THE CHANGING FACE OF AMERICAN THEATRE: COLORBLIND AND UNI-RACIAL CASTING AT THE NEW YORK SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL UNDER THE DIRECTION OF JOSEPH PAPP

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

THE CHANGING FACE OF AMERICAN THEATRE: COLORBLIND AND UNI-RACIAL CASTING AT THE NEW YORK SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL UNDER THE DIRECTION OF JOSEPH PAPP

presented by Charlene Widener,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy, and hereby certify

that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

There have been many people who have supported me as I completed this project. My greatest debt is to my husband, Patrick Reading, who read everything I wrote, offered feedback, and supported me throughout this process. He helped me through the frustration and disappointments in this process as well as the triumphs.

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ABSTRACT

It is widely acknowledged that Joseph Papp started colorblind casting in the United States in a sustained and visible way. In addition, he utilized uni-racial casting at various times in the history of the New York Shakespeare Festival (NYSF). Based on the general agreement that Papp's casting had a significant impact on the American theatre, it is clear that his work functioned as a racial project from the perspective of racial formations.

Despite the fact that Papp's work has had an impact as a racial project in the United States, there are significant elements to his casting which have yet to be explored. The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the extent and nature of colorblind and uni-racial casting at the NYSF and explore how the two different methods of non-traditional casting were used at various times in the organization's history.

Chapter One

On November 1, 1991, a black hearse turned into an untended cemetery on Staten Island. There, next to his mother and father, Joseph Papp was buried. When he died, Papp was hailed as "the most important theatrical figure of our age. . . [a]nd he was certainly the single most important individual in New York—and national—theatre."[1] He worked in almost every area of New York theatre: regional theatre, off-Broadway, and on Broadway. He began his Shakespeare Workshop in the basement of the Emmanuel Presbyterian Church on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in 1952 and eventually became one of the most powerful producers in New York City. Papp produced a free Shakespeare Festival in Central Park every summer, and he toured productions through New York City's five boroughs and public schools.

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[1]Timothy McDarrah, "Joseph Papp Dead at 70," *New York Post*, 1 November 1991, 3.

His Public Theatre was a non-profit regional theatre established to bring a new and diverse audience to the theatre. Tickets at the Public Theatre were sold at reduced prices so that a non-theatre-going public who was traditionally priced out of the attendance could attend. Papp produced on Broadway and used part of the profits from his Broadway productions to produce workshops and experimental productions at the Public Theatre. Papp took the American theatre to places it had never been. He brought Shakespeare to the common people, made it affordable to everyone, and he helped change the face of American theatre. However, some of the most important aspects of his innovations were his ideas of casting. Papp created forums for discussion on interracial casting, broke down the entrenched racial structure in theatre production, and redefined African Americans onstage with the sustained use of colorblind and uni-racial casting. The goal of this dissertation is to explore Papp's use of colorblind and uni-racial casting at the New York Shakespeare Festival.

Before discussing the specific purpose of the project, it is important to understand a few key terms: historically accurate, non-traditional, colorblind, multi-racial, interracial, and uni-racial casting. Historically accurate casting would put actors in specific roles based on race, gender, and age appropriate to time and place. For example, an African American woman would never play Scarlet O'Hara in a

historically accurate version of *Gone With the Wind*. The person cast in the role would be a young (age), white (race) woman (gender). Non-traditional casting entails choices that are not historically accurate in terms of gender, age, or physical appearance. The term non-traditional casting is used primarily to represent casting of minorities, women, or the disabled.[2] A production by the lesbian, feminist theatre company Split Britches of *A Streetcar Named Desire* with all of the roles played by women would be an example of non-traditional casting. A production of *Othello* with a white actor portraying Othello and black actors portraying the other characters would also be considered non-traditional casting. Colorblind casting refers to casting that disregards all racial categories. The thought behind colorblind casting is that the best actor should be cast in the most appropriate role without reference to race. For example, in Papp's revival of *Naked Hamlet* in 1968, Papp cast an African American as Hamlet, while both Claudius and Gertrude were white. Multi-racial casting involves using ethnicity as a statement in play that traditionally does not have an ethnically diverse cast. For example, a production of *All My Sons* might have the Keller family represented by white actors while African American actors play the family next door. This method is not

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[2]John Joseph Gibbons, "The American Theatre's Attempts to Achieve Multiculturalism on Stage through Non-Traditional Casting" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1991), 22.

historically accurate (an African American family would probably not have lived next door to an upper middle class suburban family in 1946); however, each family is represented by a single ethnic group, and a meaning can be ascertained by the casting choices. Interracial casting refers to either colorblind, multi-racial casting or racially accurate casting. For example, the casting of a black actor in Othello (as opposed to a white actor in black face) would be considered racially accurate casting and would fall under interracial casting. Uni-racial casting involves the casting of one ethnic group in all or most roles of the play. For example, an all black or all Hispanic production of *Death of a Salesman* would be considered uni-racial. Plays that are written with all African American characters would also be considered uni-racial, such as August Wilson's *Fences*. In my discussion of the material that is currently available on Papp, I will utilize the terms colorblind, uni-racial, and interracial because they have been evoked in previous research focused specifically on casting blacks and whites.[3]

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the extent and nature of colorblind and uni-racial casting at the New York Shakespeare Festival and explore how the two different methods of non-traditional casting were used at various times in the organization's history. Using racial formation as an analytical tool, this study will

[3]Ibid., 22.

focus on the intent of Papp's colorblind and uni-racial casting, the nature of the racial project, and the extent of racial project.

When discussing the intent of Papp's casting, there are several questions which must be answered. First, what motivated Papp to try non-traditional casting? Secondly, what from his background created a desire to provide opportunities for African American actors? Why did he believe it was important for African American actors to play Shakespearean roles? Finally, how were Papp's casting decisions linked to social and political environment; what is the relationship between the practices and historical events?

The second area of research I will address is the extent of Papp's colorblind and uni-racial casting at the NYSF. How extensive was the practice? Did it extend into other areas outside of casting? What is the extent and significance of the practice in terms of quantity?

Finally, I will address the nature of Papp's casting. What is racial formations perspective and how does it aid in the determination of racist verses non-racist racial projects? Given that Papp's casting was a micro-level racial project, does the colorblind and uni-racial casting function as racist or non-racist? Did Papp's casting choices work to reinforce or dispel racial categories (racist or non-racist) prevalent in theatre and society? What was the audiences' reaction to the two forms of casting? Did audience members perceive the casting as racist

or non-racist? How did critics respond? Did black critics respond differently than white critics? Are the responses different to colorblind and uni-racial casting choices? What was the impact of his work on his actors and the company he founded in the long term? Can Papp's work be perceived as not only a micro-level racial project but also as a macro-level racial project? When I answer these questions, I will be able to draw some conclusions about the intent, extent, and nature of Papp's colorblind and uni-racial casting.

A review of the literature available on colorblind and uni-racial casting at the NYSF shows that although considerable scholarship exists on the practices, there are also significant gaps. Much has been written about Joseph Papp and his use of colorblind and uni-racial casting at the New York Shakespeare Festival (NYSF) and the Public Theatre. Several books have been published about the life of Joseph Papp and his work. The most comprehensive is the 1994 book by Helen Epstein entitled *Joe Papp: An American Life*. Epstein's book is a detailed account of the public and private events in Papp's life. Epstein originally approached Papp in 1977 about writing his biography. Although Papp had some interest in the project, he declined. In 1989, however, Papp broached Epstein about writing the book after learning that he had advanced stage prostate cancer. Epstein was able to interview Papp for the book before his death. She

also had access to many of Papp's personal records before they were archived in the Billy Rose Collection at the New York Public Library. The result is a comprehensive chronology of Papp's life and work. While the text is invaluable in terms of the biographical information it offers, it is a sprawling account of his life and does not provide a systematic analysis of Papp's work in colorblind and uni-racial casting. The amount of information included in the work leaves little space for an in-depth analysis of Papp's intent, the nature of his casting in terms of being racist or non-racist, or the extent of colorblind and uni-racial casting at the NYSF.

Other books and unpublished manuscripts have focused on the chronology of Papp's life, his work, and the development of the NYSF. Stuart W. Little's *Enter Joseph Papp: In Search of a New American Theatre* (1974) chronicles Papp's professional life including his directorial process, fundraising efforts, leadership style, the development of the NYSF, and his move to Lincoln Center. Two unpublished manuscripts available from the Billy Rose Collection at the New York Public Library, *The History of the New York Shakespeare Festival* by Sean Cronin and *The History of the New York Shakespeare Festival 1952-1961* by David Black, chronicle the early years of the festival as do two master's theses, *The Roots of the New York Shakespeare Festival* by David Harry Waltrous (Hunter College 1967)

and *S.R.O. Culture: The Development of the New York Shakespeare Festival* by Robert Michael Newman (Cornell University 1967). Barbara Lee Horn's *Joseph Papp: A Bio-Bibliography* (1992) provides a brief biography; however, the focus of the text is a bibliography of material written by Papp, about Papp, and about his productions. There have also been a number of articles in a variety of publications written about Papp's life, his work, and his theatre ideology. Although many of the resources available on Papp discuss his use of colorblind and uni-racial casting, interracial casting is not the focus of any of the resources and none of the available resources provide a systematic analysis focused on the extent and nature of the casting.

Errol Hill and James Hatch are two other authors who have looked at Papp's use of colorblind and uni-racial casting. In his book *Shakespeare in Sable: A History of Black Shakespearean Actors*, Errol Hill looks at Shakespearean productions which included African American actors from the nineteenth century to the 1970s. In the text, Hill discusses Papp's work and concludes that

> Joseph Papp's contribution to black participation in Shakespearean and other classical productions should not be disparaged. In our time he has been the greatest force in demolishing barriers that for too long have shut out black actors from appearing in all but a few of Shakespeare's plays. He has also been chiefly instrumental in gaining public acceptance of multiracial Shakespearean productions.[4]

In *A History of African American Theatre* by Hill and James Hatch, the authors briefly discuss Papp and the NYSF. They note that Papp's efforts successfully introduced the concept of African American actors playing roles traditionally played by white actors.[5] Although, the books discuss both colorblind and uni-racial productions at the NYSF, the focus of the books is broader. The first looks at the history of black actors in Shakespearean roles, and the second book is a comprehensive history of African Americans in theatre. Neither book examines the nature and extent of Papp's productions nor do they look at the intent of Papp's work.

In the collection of essays entitled *Colorblind Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Race and Performance* edited by Ayanna Thompson (2006), a number of authors look at colorblind casting. The authors discuss issues such as the semiotics of race in the theatre, colorblind casting in film, and areas of future research and practice. In addition, the work includes articles discussing colorblind casting in specific productions, the work of Ira Aldridge, and interviews with performers who have worked in colorblind casts. In her article Thomson provides a brief introduction to Papp (she relies heavily on Epstein) and discusses

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[4]Errol Hill, *Shakespeare in Sable: A History of Black Shakespearean Actors* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 190-191.

[5]Errol G. Hill and James V. Hatch, *A History of African American Theatre* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), 425.

his use of colorblind casting. Thompson concludes that the "systematic practice of non-traditional or colorblind casting began with Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival in the 1950s." [6] While Thompson does discuss the debate about whether Papp's colorblind casting can be considered racist or non-racist, she does not address his uni-racial casting nor does she asses the intent or extent of his work in colorblind or uni-racial casting.

Numerous articles and reviews are also available. Articles have been written about Papp, his work, and specific events at the NYSF. There are also reviews available for many NYSF productions. Most of the reviews deal with a specific production and include the reviewer's opinion about the quality of those productions. While all of these resources discuss Papp's work and draw conclusions about that work, the intent, nature, and extent of that work has received little analysis.

Three other dissertations have looked specifically at non-traditional casting and include some information on Papp's work. *The American Theatre's Attempt to Achieve Multiculturalism on Stage Through Non-Traditional Casting* by John Joseph Gibbons (Northwestern University, 1991) focuses on the origins, evolution, and

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[6]Ayanna Thompson, "Practicing a Theory/Theorizing a Practice: An Introduction to Shakespearean Colorblind Casting" in *Colorblind Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Race and Performance*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.

promotion of non-traditional casting. Gibbons looks not only at interracial casting in his study but also at the casting of women and the disabled. He does discuss non-traditional casting at the NYSF as a model for other companies who might be interested in utilizing non-traditional casting; however, he does not analyze why Papp used interracial casting, nor does the dissertation discuss the impact of the racialized social structure on Papp's casting choices or the nature of those casting choices.

Michele Menichols in her dissertation *The Great American Pie: Theatre as a Social Force in Race Relations in Contemporary America* (Emory University, 1984) explores the dynamics of race relations in the United States by looking first at the literature available on race relations and then at groups who have attempted to use theatre to change various conditions of race relations. Menichols suggests that her work "provides a theoretical basis for theatre that attempts to act as a social force to change unsatisfactory race relations in contemporary America."[7] Menichols believes that the cultural representations used in theatre can have an impact on the social structure of the United States. The scope, however, of her research is limited to interracial theatre in Atlanta, Georgia.

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[7]Michele Menichols, "The Great American Pie: Theatre as a Social Force in Race Relations in Contemporary America" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1984), 6.

Rodney K. Douglas in his dissertation entitled *The Concept and Practice of Mixed Racial Casting in New York Theatres and Other Regions 1960-1990* (New York University, 2001) discusses the connection between society, theatre, and culture. Douglas also briefly looks at the state of theatre before the start of the study and the authors, scholars, and other professionals who have contributed to making mixed racial casting (his umbrella term for all forms of non-traditional casting involving the interracial casting of minority actors including colorblind casting and multi-racial casting), more acceptable. He notes the contributions made by black theatre artists such as Willis Richardson, Randolph Edmonds, Langston Hughes, Amiri Baraka, and Ed Bullins. He also includes a brief survey of work done by professional companies including the NYSF, the author's New Day Repertory Company, the Arena Stage, and the Guthrie Theatre among others. Douglas concludes that both the traditional mainstream and black theatres are moving toward a non-traditional theatre "with mixed racial casting as the core."[8] His work is centered on how specific theatre artists and organizations have contributed to the movement toward this new theatre. He does not however, address

[8]Rodney K. Douglas, "The Concept and Practice of Mixed Racial Casting in New York Theatres and Other Regions 1960-1990" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2001), 67.

the nature of the work and included very little information about the NYSF.

