatives in a small community that is actually not as culturally diverse as a metropolitan area. Why is this important to OSF and what are the particular challenges that you face?

Paul Nicholson:

There are a number of challenges and there are certainly a number of reasons that we've moved in this direction. And just to clarify for our colleagues here, we've (*Refers to Tim Bond and himself.*) been working in the area of diversity for about 15 years now and we have developed a number of different initiatives that I can talk about that have to do with developing the audience, developing the board and the staff. But going specifically to the reason for it, I like to think of it as three rather simplistic, and I hope not glib, ways. The first is art, the second is demographics and the third is

biology. Libby Appel, who was our artistic director, always used to say that the reason we are deeply focused on diversity is because it makes the art better and makes the art richer. We certainly have had many, many experiences of that. Particularly, we've had actors of color play certain roles. I remember last year, we had an African American woman playing the lead in *The Tempest* and what she brought from her culture totally changed the production. It was a very different production from what it would have been with an actress from a different ethnic background. So it makes the art richer and deeper and more interesting.

From a demographic point of view, as Peter demonstrated very clearly the changing demographics, we noticed this a number of years ago in our area—which is only about six percent people of color—that it was going to be changing and that we needed to be ahead of the curve. It's particularly interesting if you blend the changes in demographics—as Peter talked about the change to the west, where the population is growing and the ethnic specific population is growing. So, you put those two things together and that means there's going to be significant growth in our area, and particularly regarding the Hispanic population. We wanted to be ahead of that because we knew if we only focused on our traditional audience that we would have a significant problem.

Thirdly, there's the biological argument. We recognized that, just as in a forest, if you have trees that are all exactly the same, then the forest is more prone to disease and destruction and so on, but if you have a very richly varied forest, you have a stronger biological organism. And so it is with organizations. We feel that an organization that has a really strong mix of, not only ethnic specific areas, but also age, sexual orientation, etc., that gives us a richness that we would not otherwise have had. So those are the three primary reasons.

As far as challenges are concerned, our biggest challenge is that we are more than 300 miles from any metropolitan area. It's sort of like an isolation challenge. That does create specific problems for us when we try to bring people of color into the organization. I was talking with an African American actress recently and I asked her, "What more can we do to support your experience with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival?" And she said, "Bring in someone who can do my hair." It sort of sounds funny in a way, but it's very real. And it was only in that moment that I realized the important cultural differences that exist. For instance, Ashland doesn't have a soul food restaurant. We have not yet had any critical mass in terms of providing an environment where people of color can feel particularly welcome.

We also have a challenge in that our region, southern Oregon, had a really terrible reputation for being racist. We have photographs, believe it or not, in southern Oregon, of the KKK marching

hooded down the main street of the city. And that was in the 1920s, which was not that long ago. There are many, many African Americans who used to say, “If you’re driving south from Portland, fill up in Roseburg,” which is about 90 miles north of us. “Don’t stop in southern Oregon, it’s too dangerous.” And that’s a legacy that we’re not proud of and have to face up to.

I think another challenge has to do with an internal one—it’s tough work, it’s hard, sometimes discouraging, sometimes even dispiriting to move forward because you feel that you are making progress but you realize that not everybody is where you want them to be. So it can be very difficult. But we’ve been doing this for a long time and we know that it’s an important part of our organization.

The last point I want to make in terms of the diversity work that we do, is that there are three “ins”—we need to be inclusive, we need to be integrated and we need to be intentional, so those are the areas that we focused on in our strategic planning.

Baltes:

We talked a little bit about your use of a diversity consultant, can you talk about that a little bit?

Nicholson:

Yes, we’ve had a diversity consultant for about 12 years—and I like to recognize that Tim (Bond) as many of you know, had been with us for 10 years and spearheaded many of the diversity initiatives and it would be unfair of me not to acknowledge that. The diversity consultant came and really helped us focus our attention on diversity through diversity training—we trained over 250 members of our company over a series of three or four different trainings—talking with the board about the importance of diversity and what diversity really means and looking at the different models of diversity. It was very important for us in terms of moving forward. I think another important thing that we’ve done recently is that we’ve set up an infrastructure to support the diversity work that we’re doing—setting up councils, for instance, and action committees focused on different areas and we brought many members of our company into the discussion and exploration of diversity.