There have also been a number of articles written in the last nine years which discuss colorblind casting specifically as a result of a public debate between August Wilson and Robert Brustein. Much has been made of the dispute on the colorblind casting that began with a 1996 keynote address entitled "The Ground on Which I Stand" given by the late American playwright August Wilson at the 11th annual national conference of the Theatre Communications Group, an organization for non-profit theatres. Wilson's main contention was that black playwriting is vital and thriving but there are not enough black theatre institutions to produce the work. He stated that the recent push for colorblind casting is "'an aberrant idea that has never had any validity[,]' and compared it to the days when slaves were 'summoned to the plantation house to entertain the slave owner and his guests.'"[9] Furthermore, Wilson called for separate black theatres that are run by African Americans, produce plays by African Americans, and employ only African American actors. The paradox is that Wilson's plays are produced at integrated, mainstream theatres.[10]

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[9]David Richards, "A Playwright's Demand for Black Theatre; Angry Speech Embroiled August Wilson in Controversy," *The Washington Post*, 11 August 1996, G: 1.

[10]Frank Rich, "Two Mouths Running," *New York Times*, 1 February 1997, 19.

His statements prompted responses from theatre artists across the country, most notably, Robert Brustein who Wilson accused of cultural imperialism.[11] When the two met face to face to debate the issue, Brustein argued for an integrated culture that supports multi-culturalism and does not tolerate racist separatism.[12] Other responses ranged from support of Wilson to condemnation of his views. Some responses focused on the term colorblind; in one of the workshops at the Theatre Communications Group conference the participants suggested that colorblind be replaced with "color-conscious" or "culture-conscious" to represent non-traditional casting without pretending that race does not matter.[13] However, Richard Schechner suggests that all artists bring with them a "personal history, cultural history, and individual and collective experiences," including race and that an artist's personal history can help him or her to create more nuanced and vital characters.[14] He believes that colorblind casting works because minority actors bring their unique viewpoints to the

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[11]Patti Hartigan, "Brustein, Wilson Tiff Obscures Real Issue," *Boston Globe*, 4 October 1996, E: 3.

[12]Rich, 19.

[13]Don Shirley, "'Colorblind' Casting Has Wilson Seeing Red," *The Los Angeles Times*, 1 September 1996, 46.

[14]Richard Schechner, "Plowing August Wilson's 'Ground' Four Commentaries on the Cultural Diversity Debate; In Praise of Promiscuity," *American Theatre* vol. 13, no. 10 (December 1996): 58.

characters they play and enrich the character with their experiences. Furthermore, Wilson completely ignores the universal nature of humanity: the ability to empathize with others who are experiencing things that we have not.

The universal nature of human experiences is what Joseph Papp was trying to explore with his early work at the New York Shakespeare Festival. How can a woman born in the twentieth century understand the desperation of Ophelia? She connects with Ophelia because she understands desperation, regardless of the century and her race. The fact that she has a cultural heritage and an ethnic identity simply enriches her portrayal, and because the audience members have a cultural heritage and ethnic identity, interracial casting can be used to raise social consciousness. However, Wilson does have a valid argument in that colorblind casting can spiral into tokenism. In fact, Papp created the Black/Hispanic Company in 1979 because he felt that in many companies colorblind casting had become tokenism.

Some theatre artists believe that Wilson's statements were taken out of context and that the playwright had a valid point in his argument. Actor Peter Francis James, who worked at the Public Theatre as part of the Black/Hispanic Company and later in several colorblind productions, explained that in his opinion Wilson and Brustein were speaking about two different issues:

> I worked with August on *Gem of the Ocean* and spent some time with him and honestly in the end Brustein and August were arguing two different things, which is usually the case in what appears to be the arguments of the century. Really there were two different things being discussed. August's position was really very simple. In the great debate, the way it was framed in the larger media, I agreed with Brustein but that was not the debate. What August was really saying was unless black people have actual control of resources, there is no guarantee that their voice is going to be heard. That is a really kosher argument. It is one thing to say here is fifty dollars buy whatever you want. It is another thing to go with your mother or your father and then say you can choose whatever you want but here is the money, I am holding it. Well there is some part of you that knows there are certain things you cannot choose because they are not going to give you the money. . . . They are making the judgment and that is not good. Whoever is playing daddy is in a position of power and can ultimately exercise a discretionary censorship and that is true. . . . The point was not an anti-integration argument but that he who holds the checkbook gets to exercise discretion on what gets done. That is really what August was saying. August was arguing from the position that race is a social reality. Black people do not have money and are not empowered unless they are given the money to speak with their own voices. In other words, unless they are the ones who write the checks, they are not ultimately empowered.[15]

While the theorists are still discussing the exact positions in the debate and what it means for theatre today, an interesting fact remains. The work of Papp and other theatre artists who pioneered colorblind and uni-racial casting created a forum for any discussion or debate about those methods, and although this debate has received a great deal of attention in terms of material being written about it, little has been

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[15]Peter Francis James, Interview by Charlene Widener, 22 September 2006.

written about the impact of Papp's use of colorblind and uni-racial casting at different times in the history of the NYSF and the nature and extent of those casting choices. Much of what has been written up to now has focused on a specific production utilizing colorblind casting or the controversy surrounding the issue. Despite strong opinions about colorblind and uni-racial casting, there is no single piece of research that attempts to systematically analyze why the casting was used at the NYSF, the impact of the casting, the extent of it, how audience members responded to the casting, and how the casting functioned as a racial project.

Based on the published material currently available on Papp, it is clear that his work has had a significant impact on the American stage from the perspective of racial formations. Racial formation consists of the construction of categories used to stereotype different races. When people are divided into categories or groups based on race, some groups are more likely to succeed because of the opportunities available to them while other groups have fewer chances to succeed. Racial formation deals with the process by which the racial categories are developed or eradicated. Racial projects are the tools used to create the stereotypes, constructions, and categories that shape racial formation. Racial projects can be either racist or non-racist and can impact on the micro-level with everyday experiences or the macro-

level with state policy and collective activity.[16]

Hill, Hatch, and Thompson all note that Papp's efforts paved the way for the consistent and visible inclusion of African American actors in roles traditionally played by white actors. Furthermore, in a segment which discussed black actors playing Shakespearean roles on Public Radio International's Studio 360 with Kurt Anderson, a new documentary produced by Richard Paul with the Folger Shakespeare Library scheduled to be completed in 2007 was previewed. The segment noted that Papp essentially began the colorblind casting movement in the United States with his work at the New York Shakespeare Festival.[17] The evidence suggests that Papp started colorblind and uni-racial casting in the United States in a sustained and visible way. Based on the general agreement that Papp's casting had a significant impact on the American theatre, his casting can clearly be defined as a micro-level racial project. Despite the fact that Papp's work has had an impact as a micro-level racial project in the United States, significant elements of his casting have yet to be explored.

This analysis of Papp's colorblind and uni-racial casting will be divided into eight chapters. The order and nature of the remaining

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[16]Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 59.

[17]Richard Paul, "Shakespeare in Black and White," April 2006, 7 min., 12 sec. from Public Radio International, http://www.prx.org/pieces/10311/stationinfo.

seven chapters is as follows. Chapter Two will discuss the theory of racial formation and explain how events in theatre history have served as racist or non-racist racial projects. This chapter will lay the foundation for understanding the intent and nature of Papp's casting.

In Chapter Three, I will explore what motivated Papp to try colorblind and uni-racial casting and why he wanted to provide opportunities for African American actors to play Shakespearean roles. I will include information about his life and explore his theatrical ideology. This chapter will provide a framework for understanding how Papp's casting choices were influenced by his environment.

Chapter Four will explore the social and political events that influenced colorblind casting at the New York Shakespeare Festival between 1952 and 1965. Because racial stereotypes, conflicts, and inequality in 1952 were based on a specific historical context having descended from the racialized social structure created by previous conflict and change, I will begin this discussion by looking at the impact of World War II on racial formation. This chapter will also focus on the social and political context brought on by World War II, including economic affluence, national optimism, the Cold War, and the development of the suburbs and sunbelt which created an environment where colorblind casting was more accepted. These events contributed to a growing undercurrent of racial tension in the

1950s that led to the civil rights movement in the 1960s. This chapter will examine the link between Papp's colorblind casting decisions and the social and political environment of the time.

Chapter Five will focus on colorblind casting at the NYSF. This chapter will discuss images that were prevalent on the stage before Papp began colorblind casting. I will also examine the intent, extent and significance of the practice. In addition, I will study the nature of Papp's colorblind casting. The examination will include looking at the audience reaction, critical response, and the impact of the work on the actors who were cast in the productions.

Chapter Six will discuss uni-racial casting and the social and political environment between 1965 and 1980 which impacted Papp's decision to utilize the casting. I will discuss the rise of Black Power, the end of economic affluence and optimism, American involvement in Vietnam and the extrication of American forces, the Nixon administration, and growing disillusionment in American society. This chapter will examine the link between Papp's uni-racial casting decisions and the social and political environment of the time.

The primary focus of Chapter Seven will be Papp's use of uni-racial casting at the NYSF. In this chapter I will examine the intent and extent of uni-racial casting. In addition, I will discuss the nature of the practice. The examination will include looking at the audience

reaction, critical response, and the impact of the work on the actors who were cast in the productions.

In the final chapter of the project, I will draw conclusions about the intent of Papp's work with colorblind and uni-racial casting. I will also evaluate the nature of his work as racist verses non-racist racial projects. Finally, I will look at the extent of his work in terms of the long-term consequences of his casting at the NYSF. To understand the intent and nature of Papp's colorblind and uni-racial casting at the New York Shakespeare Festival, it is important to begin with an examination of the theory of racial formation.

Chapter Two

To place Papp's work in context and lay a foundation for the discussion of how Papp's colorblind and uni-racial casting can be interpreted based on the nature of the casting, in this chapter I will provide a detailed discussion of racial formations theory and racial projects. In addition, I will look at theatrical events in history and discuss how the theory of racial formations can be applied to those events to determine if they were perceived as racist or non-racist in nature. The discussion of those events in theatre history will provide a base for understanding the discrimination faced by black actors before this study begins and will provide a framework for looking at the significance of Papp's casting.

Omi and Winant discuss the social and historical construction of race in *Racial Formation in the United States*. They observe that the concept of race ". . . has no fixed meaning, but is constructed and

transformed sociohistorically through competing political projects, through the necessary and ineluctable link between the structural and cultural dimensions of race in the U.S."[18] The authors contend that skin color is a symbol in interracial conflicts and is one of the methods used by society to categorize individuals into races. Consequently, racialized social structures hinge on human biology and the categories created partially to articulate the biological differences; however, race is not a biological construct but rather a social construct. While the categorization of race references biological differences in humans, Omi and Winant note that there is "no biological basis" for categorizing humans in terms of race and find ". . . the categories employed to differentiate among human groups along racial lines reveal themselves, upon serious examination, to be at best imprecise, and at worst completely arbitrary."[19] However, racial ideology plays a significant role in the shaping and reshaping, categorizing and re-categorizing of the social world.

The racialized society uses stereotypes and construction to delineate the categories and connect the categories to behaviors, attitudes, and mores. Members of a racialized society

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[18]Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 71.

[19]Ibid., 55.

> ". . . utilize race to provide clues about *who* a person is. . . . Comments such as, 'Funny you don't look black,' betray an underlying image of what black should be. We expect people to act out their apparent racial identities; indeed we become disoriented when they do not [italics theirs]."[20]

For example, if the dominant stereotype in a racialized society is that black men are uneducated then most black men would be treated as uneducated regardless of their education level. An encounter with an educated black man would create disorientation for many people in the dominant category because the encounter would be outside of the realm of the prevailing stereotype. Racialized societies also expect differences in racial categories as defined by skin color to explain social differences. Differences in humor and diet, for example, are described as racial differences rather than regional or cultural. Furthermore, racial categories are linked to the evolution of class and hegemony. Cultural and socioeconomic domination are directly related to the categories which define a racialized society.

Omi and Winant call the creation of these categories racial formation. Racial formation is "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed."[21] Racial formation perspective looks at the construction of racial categories through social structure and cultural

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[20]Ibid., 59.

[21]Ibid., 55.

representation. It is a process of historically-situated racial projects and is linked to the evolution of class and cultural domination. According to racial formation perspective, racial categories are influenced by social and political events which have either a positive or negative impact on the cultural representation of a specific race. When people are divided into categories or groups based on race, some groups are more likely to succeed because of the opportunities available to them while other groups have fewer chances to succeed.

The primary tools used in racial formation are racial projects; racial projects provide the ideological link between the organization of society and the cultural representation of race. They are used to create the stereotypes, constructions, and categories that shape racial formation. Racial projects are historically-situated events which support or destroy hegemony and cultural domination in a racialized society. In racial formation, these projects connect the meaning of race and the way in which everyday experiences and social structure are organized based on that meaning. A racial project provides the link between the social structure and the cultural representation of race. Racial projects are "*simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamic, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines*

[italics theirs]."[22] This redistribution could be in favor of a specific category of people or it could be an attempt to limit the resources available to the group. An attempt to limit those resources, take them away, or reproduce the structure of the dominant society based on the categories of race would be considered a racist racial project, while a redistribution favorable to a racial category or a project that reorganizes the structure of the dominant society based on those categories giving the group more opportunities would not be considered racist.

Racial projects can take place on the macro-level with state policy and collective activity and on the micro-level with everyday experiences. For example, the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. the Topeka Board of Education*, which declared that separate is inherently not equal, was a macro-level racial project (although not racist because it did not support the racial stratification in the dominant society). It changed federal policy dealing with race, but did not dissolve a racialized social structure, which depends upon preconceived notions or stereotypes. Macro-level racial projects take place in the public sphere and include collective activity and social movements.[23] On the micro-level, a conversation with one individual

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[22]Ibid., 56.

[23]Ibid., 59.

making a broad comment that another person should serve fried chicken to an African American guest because “they” like fried chicken would be a racial project because it supports a common racist stereotype prevalent in society.

While modern society is suffused with racial projects to which all are subjected, racial projects can also be applied throughout history to identify racial formation dynamics in the past. Because racial projects are outcomes of societal evolution, any discussion of racial formation must look at the historical events at the time when the racial project was formed. Furthermore, the application of racial formation ideology to identify racial projects in history is important when attempting to understand current racial issues. For example, in American society the rate and nature of acceptance of African Americans is determined by the image of blacks perpetuated by the dominant majority. Racial projects are historical events which have served to uphold or dispel categories prevalent in the modern racialized state based on those images. Consequently, racial projects, whether they are micro-level or macro-level, can have a significant impact on individuals in a racialized society and even state policy.

The racialized social structure of the United States is based on a history of racist and non-racist racial projects. The emergence of the modern concept of race did not spring up over night; it occurred with

the rise of Western culture in Europe and the arrival of Europeans in the Americas. Debates ensued about the degree of resemblance in intellect and morality of the people Europeans encountered and the extent to which the native people could be exploited and enslaved. The conquest began the consolidated social structure of exploitation, appropriation, and domination of modern racial awareness. During the 18th and 19th centuries, scientific criteria based on biology took hold as the basis for justifying racial hierarchy and the ranking of variations in human beings. Biological arguments have now diminished with an increase in racial projects which favor an approach which regards race as a social problem or political concept but does not eliminate racial injustice and conflict.

Racial formation has now been relegated to the political realm with arguments against racism taking the form of neoconservativism (colorblind policy) and liberal policy (differential racial treatment). Neoconservative policy suggests that all reference to race be removed and that one person should be treated the same as another regardless of skin color. Liberal policy suggests that because of the history of racial injustices in the United States, we must continue differential racial treatment to support equality (Affirmative Action). The authors also point out that the labels themselves are in a constant state of flux and "exist in a definite historical context, having descended from

previous conflicts."[24] It is crucial then to relate racial formation to the broader context of political practice, organization, and change. While the labels are in flux, it is still possible to identify racial projects in history.

Because the racial formation perspective deals with the cultural representation of race, many racial projects can be identified in theatre history that have influenced racial stereotypes and categories. Some of those racial projects can be perceived as racist in nature while others can be perceived as non-racist. By looking at the intent, extent, and responses to some of the events in theatre history, it is possible to derive the nature of the racial projects.

The historical creation of a comic black stereotype on the American stage is one example of a racial project. During the colonial period, theatre was essentially an English institution in the colonies. The first professional theatre troop came to America in 1752 from England.[25] Although amateur performances were occasionally taking place, available information about these performances is scarce. Blacks did not attend the colonial theatre. They were not legally excluded from attending; however, tradition effectively barred blacks

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[24]Ibid., 57.

[25]Oscar Brockett, *History of the Theatre* 7th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1995), 264.

from the theatre.[26] All black roles were performed by white actors in blackface.

The earliest black images seen on American stages were created by English playwrights. For example, Tom Southern's play *Oroonoko* treated blacks as noble savages, similar to the American fascination with the American Indian. Although some early American plays such as *The Padlock* (1769) portrayed blacks as clownish characters, popular entertainment of the time relied heavily on the buffoonish nature of white men as well. *The Fall of British Tyranny* (1776) by John Leacock presented an image of blacks that changed the course of theatre history. In the play, a cast of whites, in blackface and costumed as blacks on a slave ship, were convinced by the British captain to kill their masters and escape.[27] The play draws parallels between the enslavement of blacks and the British rule of America. Although the characters are stereotypical in nature, the play makes an important connection between freedom of a people and freedom of a nation. The image of blacks in theatre changed significantly after this production.

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[26]Leonard C. Archer, *Black Images in the American Theatre* (Brooklyn: Pageant Poseidon, 1973), 10.

[27]Frederick W. Bond, *The Negro and the Drama: The Direct and Indirect Contribution Which the American Negro Has Made to Drama and the Legitimate Stage, with the Underlying Conditions Responsible* (Washington: Associated Publishers, 1940), 20.

The play *Robinson Crusoe and Harlequin Friday* appeared onstage in 1786 with an exaggerated Negro dialect. This play was followed quickly by other plays which attempted Negro dialects. *The Yorker Stratagem,* produced in 1792, dealt with the intermarriage of a white man and a West Indian mulatto; however, the playwright actually reinforced the dominant social structure in the play because the white man is a comic Yankee character—only a fool would intermarry with a black. James Murdock introduced the comic Negro servant type in his 1795 play *The Triumph of Love.* Murdock's Sambo character was not only a comic character but was also more interested in romantic exploits and personal vanity than in getting his work done; "Dis wool of mine will curl up so Sambo tinks himself handsome. He very 'complished, too. He sing well, he dance well; he play fiddle well; can't tink so pretty well. He berry often tink why he slave to white man."[28] The character focuses on his appearance and needs guidance to stay focused on his work. He asks why he is a slave to the white man but essentially answers his own question: he cannot think well. The Sambo was almost child-like in representation. Murdock's Sambo character is the culmination of the image of blacks in American theatre from 1783 until the play's production in 1795. Two years later,

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[28]Ibid., 21.

another play, *The Politicians,* appeared onstage with a similar comic black servant character. The course of representing blacks onstage as sub-human and in need of guidance by the white man is established with these two productions and continues throughout theatre history.

This was not a result of *The Politicians* and *The Triumph of Love* specifically but rather an exemplification of the racial conflict occurring in the larger society. Several states, including Virginia and South Carolina, tried to end slave trafficking in the middle of the eighteenth century, not only because some people found slavery immoral but also because of the growing fear of slave insurrections. The Revolutionary War, to some extent, justified that fear. The Revolutionary War began in 1775, and blacks and whites fought together for the freedom of America. Racial prejudice, however, almost destroyed the country before it began. In November of 1775, all black men were discharged from the army because it was clear that black slaves could not be asked to fight for the freedom of whites with nothing in return. The British promised freedom to all blacks who joined them and thousands of free blacks flocked to New York and Virginia. Thousands of slaves in the South fled their masters and took their place in the British ranks, including some of George Washington's slaves. Loften Mitchell in his book *Black Drama: The Story of the American Negro in the Theatre* states that,

> [t]he British armed them, and these Negroes harassed their masters, slaughtering them in their own beds. They raided Savannah. In the Bronx a garrison of black men, known as the Negro Fort, held back their white masters. Some black men joined the Royal Navy. Some became pilots and one, Mungo, piloted the *Experiment* with fifty guns through Hell Gate into New York harbor, where he reinforced the British fleet.[29]

Americans accused Britain of starting a race war; however, the American institution of slavery actually caused the exclusion of blacks in the army. By 1776, George Washington realized that blacks would determine the outcome of the war. If blacks continued to fight for the English, the colonies would fall. Washington, determined to win the war, invited blacks back into the colonial army. Thousands of blacks fought on the side of the colonies in the Revolutionary War and assisted in the defeat of British forces in 1783.[30]

Within twelve years of the war's end, the buffoonish stereotype of blacks took hold in the American theatre. Mitchell believes that the development of the stereotype was partially because of the role blacks played in the war:

> White America saw what had happened to it during the Revolution. It saw its dependency upon the Negro, and it saw that the Negro had helped save this nation for all time. It saw, too, that this black man was a powerful force to be reckoned with, and this force had to be vitiated at all costs. And so what happened in the eighteenth century

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[29]Loften Mitchell, *Black Drama: The Story of the American Negro in the Theatre* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1967), 17.

[30]Ibid., 17.

> had a twofold purpose: a moral justification for continuing to enslave Negroes, and the destruction of these proud black people by making them beggars both inside and outside the American drama.[31]

The development of the negative black stereotype served to reinforce the dominant structure through cultural representation. The racial project of black imagery began to solidify in the American theatre and became entrenched over the next one hundred years. While white Americans clung to their image of blacks as child-like and in need of guidance, black Americans appeared to accept the stereotypes. However, as Mel Watkins points out, "maintaining the appearance of the naive was crucial as a survival technique."[32] Many plays in the nineteenth century reinforced this racial project.

The impact of the racial project would be on the macro-level because it took place in the public sphere, and, because of the number of theatre artists who were involved, can be defined as collective activity. Because the project upheld the racialized social structure, the nature of the project can be determined.[33] The project is an example of a racist racial project because it served as a process to link the

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[31]Ibid., 18.

[32]Mel Watkins, *On the Real Side: Laughing, Lying, and Signifying—The Underground Tradition of African—American Humor that Transformed American Culture, From Slavery to Richard Pryor* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 66.

[33]Richard Moody, *America Takes the Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1955), 63.

dominant social structure in the United States and cultural representation of African Americans. The racial categories used by white society in the popularization of a historic black stereotype helped to justify the dominant social structure of slavery and continued as a means to assert white domination through cultural representation.

Although the negative black images were not sanctioned formally by state policy, the images were accepted and perpetuated by the white majority. The racialized social structure based on negative representations led to the racist attitude that people act out an apparent racial identity. Omi and Winant believe that a racial project can only be defined as racist in nature if it reproduces the structure of the dominant society based on the categories of race.[34] The popularization of the historic negative black stereotype is obviously based on racial categories and justifies the dominant structure of slavery. The historical creation of the comic black image can then be defined as a racist racial project sanctioned by the dominant majority and eventually aided by blacks perpetuating the same image.

The impact of the racial project on black imagery can be seen in other racial projects in the legitimate theatre and the minstrel show. In the play *Star of Emancipation,* which appeared on the American stage in 1841, the playwright attempted to dispel the black

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[34]Omi., 72.

stereotypical image popular at the time. The plot exposes the trials and tribulations of slaves. The main character, Carlos, is depicted as a brave, determined, intelligent, and daring man who wants his freedom. Frederick Bond suggests that "[t]here is no question but that the play made tremendous appeal to America on behalf of slaves."[35] The play, however, was not well received by audiences because of the volatile subject matter and was largely rejected. Although the purpose of the play was an attempt to change the racist social structure of the United States by portraying a more realistic cultural representation of blacks that did not support the racialized state, the portrayal of blacks in the play did not affect the dominant culture representation, and the social structure remained intact. While the play can be perceived as a non-racist racial project, the impact of the play was on the micro-level.

Unlike the limited impact of *Star of Emancipation*, the minstrel show of the nineteenth century not only supported the prevailing comic stereotype, but solidified the buffoonish character in American theatre. Although conflicting evidence exists about the origins of the new dramatic form, by the early 1820s Edwin Forrest was impersonating southern plantation blacks onstage. Charles Mathews,

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[35]Bond, 24.

an acclaimed English actor, toured the United States from 1822-1823 and developed a one man show based on American types, including a caricature of the American black. Although both actors believed their interpretations were authentic, Mel Watkins notes that the performances were based on a character type and, because of the immense popularity of the two performers, probably "whetted the public appetite for black-faced mimicry in both Europe and the United States."[36]

By 1826 Thomas D. Rice was performing Negro bits between the acts at the Columbia Street Theatre. Entr'acte entertainments were standard fare at most professional theatres until the middle of the nineteenth century; however, Rice's performance was probably one of the first in blackface. The exact origin of Rice's character is a mystery but Bond believes the character was based on a slave who worked behind the Louisville theatre where Rice performed. Rice observed that the slave had a limp and sang an interesting tune: "Wheel about, turn about / Do jis so /An everytime I wheel about / I jump jim crow."[37] Rice's character was an immediate stage success.

By the 1830s, white performers in blackface were gaining popularity, and by 1840, minstrelsy was one of the most popular

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[36]Watkins, 83.

[37]Bond, 18.

attractions on the American stage. The establishment of the minstrel show came in 1842 when a group of white actors decided to band together and center an evening of entertainment on blackface mimicry. The minstrel show firmly established the image of blacks as ignorant, sub-human, and clowns. This image continued through the remainder of the century and was popularized by black performers as well. A troop of black minstrels performed in Georgia in 1865 and many other troops followed. Black intellectuals and middle-class blacks either criticized black minstrels or ignored the companies because

> [middle class blacks] believed that to overcome segregation and racism, [the troupes] should emphasize the accomplishments of the small, educated, and polite segment of the black community. Even legitimate aspects of black folk culture—work songs, spiritual music as sung by the masses, nearly all dances assumed to be related to African sources—were denounced and labeled vulgar; minstrelsy, a consciously distorted white caricature of black behavior, was treated more contemptuously since it pointedly lampooned behavior that was intended to characterize *all* blacks [italics his].[38]

As a racial project, the minstrel shows did help to solidify a distorted cultural representation of blacks and had a significant impact on theatre in the United States. The racial project can be perceived as a racist racial project with a macro-level impact.

The acceptance of black minstrel companies, however, was an

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[38]Watkins, 125.

important racial project in itself. For the first time, blacks had an opportunity to make a living onstage. This eventually gave blacks the opportunity to create self-images. Until well into the twentieth-century, minstrelsy was one the primary performance venues through which blacks could receive recognition. While aspects of minstrelsy can be perceived as racist, there are aspects that can be perceived as positive for African American artists. The perception of minstrelsy as a racial project is complicated by the duel outcomes. While minstrelsy was one of the primary venues through which black actors could perform, it was not the only venue.

In 1821 William Henry Brown created the first recorded African American theatre company in the United States. He called the company the African Company. Brown converted his lower New York City apartments into a theatre which seated three to four hundred people. The company debuted with Shakespeare's *Richard III* staring a mulatto actor named James Hewlett. Hewlett would become the first known African American Shakespearean actor (although some historians do not believe that he was American at all, but rather West Indian).[39] The company only lasted for three years but earned a reputation for presenting quality productions. The productions became

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[39]Errol Hill, *Shakespeare in Sable: A History of Black Shakespearean Actors* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 12.

so popular that white audiences started coming to see the African Company. Brown partitioned off a section in the back of the theatre where white audience members were seated.

Although the company opened with a Shakespearean play, Brown, who selected the plays and directed most of them, had a specific agenda for the company. Many of the plays he selected

> ". . . had an element of revolt about them, or at least a capacity for struggle with the underdog triumphant, often at the cost of his life. . . . [M]idway through his first season Brown presented his own play about the Black Carib war in St. Vincent against both English and French settlers backed by their home governments. Then in his adaptation of the musical extravaganza *Tom and Jerry*, he inserted an entirely new scene depicting a slave market in the city of Charleston, South Carolina. The wanton sale of enslaved human beings that often separated children from their parents, wives from their husbands, and one sibling from another is one of the searing memories from the slave experience. Finally, with *Obi;* or, *Three-Finger'd Jack*, Brown staged a play set in Jamaica about a runaway slave who chose to live in the mountains rather than submit to the cruel indignities of chattel slavery.[40]

The productions became so popular that the theatre was forced to move to a new location. However, the new location on Mercer Street was isolated and proved to be inconvenient to theatre goers. Brown eventually moved the company to the Hampton Hotel which was across the street from the Park Theatre. Stephen Price, the owner of

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[40]Errol G. Hill and James V. Hatch, *A History of African American Theatre* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), 27-28.

the Park, did not like the competition so he hired white men to interrupt the performances and arranged for the police to arrest actors during one of the performances. The actors were taken to the police station and warned to stop playing Shakespearean characters before they were released.[41]

Brown was forced to move his company back to the isolated building on Mercer Street. He constructed a new theatre space there and attempted to make the facility safer by adding lighting. However, the company still encountered problems with the actors being intimidated and performances interrupted. In the summer of 1822, a young actor by the name of Ira Aldridge was assaulted on the street and in August of 1822, a gang of white men entered the theatre with tickets, extinguished the lights, destroyed the scenery and props, and incited a riot. During the riot "[a]ctors and actresses were stripped, their apparel torn to pieces, and manager Brown was soundly beaten."[42] A newspaper report of the incident noted that despite the exclusion of blacks from white theatres, "'they have been hunted with a malice as mean as it seems to be unmitigable, in every attempt they have made to form a permanent establishment.'"[43] While Stephen

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[41]Hill, 14.