Baltes:

Tim, as Paul alluded to earlier, this is your first season at Syracuse Stage after having left the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. I’m interested to hear about some of the immediate changes that you’ve made in your theatre in the first season, and looking towards the future, how are you going to shape programming to be more reflective of your community?

Tim Bond:

I will first say how much I cherished my time at Oregon Shakespeare Festival. I had a dream two days before I moved there from Seattle for my 10 or 11 year tenure. There was an image of the KKK showing up on my lawn on the first day that I moved into the city, in my dream, and they were burning a cross and all those sorts of things. I woke up and had this feeling that, no, that was a time of the past. And in fact, when I arrived in Oregon it was. So those kind of reputations in certain areas hold up longer than what's really true, and we made some terrific progress there and I had a terrific time. What I learned from that experience was how to set up an infrastructure and what you needed to do with your board, your audience and your staff to really prepare the ground for a shift towards diversity.

For me, coming from the wilds of Oregon to the city of Syracuse, has been an incredible experience. I looked at the demographics before I moved there to see what it was like in Syracuse and it's about 48 percent people of color in the city proper and that begins to shift to a lower number—in the 20s and low 30s—of people of color as you move out into the surrounding counties and as you get 20 to 30 miles out, it shifts to five to 10 percent. I had been dealing with a 300-mile radius in Oregon, so it's a very different question. In terms of being inclusive and reflective of our community, this season, which is really my first season as producing artistic director, we started off with about three shows of seven in our season that are very reflective of the demographic—of African American, Latino, Asian American and Native American. We started off with *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* in September and followed up with a project by Ping Chong called *Tales from the Salt City*. I'll talk about both projects in a minute. For our holiday musical, we're doing a production of *Godspell*, which we're in rehearsals for now, which is reflective of the idea of Jesus actually traveling the world of different cultures. So, it will be taking place in China, India, Haiti and ends up in New Orleans.

We're constantly looking for ways to deal with works that are ethnic specific but also works that are maybe open to interpretation that create a sense of world culture. Wherever I've lived, I've never been focused solely on the demographics of the immediate community, although I do care about it. For example, in Oregon where there is only six percent (people of color), there would be no mandate for the Shakespeare Festival to say that we need to have 30 to 40 percent of the acting company to be people of color because that is not actually reflective of the community, but Oregon Shakespeare did that. That's getting ahead of the curve but it also has to do with a worldview. For us in Syracuse, one of the interesting demographics—that Peter also talked about—is youth, and how the next generation of audiences represents a much more diverse population than the populations that most of us have as our subscription base. So there's a real tension there.

When I got to Syracuse, I went to see some of the shows last season—when it was my first season helping plan the programming—and 98 percent of the audience was white and over 58. I thought that was not reflective of the Syracuse community, so what do I do as an artistic director to get in tune with my community and be inclusive and reflective? So we've taken a big leap this year and we know that we're a little ahead of the curve of where our traditional audience is but we're actually more reflective of what our community is and we're trying to welcome new people to the table. We knew that we needed to put a community engagement person on our staff, which we did, and she goes out and tries to connect to very different communities that may have not felt welcome in the past. I have a new associate artistic director, Rajendra Maharaj, who is busy out shaking the trees in the community. In the shows that we're doing, group sales has become a really huge part of what we are focused on in filling in those single tickets that are not selling, as people may not be aware of the titles or, as I've heard from people who use to subscribe say, "I'm not sure I'm interested in that show," meaning that it's not something that is directly connected to their culture. So we're going out and grabbing people off the streets of Syracuse and we've had record group sales so far this year by doing that. (*Laughter.*) People are kind of blown away.