[42]Hill and Hatch, 31.

[43]Ibid., 31.

Price was never charged with instigating the riot, Errol Hill believes that Price at least created the condition where the rioters believed it was acceptable to attack the performers.[44]

In 1823 Brown was no longer listed as the African Company's manager on playbills. He might have been forced to petition for bankruptcy in July of 1823, but the listing is not clear. It is possible the William Brown took a few actors from his company and relocated to another city. The departure of Brown marked the end of the African Company. While James Hewitt continued to use the name, the company was no longer performing productions as it had under the leadership of Brown.[45]

The African Company was the first known opportunity for African American actors to perform Shakespearean characters in the United States. Because the company employed black actors in roles traditionally reserved for white actors, the company did not recreate the dominant social structure and can be perceived as a non-racist project. The extent of the project, however, is unknown. The available information indicates that the company was successful at bringing black and white audience members into the theatre. Ira Aldridge, a young actor in the company eventually left the United

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[44]Ibid., 31.

[45]Ibid., 35.

States and had a prosperous forty year career in European theatre. While the opportunities at the African Company were probably helpful to Aldridge, his long career would have possibly occurred without his time as part of the African Company. The company would certainly have had a micro-level impact in New York City and on the actors who worked in the company, and possibly a macro-level impact on theatre as well.

The development of the Federal Theatre Project under Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s would have had a much larger impact as a racial project. The Federal Theatre Project included black companies, creating opportunities for black actors to act in classical plays, social dramas, and contemporary comedies. Some of the most famous productions in the Negro units include *Voodoo Macbeth, The Swing Mikado* and *Androcles and the Lion.*[46] Furthermore, African American playwrights were incorporated into the units, so new plays emerged dealing with racial issues and Negro history. These plays, such as *Run, Little Chillun, Haiti, Brother Moses,* and *The Conjur Man Dies,* included more realistic interpretations of black characters. The Federal Theatre Project productions were not the first theatre productions by blacks with more realistic black characters; however,

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[46]Glenda Gill, *White Grease Paint on Black Performers: A Study of the Federal Theatre, 1935-1939* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), 10.

they are the first productions to be seen by largely white audiences.

While the companies provided opportunities for black performers,

> [w]hites occupied the administrative and supervisory positions because, since segregation in the theatre had been so nearly total, few Blacks had been trained to teach the theatre crafts. Looked at from another perspective, self-segregated Whites were ignorant of the talents possessed by black writers, actors, directors, carpenters, and electricians.[47]

Many blacks did not have the technical training that whites believed was needed and were not given administrative or supervisory positions as a result. Even in the black units, the directors were primarily white. Of the sixteen, nineteen, or twenty-two (depending on the source) black units, only two were initially run by African Americans: the New York and Boston units.

The New York City unit was run by John Houseman and employed one hundred and fifty theatre professionals, five hundred performers who had never worked in theatre before and two hundred and fifty additional artist in other theatre crafts.[48] Although an African American director ran the Boston unit, Ralf Coleman, he was criticized by black audiences for the plays he selected. Coleman chose plays he believed would appeal to black and white audiences alike; however,

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[47]Hill and Hatch, 316.

[48]Ibid., 316.

> [h]is white audiences enjoyed Negro folk plays, and he would produce several—*In Abraham's Bosom, The Man Who Died, At Twelve O'clock, Plumes*—but his black audiences did not care to see themselves represented as southern rural folk. Expressing middle-class black resentment, the *Boston Chronicle* editorialized: "The Federal Theatre is the finest chance that the Negro actor has had to experiment and endeavor to educate white audiences in accepting characterizations without seeking to penetrate through the grease paint. . . we must not allow either prejudiced white officials or half-baked Negro directors [Coleman] to rob us of the opportunity."[49]

Throughout the four year history of the Federal Theatre Project the black units were plagued by accusations of "covert racism" because of the plays that were produced and the racial divide between administration and company members.[50]

However, the Federal Theatre Project productions did give hundreds of black actors opportunities to perform in the professional theatre that would not have been possible without the project. In addition, thousands of audience members saw the black units' productions. During its twenty-two week run, the Chicago unit's production of *The Swing Mikado* (1938) was viewed by one hundred fifty-four thousand six hundred and sixty people.[51] The productions of the Federal Theatre Project also made the plays of William

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[49]Ibid., 332.

[50]Ibid., 327.

[51]Ibid., 326.

Shakespeare more accessible to black audiences than ever before.[52] As a result, the productions had the potential to change the cultural representations of blacks in the social structure as a macro-level racial project. The nature of that project is, however, debatable. While there are aspects of the project that attempted to change the cultural representation of African Americans, the structure of the units in many cases supported the racial divide that was prevalent in theatre and society. Consequently, there are aspects of the project that can be perceived as racist and elements that can be perceived as non-racist.

In this chapter I have provided a framework of events in theatre history that have served as racial projects and identified the social context of those events as well as how the events can be perceived in terms of being racist or non-racist in nature. There are many events in theatre history that have worked as either micro-level or macro-level racial projects. Some of those projects are clearly racist in nature. Other projects are non-racist and some are fraught with complexity because various elements of the project can be perceived as racist while other elements can be perceived as non-racist. As with the examples provided in this chapter, racial formations methodology can be applied to Papp's casting at the NYSF in an attempt to illuminate the nature of his colorblind and uni-racial casting. His

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[52]Hill, 118.

casting can clearly be identified as an example of a micro-level racial project (see Chapter One). Before turning to the nature of Papp's casting and the extent of his work, I will first address his intent. In the following chapter I will discuss what motivated Papp to use colorblind and uni-racial casting and explain why he wanted to provide opportunities for African American actors to play Shakespearean roles.

Chapter Three

Papp's commitment to colorblind and uni-racial casting was a product of his life experiences and his vision of a changing world. Papp's experiences growing up in the diverse atmosphere of New York City with its multi-cultural population helped to solidify an allegiance to interracial and uni-racial casting. To fully understand why Papp was committed to providing African American actors opportunities to perform in Shakespearean roles, it is important to understand some key events in his life.

Papp was born Joseph Yussel Papirofsky in his parent's home in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn on June 22, 1921. He grew up during the Great Depression in a very poor Jewish household.[53] At that time there was no organized Jewish community in Williamsburg

[53]Joseph Papp, "Joe Papp Sings," No date, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

but a mixture of different ethnic groups. Most children were taught the rules of turf warfare through violence, and Papp was no exception. Neither of his parents spoke or understood much English, and they were often naïve about the neighborhood. The Papirofsky children were usually left to figure out the rules themselves. Papp was the most adventurous of the children. He spent most of his time with his friends playing in the streets. He organized clubs, built playhouses, and got into fights. Growing up he learned that there are two kinds of people in the world, "Jews and the others—that's all."[54] He also enjoyed going to the movies and from them learned a valuable lesson: the only way to make it in America was to take the Jewishness from his name, his past, and his speech and become the other.[55]

Two events in his childhood affected Papp for the rest of his life. Before his voice changed, Papp was invited to sing for the High Holiday services at a wealthy synagogue in Brooklyn. He was paid for the rehearsals and performance. On the night of the performance, Papp and his father took the subway to the synagogue and were stopped at the door. His father did not have a ticket for the ceremony nor did he have the money to pay the admission fee. They were finally admitted after Papp became angry and refused to sing, but he never forgot his

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[54]Ibid.

[55]Helen Epstein, *Joe Papp: An American Life* (New York: Little Brown, 1994), 29.

father sitting alone among the wealthy Jews and the discrimination that took place within the Jewish community.[56] The feelings of sadness and embarrassment from this incident would eventually lead him on a path away from the Jewish faith.

His feelings were exacerbated by the sense of isolation he felt growing up in Williamsburg with no connection or sense of protection from the Jewish community. He experienced similar situations as a young adult working for a wealthy Jewish jeweler. After he was terminated from his management position with the jeweler for organizing the workers and helping them join a union, he began writing Protestant down on his employment forms and was hired at Samson Naval Base.[57] This incident was the beginning of more than twenty years of passing as Protestant or Catholic, instead of admitting his true heritage. He became so good at it that two of his wives and many of his friends actually thought he was Catholic. Eventually, he had his last name legally changed from Papirofsky to Papp.

During this time, Papp was in the ironic position of hiding his own ethnicity while working for interracial casting, perhaps channeling his dislike of discrimination and class differences within the Jewish community into the cause of African Americans. The events of

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[56]Ibid., 30.

[57]Ibid., 52.

discrimination created an atmosphere of denial and a disconnection between Papp's heritage and his future. Peter Francis James, an African American actor who performed in the Black/Hispanic Company and in colorblind productions at the NYSF, said of Papp that

> Joe was a New Yorker—through and through—son of Jewish immigrants, lower east side. There was nothing white about Joe. I am not sure there was a lot Jewish about Joe. Joe was just New Yorker. That to him meant the American dream. As the son of immigrants his job was to embody the American dream and he thought that was his job. It was his passion. Well it's true—they leave the old country and leave everything behind and your job as a child is to become an American and Joe took that very seriously.[58]

Papp did not see himself as a white man but as a product of the diverse population of New York City and he wanted to provide opportunities for other New Yorkers, including African Americans, to reach their American dream.

The second incident from his youth which had a profound impact on Papp occurred when he was fourteen. A seventeen-year-old Irish boy who disliked Papp lived in the same building as the Papirofsky family. One day the boy hit him in the face while Papp's father stood by and watched, immobilized by the scene. After the incident, Samuel Papirofsky, "acted like a European Jew after a pogrom: he packed his

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[58]Peter Francis James, Interview by Charlene Widener, 22 September 2006.

bags."[59] This event was like no other in Papp's childhood and from it he learned a valuable lesson: "If you want to make an impact, you hit first, hard and without any kind of feeling. *Hit Hard* [italics his]. That gives you an immense psychological advantage."[60] He also learned that he could depend only on himself. This incident would affect everything he did the rest of his life.

After his family moved to Brownsville, Papp joined a group of young men who helped evicted families move back into their apartments in the middle of the night after a sheriff had moved them out into the streets. The group was part of the Young Communist League. Papp joined the group for several reasons: 1) the league was against American neutrality in Europe and anti-Semitism; 2) for Papp, the league ". . . represented fearlessness, a stand against appalling social conditions, a way of creating a world that was free of injustice;" 3) it gave him a cause to support and a sense of protection for the first time in his life.[61] Although Papp did not agree with all communist principles, he lived by those he did believe and dismissed those ideas that he found false (a pattern that continued throughout his life).[62]

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[59]Epstein, 36.

[60]Ibid., 36.

[61]Ibid., 38.

[62]Ibid., 38.

Through a variety of jobs he held during his adolescence, Joe had his first interactions with African Americans. When he brought telegrams with bad news to African American families, they always tipped him well and were polite. He also had several instances when he needed money for his family and an African American came to his rescue.[63] When he was in the Navy, Papp was angered by the treatment of African Americans in the military. When he confronted his commanding officers about the treatment, Papp was threatened with punishment if he did not stop pursuing the issue.[64] These early experiences stayed with Joe and contributed to his outspoken opinions about African American rights and to his desire to employ African American artists at the NYSF.

While in boot camp for the Navy, Papp organized skits in his barracks and, once commissioned, was chosen to organize variety shows on the U.S.S. Solomon. Having the performances to focus on helped Papp succeed in the Navy. While he was successful and felt protected in the Navy, ironically, he could not swim and feared drowning. In 1945, he was sent to California to become part of the new Navy entertainment unit. He staged and performed in productions for the remainder of his naval career.

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[63]Ibid., 40.

[64]Ibid., 57.

Papp was discharged in 1946 and moved to Hollywood. There he began formal training as an actor at the Actor's Lab. He received a grant for his tuition and a military stipend. He soon became a leader at the lab and eventually lab manager.[65] The Actor's Lab was organized by former members of the Group Theatre and was "influenced by the Group's aesthetic reliance on Stanislavsky and its view of the theatre as a social-political mediator."[66] While working at the lab, Papp witnessed African Americans being excluded from productions to maintain historical accuracy. There were only three black students at the Actor's Lab when Papp was there, and while the lab elders often talked about issues facing African American artists, they did nothing to address those issues.[67] This exclusion fueled his commitment to colorblind casting. Papp "was motivated by a sense of racial justice." [68] He used colorblind casting to express his impatience and anger about racism; he believed that theatrical talent and humanity transcended skin color.[69] Furthermore, he realized that

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[65]John Harris, "Joseph Papp: Theatre Revolution," *Theatre Week* (November 1991): 18.

[66]Stanley Kauffman, "The Stages of Joseph Papp," *The American Scholar* (Winter 1974/1975): 111.

[67]Epstein, 69.

[68]Stuart W. Little, *Enter Joseph Papp: In Search of a New American Theatre* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1974), 132.

[69]Epstein, 69.

African Americans have the same abilities as other racial and ethnic groups and were limited only by the racial structure of society.

After members of the lab were linked to communism under the Red Scare tactics of McCarthyism, the elders of the Actor's Lab filed for bankruptcy in 1950 before closing the lab for good. Papp soon found a position as an assistant stage manager and understudy for a touring production of *Death of a Salesman* and then began working for CBS in 1951 as a stage manager (in New York City). He continued to work for CBS during the early years of the Shakespeare Festival.

In 1952, Papp secured funds to direct three one-act plays by Sean O'Casey: *Hall of Healing*, *Bedtime Story*, and *Time to Go*. In his production, Papp cast several white actors and two African American men as Irish characters.[70] Papp made his casting choices based purely on talent and his desire to expand the range of roles for African Americans. He justified his choice by noting, "'I did not cast blacks with deep Southern accents. . . . All the actors—Irish, black and Jewish—spoke with a very slight brogue. Still, Sean O'Casey would have dropped dead if he had known.'"[71]

Colorblind casting was almost unheard of in the early 1950s and Papp's decision to use it was not made hastily or without purpose. It

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[70]Barbara Lee Horn, *Joseph Papp: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 10.