I want to run a couple of clips of another strategy that we've taken, which is taken from some of the things that we talked about at the last TCG Conference—how do you get that young demographic in and how do you grab your immediate audience and prepare them for what they are going to see when they may or may not know the title of the play or know what's coming. As I find that is what's most difficult for us—our audiences that have been subscribers may have not been exposed to some of what we are bringing when we are doing more diverse work. And when they come and are surprised, they're not too happy about it, at least in Syracuse. I don't know how your audiences are but my audiences don't like surprises! Then there are people who have not felt welcome to the table for many years who don't know, even though we tell them through every ad that we can buy, that they are welcome to the table now, but they still don't know that. We're trying to reach that demographic—the 18 to 40 year olds. So we've started doing trailers that many of you have been doing for some time and have been done at the McCarter Theater but have not been done at Syracuse. My new managing director, Jeff Woodward, has been working with us and we've been working with the McCarter to create these commercials. I want to show you these short clips that we're using to try to prepare our audience for what they are going to see. I'll start with *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. (*Shows video trailer.*)

As you can see these are very short and we send them out electronically to anyone who has email access to us. As I'm also artistic director of the Drama department, we've been able to connect to Syracuse University and we've been able to get to use the database there as well. This goes out to

30,000 to 50,000 people. Whether they decide to click and open it up or not is out of our hands but we are certainly creating an opportunity for people to be able to get access to it. Pretty quickly after we've taken photos of our shows, which we have digitally, we're able to throw these in and put this quick trailer together in three or four days. And by the time we open or a little later, we're able to put these out. Our hope is that we are going to reach a new audience that may be more visual, that may be younger and not necessarily have gone to theatre a lot. We're trying to find networks and ways to reach that demographic because without that, we don't know how we're going to reach that next generation. If we don't reach that next generation, well, we know that our audience is shrinking.

At Syracuse Stage, our subscriber base has gone down from 10,000 to 3,500 in the last 10 to 12 years. And that, of course, is a real threat to our ability to continue to hold onto our current budget size and programming that we're trying to do. Given the fact that, nationally, subscriptions numbers are going down everywhere, we're trying to figure out how we can change that. My theory is that it's through group sales and spreading the wealth in terms of who we reach out to in our community.

I want to run one more clip that is from *Tales from the Salt City*. This is by Ping Chong, who was with us, and Ping created a piece that reflected our community by reaching out to the immigrant community in Syracuse. We had someone from the Cambodian community, someone from the Sudan community, from Macedonia, from Cuba, a Native American from the Onondaga nation, an African American—whose family goes way back in Syracuse—and a Mexican woman. They all told personal stories of how they came to Syracuse and it's all interwoven into a project that Ping's been doing for 17 years called *Undesirable Elements*. This one is called *Tales from the Salt City*. Salt City is the nickname for Syracuse because we used to run salt through the Erie Canal. (*Shows video trailer*) So that's a little bit about what we've been up too now.

Baltes:

I'm going to open it up to Q&A in second, but I first wanted to share a little bit of my thoughts on this. Doing my research and asking people what I should be discussing today, the one question that resonated above all was why is this important? Before the how, why is this important to your communities? And in digging down, why this is important to me? My sister on election night sent me a text message. A little background on us, I'm adopted, she's adopted, I'm Korean and she is black. She is 21 and this is her first election, and we had been talking about growing up in Springfield, MO and being the only Asian and black person in our elementary and high schools. So, she sent me this text message that read, "You were right, the world is bigger than Springfield, I now see possibility." So that's my answer. And before I open it up to questions, I want to ask this question again, why is

this important? And see if you have any other thoughts about why it's important for your communities, respectively.

Katigbak:

I've always reacted to how a population is represented on film, on TV and on stage, and going back to what Tim was saying about reflecting the community, I find in my experience that it really does not do that. Being in New York, when you walk down the street, it's a preliminary reaction and when you become conscious of something like that, you reflect on where else in life is this happening? So my choice of expression is the theatre. This was also very personal too—the history of trying to get work as an actor and not being able to, despite your training. We don't talk about this much anymore as it's impolitic but it's physiology. Someone who looks at me can't assume that I'm not Swedish. That's the truth. That's the way the world looks at it now. We're behind the curve. So how do you change that? Making inroads into education and into consciousness and it seems self-evident but it's not.