[71]Epstein, 77.

was based on the history of exclusion that he had witnessed growing up in his Williamsburg neighborhood, in the military during the war, in California while working at the Actor's Lab, and when he returned to New York City in the early 1950s. Papp witnessed discrimination in theatre and society at large.[72]

It was also based on the changing racial composition he saw in the population of New York City. Papp believed that theatre should reflect that change. After World War II, the number of African Americans in the city increased as many whites immigrated to the suburbs. There was also an influx of Puerto Ricans, and

> the very color of the crowd in the streets had markedly changed. In social dynamics the blacks and the Latins became more self-confident and more mobile. The theatre, which had previously been "downtown" and remote from nonwhite New Yorkers, was now a possible part of their lives. These changes were hugely important to Papp. . . . [H]ere he found himself in a city involved in swift social transition, where ethnic minorities were coming rapidly to the fore.[73]

He wanted to represent that changing population onstage and hoped to draw the racially diverse audience to his productions.

Although critical reaction to Papp's O'Casey production was mixed, the responses did not weaken Papp's resolve to use colorblind casting. Some of the critics who reviewed the 1952 production did not

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[72]Epstein, 77.

[73]Kauffman, 113.

even mention that Papp had used colorblind casting; however, those who did write about the casting believed that his use of colorblind casting was a serious mistake that had weakened the production.[74] However, the negative critical reaction did not change Papp's commitment to diversity which permeated his future work as both a director and producer. Papp employed many minority actors, directors, and technicians in his work as a tool to represent the diverse people of New York onstage and draw minorities into his audience. His commitment to non-traditional casting cut across every production area and was more important to him than any one production; the productions were simply his instruments of implementation.[75] The productions were vehicles used to forge a connection between the art of theatre and diverse audiences who Papp wanted to bring to the theatre.

Because of his youthful experiences and his work in the socially oriented Actor's Lab, it was inevitable that he would be dissatisfied with a daily job and find a way to subsidize his theatrical work.[76] In 1953 he named his company the Shakespeare Workshop and began

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[74]Joseph Papp, "Channel 5 Interview," 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[75]Kauffman, 110.

[76]Ibid., 111.

producing in a church basement. The first productions under the new name were staged in 1954. Papp selected the name because he was primarily interested in staging Shakespeare. A cutting from *Julius Caesar* given to Papp to memorize for an English class when he was twelve years old began his love and obsession with the playwright. He identified with the themes in the play such as violence, revenge, corruption, and isolationism.[77]

Other elements influenced his desire to produce Shakespeare. For Papp, Shakespeare was the best of all worlds; the plays were masterpieces with poetic language, social relevance, and they were not bound by copyright and royalties. Papp preferred texts with poetic language and believed language to be the most important aspect of a production. He wanted to make the poetry of Shakespeare accessible to the common man. He was also interested in plays that had political themes and represented an isolated figure against the establishment. He found the characters and situations in Shakespeare's plays universal. He wrote of *Henry V* that "'[a]lthough this play is a paean to the glory of England, it transcends flagwaving and is transformed into a statement of triumph for all ragged men fighting everywhere against impossible odds.'"[78] Papp preferred Shakespeare because he

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[77]Epstein, 34.

[78]Kauffman, 111.

could rearrange the text, make non-traditional casting choices, and change the situation without interference from the playwright. Finally,

> working on classics evidently satisfied a cultural imperative that ha[d] been drummed into him as into many thousands of children raised by Jewish immigrant parents. To honor the freedom of the New World as against the restrictions of Eastern Europe, the watchwords, brighter than success in a good number of those households, were education and culture.[79]

Furthermore, Papp believed that using colorblind and uni-racial casting in Shakespearean productions led to productions that were more thought-provoking and culturally enhanced; "a great dramatist deals with all humanity. Which means that if you are a fine artist, no matter where you come from you'll be able to bring your own particular culture to the playwright, and the meeting of the two will [be] . . . very enriching."[80] Papp felt that having black actors play characters traditionally played by white actors was very important because the casting opened up lines of communication about racism in society and opened white consciousness to the possibilities of what was acceptable and correct.[81] His work went beyond interpreting the

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[79]Ibid., 111.

[80]David Graubert, "Latinos in the Acting Profession: A New Generation Battles the Stereotype," 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[81]Joseph Papp, Handwritten Notes on Black/Hispanic Company, 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

social reality of the time to representing the racial dynamic as he wanted it to be and thought that it should be while reorganizing the traditional theatre company model to include colorblind casting.

Papp thought that theatre committed to righting past wrongs in society, such as the Federal Theatre Project, had the potential to effectively create significant change in society.[82] He believed that,

> [o]ur progress in democracy can only be measured by the extent of economic and social freedom afforded the black in the United States. It would be ridiculous for a theatre to take as its burden the freedom of the black when the entire nation and Government seem to be unable or unwilling to deal with the injustice . . . [however] the theatre is one area in society which can address itself to "giving us our humanity" by promulgating changes of a social as well as an artistic nature.[83]

While theatre can show the past and current situation, Papp felt that it had the most significant impact when it was developing the potential to change the current situation into a better tomorrow. Papp called this the potential for "permanent revolution."[84] His goal was to revolutionize casting procedure through colorblind and uni-racial casting.

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[82]Joseph Papp, "Commencement Speech North Carolina School of the Arts," 5 June 1971, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[83]Joseph Papp, "Lincoln Center Position Paper," 1973, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[84]Papp, "Commencement Speech North Carolina School of the Arts."

Papp believed that colorblind and uni-racial casting in Shakespearean productions gave black actors the opportunity to play roles which did not focus on racial tension or racial issues.[85] Since the majority of Shakespeare's plays do not reference race as a method to organize society, he believed that the productions allowed the audiences to witness a society onstage which was not permeated by racism and this provided a model for constructing a society where all races are equal.[86] Papp thought that the psychological and social impact of African Americans in colorblind and uni-racial casts was invaluable because the audience and critics, who were primarily white, would witness African Americans playing characters unburdened by racial injustice. He believed that using colorblind and uni-racial casting in classical plays, specifically Shakespearean plays, was important because

> [a]n audience has no problem accepting a black Cordelia, say, as the daughter of a white Lear; or a black Polonius as the father of a white Ophelia. Such violations of reality are impossible when a play has a contemporary setting, but period plays such as Shakespeare's are so stylized that we do not judge them according to our own realism.[87]

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[85]Richard Paul, "Shakespeare in Black and White," April 2006, 7 min., 12 sec. from Public Radio International, http://www.prx.org/pieces/10311/stationinfo.

[86]Papp, Handwritten Notes on Black/Hispanic Company.

[87]Martin Gottfried, "Shakespeare for White Liberals," *Saturday Review*, 31 March 1979, 40.

Joe Papp believed that using colorblind casting in modern realistic plays was more problematic because of the prevalence of racism in America. Papp noted that racism was such a significant problem that "choosing an actor of color to play a white character without also incorporating some recognition of the character's race and its effect on relationships will result in "a fairy tale."[88]

Papp was also interested in producing Shakespearean plays because he believed that American speech patterns created a more Elizabethan style of performance than British accents. Papp argued that critics who believed that Shakespeare should be performed with British accents did not have an understanding of Elizabethan theatre. Those critics were under the assumption that modern

> British speech [was] the speech heard on the stage of the Globe some 400 years ago. . . . In a society, like Britain, where gentlemanly Oxford accents were set forth as the proper mode of expression, with all of its aristocratic implications, such speech became the 18th and 19th century speech of the stage. It is hardly likely, and scholars all agree to this, that what we hear today on the British stage bears slight, if any, resemblance to that spoken on the lusty Elizabethan platforms of Shakespeare's day. . . . Nobody knows how Richard Burbage, Shakespeare's leading actor, played Hamlet, in what kind of accent or in what kind of style. British Shakespeare, until recently, had its traditions in the bombastic styles of the 19th century and if anything, changed because of the new and fresh American approach to acting, naturalistic and emotionally organic in its

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[88]Hal Gelb, "Should Equal Opportunity Apply on the Stage," *New York Times,* 28 August 1988, national ed., sec.2: 3.

> content. To state so blazingly clear that British speech [was] the foundation of Shakespeare is poppycock.[89]

Papp believed that representing some of the, "many accents we have in this country, [created] a very rich kind of experience in terms of the reality on the stage and not some artifically [sic] conceived standard of what constitutes proper Shakespeare."[90] He believed the arguments against allowing Americans to use their diverse dialects in performances of Shakespeare represented a cultural problem in the way young people in America are exposed to Shakespeare. He felt that,

> British-spoken Shakespeare merely reinforces the mistaken American attitude that the Bard's Elizabethan workingmen actors acted his plays in some highfalutin manner. The fact is that our less lyrical and tougher accents of American speech, in all its varied intonations, are far closer to the original Elizabethan."[91]

Papp stressed that a primary goal of the New York Shakespeare Festival was to create a tradition of American Shakespeare that moved away from the oratorical and declamatory British performances of Shakespeare and to "deal with American accents, American speech,

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[89]Joseph Papp, "Theatre USA Speech," 30 April 1979, Joseph Papp /New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[90]Joseph Papp, "Formation of Permanent Black/Hispanic Shakespeare Company," 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[91]Joseph Papp, New York City to Editor of the *New York Times*, New York City, 14 February 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

American energy."[92] This meant the inclusion of minority actors in Shakespearean productions. Because Papp felt that the plays of William Shakespeare lent themselves to colorblind and uni-racial casting and he used the practices extensively in Shakespeare's plays throughout his career, this research will focus on Papp's Shakespearean productions.

Papp produced only a few productions each year between 1954 and 1956. He moved his workshop outside in 1956 and renamed it the New York Shakespeare Festival. As the Shakespeare Workshop developed into the NYSF, the basic philosophical concept under the leadership of Joseph Papp was to take Shakespearean plays and other classical plays and present them to the people free of charge.[93] Papp produced three Shakespearean productions in a two thousand seat amphitheater by the river during the summer of 1956. Over twenty-five thousand people attended the performances including wealthy patrons, street people, working class individuals, blacks, whites, Hispanics, children, and even gang members.[94] The following

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[92]Papp, "Formation of Permanent Black/Hispanic Shakespeare Company."

[93]Joseph Papp, "New York Shakespeare Festival Artistic Statement," March 1983, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[94]Horn, 11.

summer, over one hundred and fifty thousand people came to the Festival's productions.[95]

In 1958 Papp simultaneously experienced two of the most difficult obstacles of his career: Parks Commissioner Robert Moses was pressuring Papp to charge admission to his performances in Central Park, and because of his involvement with the communist party, Papp was called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). On June 19, 1958, Papp went before HUAC and took the Fifth Amendment twelve times during questioning; he was fired from CBS later that day.[96] Papp appealed being fired to his union and won after months of fighting in court. He was reinstated to his position; however, he was assigned menial tasks instead of being in charge of projects. He quit just two months later (January 1959) and devoted himself to the NYSF full time.

That same year he encountered problems with Robert Moses. Moses wanted Papp to charge admission to the productions to help defer some of the costs of the performances. Moses also wanted ten percent of the admission fee for the Parks Commission. Papp thought it would defeat the purpose of the festival, which was to create new

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[95]"Brooklyn's Gift to the Bard," *Theatre Arts* (January 1958): 12.

[96]Harris, 20.

audiences for the classics; therefore, he refused.[97] Charging admission to attend the productions in the park went against Papp's theatrical ideology.

Papp's theatrical ideology was a pro-active idealism that centered on the importance of art to society: his central belief was that the arts are essential to life, not just an amenity. Although many people may not see the importance of the arts in their everyday lives, Papp thought that the arts must be protected because they are imperative to our happiness and our lives.[98] Furthermore, he believed that life would be unbearable without art as an escape and instrument of social change.[99]

To Papp, theatre has a responsibility to audiences and audiences have an obligation to theatre. He believed that artists are not the creators of culture but they are entrusted with it and refine it and that they must extract pieces of culture to return to the people.[100] Those pieces of culture can make a significant impact on society because

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[97]Mel Gussow, "A Public Life," *American Theatre* (January 1992): 18.

[98]Joseph Papp, "Board of Estimate Speech," 1968, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[99]Papp, "Commencement Speech North Carolina School of the Arts."

[100]Joseph Papp, "Statement before hearing of House Subcommittee on Select Education Concerning H.J. Res. 600," 17 December 1977, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

"[a]rt is never neutral. Great art is totally commited [sic] to a single pervasive, relentless idea."[101] He considered theatre a form of education and thought that education should be the goal of theatrical productions.[102] An audience should know more when they leave a performance than they did when they came in. Theatre should explore a platform of sexual and political ideas without easy answers. He viewed art as a necessity to life; he believed art should be vital and challenging to audiences.

Papp thought that in modern society individuals are over stimulated and that we encounter so much violence and injustice in mass media that humans become numb to the world around them. Theatre, however, could reverse the desensitization of everyday life. He suggested that the "arts can counteract some of the vulgar proliferation of terrible television shows, lousy magazines, [and] rotten newspapers. . . ."[103] He believed that art can assist in the human search for justice and meaning in a world that seems relentless and inexorable.[104] Theatre can speak to individuals in ways that film and television cannot because theatre is a living, breathing situation where

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[101]Papp, "Commencement Speech North Carolina School of the Arts."

[102]Epstein, 208.

[103]Vance Muse, "Joe Papp," *Life* 12 (April 1989): 24.

[104]Papp, "Commencement Speech North Carolina School of the Arts."

the audience witnesses an action and is simultaneously part of the action being portrayed.

For theatre to be effective in changing the lives of the people in New York City, the people needed to have access to the theatre. He wanted to "provide access to the best human endeavor to the greatest number of people."[105] Papp believed that art was vital to all humans, not just the wealthy.[106] Since wealthy individuals already had access to the arts, he wanted to help provide access to the theatre for the poorest New Yorkers.[107] He thought that the poor in urban areas needed to have access to the arts because they needed an escape from their environment and social situation.[108] Because of the social tensions and injustices encountered in urban areas, Papp felt that artistic institutions have a responsibility to provide an outlet for their audiences.[109] To bring the poorest New Yorkers in to the theatre, Papp did not charge admission to his theatrical productions in Central Park (a tradition that continues today).

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[105]Epstein, 18.

[106]Papp, "Board of Estimate Speech."

[107]Papp, "Joe Papp Sings."

[108]Papp, "Statement before hearing of House Subcommittee on Select Education Concerning H.J. Res. 600."