Bond:

I think for us, it's just our future. We will have no future if we are not being inclusive. We can't really afford, in terms of business, to only welcome the same traditional audience to the table. It's a pretty simple equation. If you look at that demographic that keeps getting smaller, why would we say that the majority is going to be a different population than those that we are welcoming to the theatre. It doesn't make any sense, that's one thing. In terms of a personal global perspective, I really think it does make the work better. It makes our embracing of the human condition, which I think is always what theatres been about, actually true. Rather than saying that to be human, is to be white.

Baltes:

Now I'm going to open it up for Q&A.

Carey Pickus:

Hi, my name is Carey Pickus and I'm from TheatreWorks in Silicon Valley. Diversity has always been a big part of our mission and a big part of our programming, but what we learned recently from our audiences and our demographics is that what diversity means for the future is different than what it's meant in the past. Most people, eventually, if not now, can check more than one box on the Census. So diversity really means addressing issues of multi-culturalism, and multi-culturalism within individuals. I'm wondering if the panel has any wisdom about how we change our programming, so that instead of reflecting diversity by doing really interesting Asian plays and plays that address African-American issues, how do we address multi-culturalism?

Katigbak:

If I may switch hats here and speak on behalf of my theatre, which is the National Asian American Theatre Company, we introduced a new initiative to hopefully address something like that. How you do that is to address the present conceptions and misconceptions about who we are. This new initiative is to produce plays (preferably world premieres), not by, for or about Asian Americans but realized by an all Asian American cast. To point to the fact, as I said before, you can't make assumptions about someone's culture just by the way they look. And hopefully, in terms of the field, it will encourage people to create new work that addresses, precisely, those kinds of things. That you can cast, not according to the assumption but, for example, Tim and I, as Casey pointed out, could be siblings, even biological siblings, in this world. So that's one way to address it, hopefully.

Bond:

It's a great question. *Tales from the Salt City* was very much about that. As much as it seems to be about specific cultures, every character in the play, said at one point, I'm from here, but I live here now, so who am I? What does that mean being a hyphenated person in this culture? What does that hyphen mean in terms of your identity, is at the core of Ping Chong's projects, as he explores them when he's dealing with race and culture. I also think, or hope at least, that if you have enough of a blend of plays that are specifically about particular cultures that are breaking open expectation of, "Well, this is the way that it's always been cast, but now we are casting it multi-culturally." It begins to question your assumption about who has propriety over certain ideas and certain worldviews and it begins to become inclusive of a larger demographic. Also, I'm looking for great plays that deal with that very issue, being a person myself that checks three boxes and have done so since I've been old enough to do that. I get that deeply in my work and as a person. So, I know we're searching for that aesthetic as well, that multi-cultural aesthetic.

Nicholson:

From our perspective, I want to illuminate a little more bit more in terms of what Tim said. I guess the main thrust of what we have in that area is to cast in what we call color conscious casting rather than non-traditional or color-blind. We are aware of color and that's integrated into our plays. We did *Our Town* with a totally multi-cultural cast. We had three sisters where all three were from different races. Those are some of the ways that we can break down some of the stereotypes.

Baltes:

Other questions?

David Hawkanson:

Tim, David Hawkanson from the Steppenwolf Theatre. I'm curious, that subscription number is quite staggering and I've heard that Syracuse has been having audience problems for some time. I was wondering when you were hired and now that you are diversifying the programming, what steps have you taken with your leadership at the university or your trustees to bring them along for this challenge, as this is something that doesn't happen overnight? How did you get them on board and how are you keeping them on board and making them part of the challenge?

Bond:

University folks, as one might imagine, though it may not be the case with the university in your town, but they are very interested in us moving in this direction. I think that's part of the reason that I was welcomed into the family, so to speak. The board, well, it's dawning on them where we're going, although, I told them that from the very beginning, but they really didn't visualize what that was going to look like. What we've done is bring the artists into the board meetings and have them address various issues. I bring them in to the meetings and ask them to tell the board what they are thinking about and to tell them about themselves. So the board is getting to realize who they are, and not, this is somebody that they don't know and are distant from. Bringing them closer to the art, to the process of the art, to the actual artists themselves, makes a big difference. So that's helping to bring the board along.