[109]Ibid.

Because Papp wanted human beings from all economic backgrounds to have access to the theatre, he felt that the government had an obligation to support the arts.[110] The NYSF needed support from the local, state, and federal government to perform work without charging admission. Support from the government was especially important during times of social and economic difficulty because that was when the people of urban areas need the work the most.[111] So when Moses suggested that Papp charge admission to the NYSF productions, Papp flat out refused.

Moses then suggested that an admission fee be charged to enter the park on performance nights. Again Papp refused, and he began a press campaign to rally support. He sent out press kits to the four major newspapers in New York describing the incident and started a telephone campaign. He contacted radio stations and television stations, eventually gaining national attention. Moses tried to scare off Papp supporters by condemning Papp as a Communist but to no avail; the press rallied behind Papp and ridiculed Moses.[112] The NYSF sued the Parks Commissioner and won on appeal. In June of 1958, Moses surrendered and helped secure the twenty thousand dollars needed to

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[110]Ibid.

[111]Papp, "Commencement Speech North Carolina School of the Arts."

[112]Horn, 13.

prepare for the festival from the Board of Estimate.[113] Papp would still be able to bring free Shakespeare to the economically and ethnically diverse population of New York City.

Papp, however, did not feel that the performances in the park were reaching enough people. With the help of the mayor, he started a mobile theatre to take theatre to the five boroughs, and in 1961 Papp expanded his audience by touring his productions through high schools. Papp eventually secured funds for a permanent outside theatre in 1961, and in 1962 he opened the Delacorte Theatre in Central Park. Four years later, he expanded the NYSF season to year-round and secured the Astor Library as a permanent home for the Festival. The new facility, named the Public Theatre, opened in 1968 with *Hair*. *Hair* was a new musical with a rock and roll score, sexual situations, profanity, drug use, and nudity. Although the production met with mixed reviews from the critics and the subscribers to the NYSF, the musical was embraced by a generation of young people and became a Broadway hit.

For a brief time starting in 1973, Papp took over the Vivian Beaumont Forum and Newhouse Theatre at Lincoln Center. He quickly became discouraged with the amount of money it took to operate the

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[113]Epstein, 154.

theatres.[114] Papp's desire to attract a culturally diverse audience by updating classics and producing new works also alienated the Lincoln Center audiences. He resigned the position in 1976.

Papp remained a prominent producer in New York through the 1980s. Over the thirty-nine years Joseph Papp worked in New York he challenged conventions, fought against censorship, and tried to dispel the elitist nature of theatre. He was committed to bringing Shakespeare to the people of New York. Papp directed approximately twenty-seven Shakespearean productions during his career. In addition, he produced hundreds of plays that were directed by one of the many artists Papp selected. He selected directors who shared (or at least seemed to) his social ideology, supervised their productions closely, and ultimately allowed the productions to perform or required that they be revamped.[115] In 1987 he decided to direct or produce all of Shakespeare's plays by 1993. He died in 1991 before the Shakespeare Marathon was complete.

Throughout his career, the challenge for Papp was to provide his audiences with Shakespeare, and eventually new plays, that the audience could believe in and identify with, without sacrificing the poetry and message of the plays. Robert Brustein stated in 1968 that

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[114]Harris, 22.

[115]Kauffman, 112.

the NYSF was the only theatre group in New York dedicated to not only remounting Shakespeare but also trying to discover what Shakespeare meant to Americans today.[116] Although Papp was committed to mounting productions that were significant to his audiences, many critics thought he was a poor director. Whether or not he was a gifted director and, as some believed, had "no artistic talent," is not as significant as the intent and function of his work.[117] As a result, the focus of this research will be on the intent, nature, and extent of Papp's work with colorblind and uni-racial casting in Shakespearean productions. The question is not whether or not the productions were masterfully produced or directed but what prompted Papp to utilize a specific type of casting at a given time in the history of the NYSF and whether the casting can be perceived as racist or non-racist in nature.

From the very beginning of his professional theatre career, Papp used colorblind casting. He began his career by casting African American actors in roles traditionally reserved for white actors. His decision was based on his life experiences but was also a result of a changing world. He used colorblind casting because he thought that African American artists should be given opportunities to perform Shakespeare and because he believed that conditions in society made

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[116]Joseph Papp, *William Shakespeare's "Naked" Hamlet: A Production Handbook* (London: Macmillan Company, 1969), 12.

[117]Kauffman, 113.

the use of colorblind casting more acceptable. In chapter four, I will look at the social and political events which led to Papp's desire to use colorblind casting.

Chapter Four

Papp's early work with colorblind casting was a result of the political and social events occurring during the first fifteen years of the NYSF's history. A number of political and social events created an environment where colorblind casting was more socially acceptable. Because racial stereotypes, conflicts, and inequality in 1952 were based on a specific historical context which emerged from previous conflict, I will begin this discussion by looking at the impact of World War II on racial formation. This chapter will also examine the social and political context brought on by World War II including economic affluence, national optimism, the Cold War, and the development of the suburbs and sunbelt which created an environment where colorblind casting was more accepted. These events contributed to a growing undercurrent of racial tension in the 1950s that led to the civil rights movement in the 1960s. This chapter will examine how the

intent of Papp's colorblind casting is connected to the broader context of social practice, political initiatives, and cultural injustice. Papp acknowledged that the social and political situation of the 1950s and 1960s influenced his use of colorblind casting at the New York Shakespeare Festival.[118] He noted that although a play script does not change, the concept of his production might differ radically from traditional productions of the script because he wanted to comment on what was happening in the life of his country and society.[119]

Growing up in a poor Jewish family, Papp experienced discrimination based on both his ethnicity and class. He also witnessed racial discrimination against the few African American families in his neighborhood. With the onset of World War II, a shift in racial rhetoric seemed to promise a significant change in context for minorities in the United States. The defense crisis required that the government enlist as soldiers individuals in society who had previously been excluded. Black leaders thought that black loyalty to the war effort would bring more civil rights and African Americans were called upon to serve the United States in roles reserved traditionally for white

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[118]Joseph Papp, "Commencement Speech North Carolina School of the Arts," 5 June 1971, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[119]Joseph Papp, "New York Shakespeare Festival Artistic Statement," March 1983, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

men. Unfortunately, the war era suggested a greater promise for change and equality in society without a change in policy in the ranks of soldiers. While in the United States,

> President Roosevelt repeatedly told the world that the country was fighting for freedom and democracy, training camps were torn by prejudice and discrimination, the Red Cross blood supplies were segregated into "white" and "colored" and blacks were the victims of violence from whites in local communities where they were stationed.[120]

Papp noted some of these inequalities in his own experiences with the military. In one situation, he spoke up when a black sailor was unfairly put in the brig. Papp was angered that there were no black officers to speak up for the man and that African Americans were relegated to menial positions such as kitchen help. He was threatened with being thrown into the brig himself if he continued to speak out about the unfair treatment of black sailors.[121]

A significant change in both the social and political context of the war era was the accelerated migration of blacks from the South into northern and western cities and from the rural South into southern cities. This migration was often disappointing because blacks found the conditions in the urban ghettos almost as bad at those they had

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[120]William H. Chafe, "The Social Politics of Race and Gender," in *Major Problems in American History Since 1945*, ed. Robert Griffith (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1992), 33.

[121]Helen Epstein, *Joe Papp: An American Life* (New York: Little Brown, 1994), 57.

left, which contributed to some of the social conditions prevalent in the inner cities in the 1950s and 1960s. However, moving out of the small southern communities created a positive change in the political context of the time because it brought independence for blacks from the traditional social controls to which blacks were forced to comply as a means of survival in the South.[122] In southern rural areas, African Americans rarely challenged the racial construct because doing so could have resulted in violence and perhaps even death; in urban centers, those fears were lessened.

The movement out of rural southern communities also brought increased financial security to some African Americans. Two million blacks worked in defense plants, and another two hundred thousand blacks worked in low level federal civil service positions with a doubling of blacks in labor unions during the war to one million two hundred and fifty thousand.[123] Because of the limited progress made during the war, some African Americans were optimistic about continued change but many blacks were frustrated by the reality of oppression. The dismal housing conditions in the urban ghettos, racial prejudice in the military and work force, and the resentment of some whites led to several race riots during the war. Little was accomplished during the

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[122]Chafe, 32.

[123]Ibid., 33.

war years in terms of permanent movement toward equality; however, the foundation was laid for mass protests after the war.[124]

The increasing problems created by racial injustice led many white leaders to support change in the area of race relations after the war.[125] In 1947, President Harry Truman issued a report titled *To Secure These Rights* which helped put civil rights back on the liberal agenda. The following year, while campaigning for President, he became the first President to campaign in Harlem. In 1948 Truman also began integrating the military.[126] Truman believed that increased focus on race relations was imperative to foreign policy. The United States was under a great deal of pressure internationally to "practice what we preached" in terms of freedom and equality. Racism in America was increasingly becoming a moral embarrassment in world affairs.[127]

Truman's focus on race relations alienated many Southerners and, when Truman brought race back to the center of the liberal agenda, the southern democrats broke away from the party to form the Dixiecrat party. Strom Thurman ran for President under the

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[124]Ibid., 32.

[125]Alan Brinkley and Ellen Fitzpatrick, *America in Modern Times: Since 1890* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1997), 355.

[126]Chafe, 34.

[127]Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1987), 137.

Dixiecrat ticket in 1948 promising to move the focus of the Presidency away from race relations.[128] Truman narrowly won the election partially because of the outpouring of black voters in many states and his statements on civil rights.[129] However, the incident highlighted the dividing force of racial issues in the United States. Although Truman's work did help to legitimize civil rights issues, the reality of African Americans did not live up to the promise presented by Truman in his civil rights recommendations. For example, Truman began integrating the military in 1948 but the integration progress was slow and the military did not become fully integrated until after the Korean War.[130]

While Truman believed that much had been done in terms of civil rights, African Americans were frustrated by the lack of progress. The contradiction between promise and reality led to dissatisfaction in the postwar era and increasing insistence among African Americans that they must take action to secure equality. The post World War II era was not the first time in American history when the changes promised to African Americans were not followed by legislation to support those changes. The difference in the post World War II era was a series of social and political events which helped to bring the undercurrent of

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[128]Brinkley, 391.

[129]Chafe, 34.

[130]Ibid., 34.

racial injustice into the public eye for scrutiny; economic affluence, national optimism, the Cold War, and the development of the suburbs and sunbelt helped to expose the gap between the surface harmonies that seemed to unite society and the real conflicts that divided it. Postwar affluence had the most significant impact on the social and political context of the time.

During the war years, many men were fighting overseas and earning money, while at home, women and African Americans entered fields that had previously been closed to them. Government cautions on spending to control inflation resulted in more spending power for many Americans once the war ended.[131] While European and Asian countries and their economies had been disrupted by the war, the American economy and American industry were poised to supply those countries with goods and services and there were few countries with the natural resources and raw materials to compete.[132] Americans were improving their economic positions in comparison to how they had lived in the past and had more money to spend to make their lives even better.[133] From 1947 to 1960 the gross national product rose from two hundred and eighty-two billion dollars to nearly four hundred

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[131]Irwin and Debi Unger, *Postwar America: The United States Since 1945* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 18.

[132]Ibid., 19.

[133]Gitlin, 13.

and forty billion.[134] Over the same period of time, unemployment remained below five percent while the rate of inflation averaged a moderate three percent.[135] The poverty rate decreased and the standard of living increased over this time period. In 1950 about thirty percent of the United States population lived in poverty: in 1960 that number decreased to approximately twenty percent and then to eleven percent by 1973.[136]

With the postwar affluence and hegemony in global economics, Americans were optimistic that the United States could accomplish any goal. This optimism signaled a new hope that had been missing following the Great Depression. Americans were confident that, with the increased levels of production, they could solve social injustices and political problems.[137] National optimism coupled with economic affluence led to massive spending initiatives in the 1950s and 1960s to solve some of the social and political problems. The impact of economic affluence and optimism can be seen for example in the Cold War era massive defense spending.

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[134]Robert M. Collins, *More: The Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 41.

[135]Brinkley, 407.

[136]Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-1980*, Tenth Anniversary Ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 245.

[137]Brinkley, 411.

The Cold War generated massive defense spending which helped to sustain economic growth. With the onset of the Cold War, monumental resources were allocated to defending the United States which acted as a stimulator for the national economic metabolism and contributed to the stability of the postwar economy. Defense spending also gave the government an opportunity to put money into sectors of the economy where the United States was falling behind other countries. This informal industrial policy brought the nation back into competitive markets; however, only industries which could provide technologies needed for the Cold War benefited from this informal policy.

For example, the Cold War led to the creation of a national highway system which provided jobs. The interstate highway system began in 1956 for the transportation of war materials across the United States. The federal government invested $100 billion in the project which created many jobs.[138] The project also made areas outside the city easily available by car which contributed to the increase in suburbanization.[139] Once the highway system was completed, the need for more potential war materials spurred the

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[138]Ibid., 407.

[139]J. John Palen, *The Urban World*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 206.

development of the sunbelt which in turn helped to sustain economic growth and affluence.

In fact, economic affluence was so widely shared that it worked to close the gap slightly between whites and blacks.[140] Affluence led to the mechanization of the South which continued the migration of African Americans from the rural South into southern cities and then the migration to northern and western cities, which had started during the war. In northern cities political groups seeking support encouraged blacks to register to vote and offered blacks some incentives for their support. Blacks could then vote for people to represent them which gave blacks pockets of power and a heightened sense of how they could achieve social and political gains toward a better life.[141]

In addition, the mechanization of the South created a situation which made racial equality appear to be a positive sum gain. Historically, black slaves had been a valuable asset to the southern economy as had poor black farm workers. With the increased mechanization, there was a decreased economic advantage to racism. Economic growth shifted power away from a tradition-bound land owner elite toward managers and laborers who did not have an

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[140]Collins, 42.

[141]Chafe, 32-33.

allegiance to Jim Crow historically or an irrational attachment to racism. The managers and laborers were less likely to sacrifice economic growth in an attempt to maintain a racialized social structure.[142] Although racism continued to be a serious social problem in the South, the increased mechanization made progress easier.

Furthermore, affluence gave African Americans economic power that they had not achieved before. Labor and industry which had previously been denied to blacks became available during the war and remained available in the postwar era because blacks were allowed to enter into labor unions previously closed to them. Affluence also gave African Americans economic power because it gave them the power to boycott and actually make an impact. Economic power served to strengthen organs of protest; for example, the Montgomery Bus Boycott was expensive to sustain, and blacks had the money to support the boycott.[143] This led to real progress in the civil rights movement when the Supreme Court also supported the boycott.