Our pre-show talks and our design presentations, we invite the board to those as well. They can be at those sessions where the artist is really taking them through the designs, meeting the cast and talking about the art. The more early exposure that the board can have to those things is helpful. I'm also asking them to be advocates for us in their communities and bring us resources—not just financial—but particularly, people, connections and groups that they can connect us to. I'm still learning how we can engage them more in that. That's something that Jeff and I are focused on. But those are some of the techniques that we are using to try and bring them along with us. They were very dubious to begin the season and I'm finding now that they are really embracing where we are going. That's what I know so far as it's been a short time.

Angel Ysaguirre:

Hello, I'm Angel Ysaguirre from the Boeing Company. When we make grants to arts organizations that are trying to broaden participation in terms of ethnicity and race, we always ask about developing a practice of theatregoing. So, not just how do you pull in African Americans for the African American show, but how do you get them to develop a practice of coming to your theatre show after show? But my question is more about class than it is about race or ethnicity, and if you think about trying to bring audiences to this practice of theatregoing, how do you address class when

ticket sales, by necessity, cost more than many people can afford? How do you tackle that in your work?

Nicholson:

I think that we are tackling that in two major ways. The first is through our education work—about 20 percent of our audience is made up of school groups. The one thing we do know is that school groups, as Peter revealed through the statistics and the analysis, kids in the schools are much more multi-cultural than the rest of the population, particularly the population that we deal with. So, we work a lot with school groups. We have an initiative in place that not only brings kids from the schools to us to see the shows, but also that they have specific education work that goes with it, we have many study guides, etc. The most recent initiative we had focused on increasing the number of school groups that have another education activity associated with us, and that rose from 50 percent to 75 percent. And we were successful in doing that over a three year period. That's very important in terms of breaking through the class distinctions. As we all know, there was a study carried out many years ago that stated that the single greatest indicator of theatregoing as an adult is theatregoing as a child. And so that's one of the things that we try to focus on to connect with the kids as they come through our doors.

Bond:

Eighteen percent of our audience is students as well, so, we go that route too. We have vouchers that we started this year and the community engagement person and others are able to hand them out. They are significantly discounted tickets available to groups that they may run into or even individuals on the street that they talk to and they encourage them to come. Looking at the demographics of Syracuse, we have one of the lowest income brackets of any city in the U.S. It is a very impoverished community and the housing prices are unbelievably low. In fact, come move there, you can get a really great, big house for very little money. (*Laughter.*) We are part of what they call the Rust Belt. There are a lot of people who just don't have the money to afford to come. We have rush tickets that are currently going for \$20 and the student price for university students is \$9 on rush—a price of a movie. We have a 40 below subscription that we are going to roll out next—now it's 35 below—but we're moving it to 40 below. Anyone 40 years of age and under will be able to get a half-price subscription to the theatre. We're trying a number of ways to begin to address those class issues because they are very real to us in Syracuse. And any other ideas that anyone else has, I will steal.

Lobo:

That's a very interesting question and one that is often ignored. The reality may actually surprise you. Asian groups in New York City have pretty high incomes. The median income in New York City is \$43,000. For Filipinos, it's around \$75,000. For Asian Indians, it's around \$55,000. And nationwide, Asians have the highest income of any group, followed by Filipinos. If you look at immigrant blacks in New York, they have higher incomes than native born blacks and that's true nationwide as well. It's not necessarily always a class issue as there are groups with substantial sums of money.

Sharon Fairley:

Hi. I'm Sharon Fairley, a trustee from Steppenwolf in Chicago, and I have one comment and a question. The comment is that as I look around the room, I'm fairly surprised to see that there are not a lot of people like me, and I don't mean that I don't see other 5'8" attorneys! (*Laughter.*) To the extent that you have comments about that, I'd appreciate hearing them. Over the past several months, because of the nature of our election, there's been a lot of discourse about the issue of race, and my question is, to what extent do you think that will inform you about the work that you do and what extent do you feel a responsibility to contribute to the national discourse on that issue?