Affluence meant that African Americans had more disposable income to support arts organizations such as Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival. In addition, affluence gave many young African

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[142]William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 70.

[143]Brinkley, 441.

American men and women the opportunity to attend college. The dramatic expansion of higher education in the United States after the war brought with it long term exposure to enlighten attitudes which helped spotlight racism, not just for African Americans but for young people from all ethnic groups.[144]

Affluence also meant that more households could afford television sets, and by 1957, there were over forty million television sets in the United States, almost as many television sets in the country as families.[145] The increasing availability of televisions in the 1950s helped to make the problem of race a national issue and to educate Americans that there were significant exclusions to the postwar affluence. Protests were covered by the national press; scenes of racial violence flashed across television screens in living rooms around the country, and the coverage helped to school African Americans in the techniques of protest. The availability of television also sharpened in African Americans a sense of relentless proof that others had something they did not; it gave blacks an opportunity to see what they were denied.[146]

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[144]Gitlin, 20.

[145]Brinkley, 419.

[146]Chafe, 34.

The growing sense of exclusion was also fueled by the driving force of the consumer culture: advertising. Advertisers spent ten billion dollars a year in the postwar era to create images of abundance and to convince viewers that a product would not only improve their lives but was essential to their happiness.[147] Advertising helped to spur on mass society and mass culture.

Mass society/culture, which took shape in the 1950s, was distinctive in the sheer scale and size of the institutions in conjunction with mass consumption and mass production fueled by mass media. The totalistic embrace of mass society/culture became increasingly difficult to escape as the driving force in society was motivated more and more by the desire to have what others already had and the goods that advertisers promised would make consumers happy. As Americans became interested in buying the products and reaping the benefits of the consumer culture, more individuals had the financial ability to take part in consumerism than ever before. For those people without the financial ability to fully partake in this new consumer culture, the unprecedented availability of credit allowed them to identify with middle-class culture and middle-class levels of consumption.[148] However, millions of minorities were unable to

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[147]John Patrick Diggins, "The Proud Decade," in *Major Problems in American History Since 1945*, ed. Robert Griffith (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1992), 231.

participate in the consumer culture which helped to heighten the growing feeling that they were excluded.

Affluence and optimism in the postwar era also led to a baby boom. Many people who had decided not to marry and have children, because of the Great Depression and then the war, contributed to a population explosion after the war. Before the war, the national birth rate had been in decline. Post World War II, the birth rate increased and the population of the United States rose twenty percent in the next decade.[149] In the ten years following the war, ten million new households were formed.[150] Between 1950 and 1960 the population increased by twenty percent, and the young families turned out to be avid consumers, which helped to sustain postwar affluence.[151]

The young families needed a place to live, and as a result, suburbia became the new frontier of the 1950s. After WWII most of the land within the legal boundaries of large cities was already developed. The millions of young married couples needed housing the city could not provide. The suburbs became one of the few realistic choices for young families. The suburbs were also an attractive choice

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[148]Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowark, "The Precarious Prosperity of People's Capitalism," in *Major Problems in American History Since 1945*, ed. Robert Griffith (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1992), 223.

[149]Brinkley, 408.

[150]Diggins, 207.

[151]Brinkley, 408.

because the new houses in the suburbs were frequently cheaper than housing in the city.[152]

The development of the suburbs helped to sustain the economic growth in the decade after the war but increased the growing racial frustration in the country because the movement to the suburbs was racially segregated. The federal government subsidized suburban growth with two programs: Veteran Administration loans for veterans and Federal Housing Administration loans for non-veterans. Both programs "required that communities be 'homogeneous areas,' thus reinforcing racial segregation."[153] The loans given in the suburbs were given to whites to maintain homogeneous neighborhoods while few loans were given in central cities. Furthermore, blacks participating in the loan programs paid higher interest rates than whites. The models used by the loan programs supported racism based on the fear that property values would decline if segregation did not continue.

The Veterans Administration and Federal Housing Administration loan programs had a lasting impact on the wealth of black Americans. Middle-class blacks were effectively locked out of one of the greatest opportunities for wealth accumulation in American history. African Americans were also locked in central city communities which were

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[152]Palen, 207.

[153]Ibid., 206.

blocked by the Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Administration from sources of new investment in their homes.[154] The disinvestment in central cities at the expense of the suburbs increasingly meant the disinvestment in blacks as opposed to whites. The policies of the loan programs influenced the lending practices of other lending institutions which sent cities into decline.

This decline was complicated by the continued influx of blacks from the South who were entering urban centers. As demand for social services grew, taxes were increased to meet the needs of the deteriorating infrastructure of the central cities which accelerated the exodus of the white middle class to the suburbs.[155] As whites moved to the suburbs, they took jobs with them, and the suburbs became major economic centers.[156] With more jobs moving to the suburbs and out of reach of the African American population, poverty became an increasing problem in the central city and contributed to the frustration of minorities. The movement of whites to the suburbs helped underscore the economic inequalities in America in the postwar era as primarily minorities were left in the urban ghettos.

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[154]Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth, White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 18.

[155]Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 55.

[156]Palen, 198.

Although the racial gap between blacks and whites closed a bit in the postwar era due to affluence, poverty and inequality still defined the lives of many African Americans and other minorities. Robert Lampman from the University of Wisconsin revealed in a 1957 study that, "32.2 million persons, nearly a quarter of the population had incomes below government-proclaimed poverty levels. Millions more, while not starving, had minimal comforts."[157] Over half of American minorities lived in poverty in the early 1960s and the black unemployment rate was twice that of whites.[158] While the 1950s were a time of prosperity for many middle and working class Americans, millions of African Americans lived in poverty during the postwar decade. As the population moved out of rural southern areas and into urban ghettos, the economic gap between working and middle class Americans became more and more glaring and ominous.

Economic affluence and economic growth created conditions where the United States could spend millions of dollars on the Cold War, but Cold War policies further underscored racial inequality in the United States. America was calling for free elections in other countries yet did not have free elections in the American South; America was calling for democracy abroad but did not have democracy for all at

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[157]Miller, 225.

[158]Brinkley, 479.

home. Racial inequality and racist attitudes served as a source of embarrassment for the United States in the global arena and frustrated African Americans.[159] The growth made possible by affluence helped to create a feeling that America could allocate more resources to those people who were impoverished and that America had the power to end racial injustice, influenced perhaps by Kennedy's decree that he would end discrimination with the stroke of the presidential pen.[160]

By the mid-1950s the growing undercurrent of racial tension began to surface as a favorable context to challenge racism emerged. In 1954 the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that separate is in itself unequal, overturning the 1896 ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* which supported the segregation of transportation as long as the separate units were equal. Unfortunately, Eisenhower did not offer support for changes in race relations and southerners in congress slowed down legislation that would protect African Americans from discrimination.[161] In addition, the growing availability of television and mass media helped to inform the nation of the civil rights violations taking place in the South including the 1954 murder of Emmett Till, a

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[159]Gitlin, 137.

[160]Chafe, 35.

[161]Brinkley, 436.

fourteen year old boy from Chicago who was murdered while visiting his uncle in Mississippi because he whistled at a white woman.[162] The black community was emboldened by the mass resistance to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, outraged by the murder of Emmett Till, and optimistic that change was possible and within reach. As a result, the established system of racial identification and meaning met increased opposition.

The civil rights movement was initially organized under the dominant paradigm of ethnicity. The early leaders of the movement were moderates who sought to end inequality under the current social system.[163] This belief helped to unify the movement into a single-minded interest based on liberal hope with integration as the primary goal, exemplified by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). When the organization started, the goal of the struggle was integration through non-violence.[164] SNCC also believed that the federal government was on the side of the organization and that optimism influenced the action of the group in the early 1960s.

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[162]*The American Experience: The Murder of Emmett Till*, directed by Stanley Nelson, Public Broadcasting System, 2004, DVD.

[163]Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 96.

[164]Gitlin, 106.

Optimism played out in another major development of the civil rights movement in 1960 when four young, black college students sat down at an all white lunch counter in a Woolworth's store in Greensboro, North Carolina. The students were angered because they were served at all other counters in the store and felt they should be served at the lunch counter as well.[165] This provided the civil rights movement with a symbol of protest to rally involvement. They sat down and protested segregation non-violently; the sit-in became the symbol of protest in the civil rights movement.[166] Soon sit-ins and boycotts spread across the urban South and North. The vision of the civil rights movement was for a non-violent movement with the goal of integration: blacks and whites coming together. The leaders of the movement believed that integrationist techniques would lead to a "colorblind" future for the United States.[167]

Papp's work with colorblind casting at the NYSF mirrored the goals of the civil rights movement: racial equality and integration. While he was interested in representing the changing racial mix in New York City onstage, he believed that African Americans have the same abilities as whites and deserve the same rights. Papp's commitment to

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[165]Ibid., 81.

[166]Chafe, 43.

[167]Unger, 93.

creating a multi-cultural audience and addressing racial issues can be seen in his mission for the NYSF Board of Directors. He wanted the board to be more than a fund-raising unit; he wanted the board to help raise awareness of the glaring racial inequality in society.[168] Papp was inspired by the national optimism in his work with colorblind casting and by the new opportunities opened to blacks. He had witnessed the mass inequality in society and Papp believed that he could help inspire real change. He wanted to redistribute roles/jobs along racial lines in an attempt to destroy racist stereotypes, influence cultural representation linked to class and cultural domination, and change the position of African Americans in society.

From inception, it was the mission of the NYSF and later the Public Theatre to involve minority, specifically African American, actors in productions to both train the minority actors and enrich the productions with different cultural perspectives. Papp also believed that blacks in his audiences would be proud to see African American actors playing kings and nobles onstage.[169] Papp felt that having black actors play characters traditionally played by white actors was very

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[168]Joseph Papp, "Lincoln Center Position Paper," 1973, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[169]Joseph Papp, "Formation of Permanent Black/Hispanic Shakespeare Company," 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

important because the casting opened up lines of communication about racism in society and opened white consciousness to the possibilities of what was acceptable and correct.[170] This fueled his desire to use colorblind casting when he began his theatre company.

[170]Joseph Papp, Handwritten Notes on Black/Hispanic Company, 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Chapter Five

Joseph Papp felt that casting minority actors was a social responsibility in a country where vast racial inequality helped sustain tension and that the impact of the civil rights movement on blacks had created a significant change in the American landscape. Being black was no longer about being part of an underprivileged racial minority asking for equality; the civil rights movement had created a revolutionary force in America by focusing attention on injustice, corruption, and violence.[171] Part of that injustice was the uneven distribution of roles to minority actors. Papp wanted to provide opportunities for minority actors and the importance of his work can be seen in his intent, the extent of the colorblind casting and the nature of that casting as perceived by theatre critics, historians,

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[171]Joseph Papp, Untitled: Need for Black Critics, No Date, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

audience members, and the actors he worked with. Because Papp's work was influenced not only by what was happening in society, but also in the American theatre, it is important to understand the limited opportunities available to African American actors when he started working in New York.

Papp was not the first theatre artist to utilize interracial casting. Several theatre artists helped pave the way for Papp's work; one such person was Jasper Deeter. Deeter's Hedgerow company was the first white theatre company in the United States to cast an African American actor, Waylon Rudd, as Othello in 1926. Deeter created

> unprecedented opportunities for black artists at Hedgerow. . . . Deeter welcomed black actors into his company and acting classes, placing shows with racial themes and black casts into his regular rep season, but also casting black actors nontraditionally. . . . Hedgerow was especially significant as a place where [black actors] could study and improve their craft in an era when established theatre schools, as many black actors have reported, refused black students.[172]

The Federal Theatre Project also opened doors for African American actors that had previously been closed. The project created a multi-cultural audience for Shakespeare's plays and provided some opportunities for black actors to play Shakespearean characters in the

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[172]Cheryl Black, "After the Emperor: Interracial Collaborations between Provincetown Alumni and Black Theatre Artists, 1924-1946," (paper presented at the Association for Theatre in Higher Education Conference, San Francisco, California, 28-31 July 2005).

black units.[173] However, "[u]ntil the 1940s the established professional theatre in America failed to accommodate a black actor in a major role from the Shakespearean repertoire. Indeed, a book published in 1939 entitled *Shakespeare in America* by Esther Dunn does not mention a single black performer."[174]

But that would change in 1942 when it was announced that Paul Robeson would be playing Othello at the Theatre Guild. He had played the role in 1930 in London to good reviews and had planned to return to the United States to perform the character, but was unable to work out a deal with an American company. Interracial casting in America was still rare at the time. It took twelve years before Robeson was able to perform the character here. The production was a hit and moved to Broadway the following year where it played for two hundred and ninety-six performances.[175] While the production was well received, it did not create an atmosphere in professional theatre that was more accepting of casting African Americans. Although there were some colleges and universities mounting uni-racial and colorblind theatre productions of Shakespeare's plays in the 1940s including

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[173] Errol Hill, *Shakespeare in Sable: A History of Black Shakespearean Actors* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 118.

[174] Ibid., 120.

[175] Ibid., 128.

Hampton Institute and Howard University,[176] the first recorded production of a black actor playing a Shakespearean role that was traditionally considered a white character (colorblind casting) came in 1945, when Canada Lee was cast as Caliban in *The Tempest*.[177]

In the 1950s, more opportunities became available for black actors. Earle Hyman played Othello in a summer production at the Ohio Shakespeare Festival in the early 1950s and the Prince of Morocco in a New York City production of *The Merchant of Venice* in 1953. Both productions would be classified as interracial since the characters played by Hyman are traditionally considered to be black characters, however the characters were rarely played by black actors in the 1950s. In 1955 Hyman was invited to join the American Shakespeare Festival Theatre at Stratford, Connecticut. Over the next five summers he performed in eleven roles with the company.[178] However, Hyman was an exception. Most African American actors did not encounter the same range of opportunities.

After the Brown decision in 1954, "[a]n increasing number of college-educated and academy-trained black actors and actresses

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[176]Ibid., 131.

[177]Ayanna Thompson, "Practicing a Theory/Theorizing a Practice: An Introduction to Shakespearean Colorblind Casting" in *Colorblind Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Race and Performance*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4.