Katigbak:

It was a great celebration of what we do, actually, in terms of our President-elect. I was just recalling, after a comment that Tim made, that he (Obama) was described as a stew of cultures residing in one person. I think there is a common thread in what we are speaking about—very different approaches to accomplishing something like that. There was another comment after his rebuttal at a conference in Philadelphia about his association with Reverend Wright and a commentator said that not once did he ever refer to his race but addressed the issue in a very eloquent and inspiring way. I think that it's a very inspiring thing. I'm sure that I'm not alone in saying this, but it was such an emotional moment, especially for people of color—I'm sorry, that was presumptuous. It's a great boost of energy and it's very encouraging. It's inspirational, I suppose.

Bond:

It's a great question. Actually the biggest question that I have in my mind right now is, will an Obama presidency legitimize the discourse on race in the theatre or will it, as some pundits have already done in the last few days, saying that we need a moratorium on the whole question of affirmative action because obviously you've succeeded, so why do we need to continue that program? I hope that doesn't catch on too much in the world as I don't think that this one success is going to turn everything around. My sense is that, what's happened in the world should create an entry for inclusion in a way that has been legitimized. The thing that I'm most curious about is the concept of

victimization in a number of plays that deal with race, which has been an important discourse for the last 50 years, on understanding what the difficulties and struggles of people of color in this country has been under a very different mindset. And also, whether that mindset has changed or begun to change enough. The question of exploring victimization due to racial difference is what we need to be presenting to move the discussion forward. What are those plays, what are those projects that are not just thin celebrations but something that moves us to that next level of discourse? So that's the question I'm asking myself. And I'm searching for those kinds of projects. They can be taking a Shakespeare play and casting it in a certain way and taking a different worldview and breaking it open—that certainly would be a project. It could be—what are the new works that are out there that lend themselves to that, what are the classic American plays, re-imagined in other ways that begin to break open what it means to be an American? Those are some of the things we're talking about a Syracuse Stage.

Nicholson:

One of the things that struck me with the recent election was thinking back to when Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister of England. Many people at time thought that now women have reached this pinnacle, women can be fully involved in the political scene in England. And we see how many women Prime Ministers have been in England since Thatcher stepped away. I think my real concern is that America may do the same thing. We reached this level with Obama's election and suddenly, he'll be the last person of color we'll see in major elected offices. I think our role here in the theatre is pivotal to make sure that doesn't happen. As Tim said, we can use our art to explore these issues in ways that I'm not sure anyone else can. I think through the work that we do and the way that we intentional bring people onto our staff and onto our boards, underscoring the importance of leadership across the spectrum is going to be very important for our futures.

Baltes:

I think we have time for one more question.

Susan Medak:

I've got two comments that I'd like you to respond to. One is that we've been talking for years and years and years about audiences of color and I think that what many of us have experienced is that among an older generation, the aesthetic and taste of audiences of different backgrounds is very different. When we do a play that is affirming of a specific ethnic community, that older ethnic community comes out for it. But if we do a play that is an *Our Town* or whatever, well that older ethnic community comes out for that too. Unfortunately, what we found is that no matter what we do, our younger audience has a totally different aesthetic than our older audience. So when we go back

to our older audience with a work that speaks to their community, they will come. But if we do a piece that is non-traditional, non-linear, a young audience comes and that audience is all different colors. And it has created a certain dilemma for us. We opened *Joe Turner* two nights ago and the thing that fascinated me, and raised all kinds of questions about our future programming, was my 30 year old black cousin came up to me afterwards and said, "Two nights ago, I would have loved this play. But tonight, I find it a minstrel show." Here we have, in front of us every night, a black man who is so well-spoken, who is so middle class, who has so agreed to buy into what is an all American culture as opposed to a specific American culture. And she said that what you're doing on stage here is really retro. And it doesn't speak to my generation. Comments?

Bond:

Welcome to America! (*Laughter.*)

Baltes:

Well, I think that concludes our session. (*More laughter.*) Thank you so much panel and thank you all for an engaging discussion.