[178]Hill, 136-137.

sought entrance into the professional theater and clamored for roles in nonblack plays, requiring a more venturesome policy in casting Shakespearean productions."[179] While a few African American actors had been cast, opportunities were few and far between;

> an array of black talent remained essentially invisible. This was particularly true of black actresses, who were never considered for any of Shakespeare's heroines, since, apart from Cleopatra—a role that was seldom if ever thought of as black—nonwhite female characters do not exist in his plays. Casting black women in Shakespeare, except as silent ladies-in-waiting or other supernumeraries, seemed to pose insuperable problems for producers. . . . [180]

In fact, the hiring conditions of African American actors was still considered so dire in 1959 that Actors' Equity Association decided to sponsor a "special Integration Showcase performance" in New York to highlight the exclusion of blacks from professional theatre.[181]

Such was the state of African American actors in New York City when Papp began his work at the NYSF. Few black actors were hired to play Shakespearean characters and rarely in lead roles. Papp significantly changed the hiring practices of black actors. The extent of his work can be seen in the number of times Papp utilized colorblind casting. During the thirty-nine years Papp ran the company, the NYSF produced approximately one hundred and thirteen Shakespearean

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[179]Ibid., 143.

[180]Ibid., 143.

[181]Ibid., 130.

productions. Of those, at lease seventy-six included actors of color with colorblind casting in at least seventy-one of those productions. Of those seventy-one, many included more than one minority actor. Twenty-seven of the seventy-one were produced at the height of the civil rights movement (between 1956 and 1966). In addition, Papp directed approximately twenty-eight Shakespearean productions at the NYSF; he utilized colorblind casting in at least sixteen of those productions.

Papp began using interracial casting in 1952, but his first interracial Shakespearean production was in 1956 when he cast Roscoe Lee Browne as Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*. Notable examples of Papp's colorblind casting include his 1964 touring production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the 1968 production of *Hamlet* when Papp cast Cleavon Little in the title role. Although Papp was very successful with his free Shakespearean productions in Central Park, he wanted to ensure that the poorest of individuals in New York City had access to theatre. He also wanted to see a more ethnically diverse audience come to see theatrical productions and build a diverse audience for future productions. In the summer of 1964, he created the Delacorte Mobile Theatre to take the performances into some of the neighborhoods of the city. Papp selected *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the mobile theatre to perform and presented fifty-seven full

scale performances with lighting, scenery, costumes, and props throughout the five boroughs. The interracial company performed primarily in playgrounds or parks. The Mobile Theatre included two trailers which served as dressing rooms, a stage, a control center, bleachers, and folding chairs which could seat approximately fifteen hundred people and seating was generally filled to capacity.[182] Over seventy thousand people saw the performances including many teenagers and children.[183]

When Papp cast Cleavon Little as Hamlet in 1968, the New York City school board considered canceling the performances scheduled for local school children because Papp's concept for the play centered on the idea that the lead character was trying to usurp the throne of Claudius, and he portrayed Hamlet as an angry militant black hero.[184] While Actors Equity supported the decision stating that all actors should be cast according to merit and talent not skin color, members of the school board called Papp's casting, " a gross distortion [of Shakespeare]."[185] These are just a few notable examples of Papp's

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[182]Joan Barthel, "Who Threw The Rocks," *New York Times*, 27 June 1965, X3.

[183]Richard Faust and Charles Kadushin, *Shakespeare in The Neighborhood: Audience Reaction to "A Midsummer Night's Dream as Produced by Joseph Papp for the Delacourt Mobile Theatre* (New York City: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1965), 1.

[184]Dan Sullivan, "Papp is a Love Person," *New York Times,* 15 October 1967,117.

work with interracial casting. He used interracial casting in at least two-thirds of the Shakespearean productions at the NYSF. His commitment to casting black actors in classical roles was unprecedented.

One additional fact, however, leads me to question the nature of Papp's work. Of those one hundred and thirteen Shakespearean productions, none were directed by African American directors. Between 1964 and 1989, at least fifty-seven minority directors directed at the festival. None of them were hired to direct Shakespearean productions.[186] This fact is important in determining whether Papp's work can be perceived as racist or non-racist in nature. While Papp has been celebrated for the opportunities he created for black artists, he has also been condemned for recreating the dominant structure of society within his theatre company. This leads to several questions which need to be explored: what impact did the environment have on the colorblind productions and were the productions perceived as being racist or non-racist by theatre historians, critics, audiences, and actors who performed in the productions.

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[185]Sam Zolotow, "Negro will Play Hamlet For Papp," *New York Times*, 13 February 1968, 49.

[186]New York Shakespeare Festival List of Minority Directors and their Productions, no date, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Interestingly enough, some of the critics who wrote about colorblind productions, did not even mention the colorblind cast or mentioned the casting in passing. Arthur Gelb, who wrote the first review for the *New York Times* of a festival production in 1956, did not mention in the review that *The Taming of the Shrew* used colorblind casting.[187] George Goodman and Joan Barthell both mentioned that Papp cast blacks in roles that did not have racial themes[188] or in Shakespearean plays.[189] Dan Sullivan discussed the interracial Hamlet staring Cleavon Little but said little about the impact of the casting decision.[190] Michiko Kakutani mentioned Papp's use of colorblind casting in *Measure for Measure* but focused primarily on Papp's work in general.[191] Robert Hatch critiqued three colorblind productions from the summer of 1960 (*Henry V, Measure for Measure,* and *The Taming of the Shrew*) but did not mention the colorblind cast in any of the productions.[192] Of the three reviews written by D.J.R. Bruckner,

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[187]Helen Epstein, *Joe Papp: An American Life* (New York: Little Brown, 1994), 108.

[188]George Goodman, "More Blacks in Theatre? Yes and No," *New York Times*, 9 August 1972, 20.

[189]Barthel, X3.

[190]Sullivan, 117.

[191]Michiko Kakutani, "The Public and Private Joe Papp," *New York Times*, 23 June 1985, SM15.

[192]Robert Hatch, "This Blessed Plot, This Shakespeare in the Park," *Horizons*, 2 November 1960, 117.

Douglas Watt, and Linda Winer critiquing Papp's colorblind *Measure for Measure* which appeared in the July 2, 1985 *New York Times*, none of them mentioned the colorblind casting. In fact, when discussing a 1989 production of *Twelfth Night* with Gregory Hines and John Amos, David Blum was more interested in the use of Hollywood stars (Michelle Pfeiffer and Jeff Goldblum) than the colorblind casting.[193] Perhaps the critics did not mention the colorblind casts because they did not want to be labeled racists or perhaps the critics supported Papp's work and did not believe that the casting was a distraction for the productions.

However a few critics and theatre historians have been very vocal about Papp's use of colorblind casting. Some believed that Papp's work was exploitative and not colorblind at all. John Simon, for example, believed that Papp's use of colorblind casting undermined productions. When writing about the use of colorblind casting in the 1965 production of *Coriolanus*, Simon stated that,

> "[b]oth Miss White and Mr. Jones are blacks, which brings me to yet another trouble with Papp's productions. Out of laudable integrationist zeal, Mr. Papp has seen fit to populate his Shakespeare with a high percentage of black performers. But the sad fact is that, through no fault of their own, black actors often lack even the rudiments of Standard American speech. . . . [M]oreover, they have been unjustly deprived of sufficient training and experience

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[193]David Blum, "Hollywood Shakespeare: Joe Papp Sprinkles Stardust on 'Twelfth Night'" *New York*, 19 June 1989, 29.

> in even the standard American repertoire, such as it is. As a result, desegregation will take even longer on the poetical than on the political plane. "[194]

He went on to say of African Americans that, "they [did] not look right in parts that historically demand white performers."[195] Simon made similar comments about the casting of Alfre Woodard in a 1989 review of *A Winter's Tale*. Simon stated that the actress was to black for Shakespeare. He went on to say that Shakespearean roles not specifically written as black characters should not be performed by black actors unless the characters are in fantasy plays such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and then only if all of the fantasy characters are played by African Americans. [196]

While Simon's response to colorblind casting was considered by some to be racist in nature, it is important to point out the various accents of minority actors in colorblind casts were also "bothersome" to black critics.[197] Another black critic noted that by casting black actors in productions with white, trained actors, Papp highlighted the fact that the African American actors were untrained and did not

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[194]John Simon, *Singularities* (New York: Random House, 1975), 109-110.

[195]Ibid., 110.

[196]"New Yorkers Demand 'Racist' Critic's Ouster," *Toronto Star Newspaper*, 3 April 1989, C7.

[197]Errol G. Hill and James V. Hatch, *A History of African American Theatre* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), 425.

belong in the productions.[198] Martin Gottfried noted that the use of colorblind casting specifically to integrate a company sometimes led directors to "overlook accents or inexperience that they wouldn't tolerate in white actors. The black actor then sticks out like a sore thumb and the tokenism becomes theatrically as well as morally bothersome."[199] Other critics have argued that the world is not colorblind and attempts to leave race "at the door" actually erodes racial differences.[200]

Critics Vince Canby, Frank Rich, and Michael Feingold also considered some of Papp's colorblind casting choices problematic. Of Papp's 1968 colorblind casting in *Hamlet*, Canby began his review by noting that he considered the production an interracial political comedy. He went on to write that ". . . Shakespeare was not writing about either Caribbean politics or biracial societies, nor did he write the outline for an absurdist comedy, which is that way this "Hamlet" winds up."[201] Rich argued that the casting of a black actor to play the

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[198]Townsend Brewster, "Theatre: Minorities and Classical Theatre," *Routes, A Guide to Black Entertainment*, 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[199]Martin Gottfried, "Shakespeare for White Liberals," *Saturday Review*, 31 March 1979, 40.

[200]Ania Loomba, Forward in *Colorblind Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Race and Performance*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (New York: Routledge, 2006), xv.

son of a white woman in the 1989 production of *Cymbeline* was pointless and confusing.[202] Feingold argued that the casting of a black actor as Mariana with a white actor as Isabella was a mistake in a production of *Measure for Measure*.[203]

Furthermore, Ayanna Thompson argued in her recent collection of essays that the colorblind casting practiced at the NYSF was not really colorblind at all. She noted that

> the black actor Roscoe Lee Browne, who was regularly employed by the Festival in the 1950s and 1960s, was never cast as a romantic lead . . . [i]nstead Browne was consistently cast as the more earthy sidekick. He played Balthasar in *Romeo and Juliet* in 1957, the Soothsayer in *Julius Caesar* in 1959, the Fool in *King Lear* in 1962, Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* in 1963, and Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida* in 1965. This black actor who was known for his strength, wit, and cultured appeal could not ascend into the rank of Shakespeare's romantically involved characters. Despite the festival's colorblind approach, there were still roles that were not open to this black actor: the use of colorblind casting did not eradicate the glass ceiling for Browne. What makes this example even more disturbing is the realization that colorblind casting can still traffic in race-based stereotypes. The casting of Roscoe Lee Browne in these various supporting roles, instead of leading ones, unwittingly replicates the stereotypes that black men are less threatening when they are presented as sidekicks. And in turn, this practice

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[201]Vince Canby, Review of Hamlet, by William Shakespeare, New York Shakespeare Festival, New York, *New York Times*, 4 July 1968, 15.

[202]Blum, 32.

[203]Rodney K. Douglas, "The Concept and Practice of Mixed Racial Casting in New York Theatres and Other Regions 1960-1990" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2001), 104.

> implicitly "races" leading men and lovers, like Romeo, Julius Caesar, Lear, Leontes, and Troilus, as white."[204]

She also stated that

> [w]hen black actors were allowed to perform in Shakespearean roles with romantic counterparts, interracial casting still proved a strange barrier. Again, it becomes clear that colorblind casting was never as blind as Papp and other proponents of the practice imagined it to be. There were many examples of Festival productions in which actors of color were cast to play opposite each other so that interracial unions were avoided. For instance, Robert Hooks and Ellen Holly performed opposite each other as Henry and Catherine in the 1965 production of *Henry V*. James Earl Jones and Ellen Holly were the Macbeths in the 1966 production of *Macbeth*. Jonelle Allen and Clifton Davis were Silvia and Valentine in the 1971 and 1972 productions of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Coupling more often that not, was not an interracial affair in the Festival's colorblind casting. Likewise, Shakespeare's families were often constructed in a monochromatic fashion when colorblind casting was employed. When playing King Lear in a 1973 production, James Earl Jones was provided with black daughters."[205]

Thompson clearly believed that colorblind casting was not fully realized form at the NYSF and she implied that the roles offered to minorities actually perpetuated the racialized stereotypes and could be perceived as racist (although she claimed unwittingly).

Thompson's point is worth discussion. Many minority actors played minor characters throughout the NYSF's history: guards, servants, and similar roles. In one production of *A Midsummer Night's*

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[204]Thompson, 8.

[205]Ibid., 8-9.

Dream, in 1988, the forest inhabitants (Oberon, Titania, etc.) were played by black actors. There were however, significant exceptions to the list provided by Thompson. For example, in the 1960 production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Jane White played Katherine to a white Pertruchio. Ellen Holly played Katherine in 1965 also as part of an interracial couple. Holly also played Titania in the 1964 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with a white Oberon. In 1961 James Earl Jones played Oberon as part of an interracial couple, and Ruby Dee was Gertrude to a white Claudius in the 1975 production of *Hamlet*. In the 1966 production of *Macbeth* cited by Thompson staring James Earl Jones and Ellen Holly as the Macbeths, Raul Julia played Macduff as one half of an interracial couple. Other examples of minority actors playing lead characters that were part of interracial couples include Ellen Holly as Titania, Cleavon Little as Hamlet, and James Earl Jones as Claudius (in two separate productions).

In addition, it is important to note that while Thompson questioned the casting of black daughters for an African American Lear she also defended the idea of multi-racial casting (one ethic group cast as a family unit). She stated that "when interracial families are the result of colorblind casting, critics often fault Shakespearean productions for being unrealistic."[206] However, in the 1962 production

of *King Lear* cited by Thompson staring Roscoe Lee Browne as Lear's Fool, Lear was also played by a minority actor, Frank Silvera, with white daughters. While there are examples of multi-racial casting at the NYSF there are many examples of true colorblind casting such as Cleavon Little's Hamlet to a white Claudius, James Earl Jones' Claudius to a white Hamlet, Jane White's Katherine, and Ellen Holly's Katherine.

There were obviously numerous examples of colorblind casting and multi-racial casting of Shakespearean roles at the NYSF, however, the way that colorblind casting has been perceived varies significantly. Not all critics and historians have perceived Papp's work in the same way that Thompson has. Others believed that Papp's work was neither racist nor non-racist but rather pragmatic. Errol Hill noted that Papp's colorblind casting opened doors for black actors but he believed that Papp's intent was centered on creating a company that would appeal to the diverse philanthropists in New York. He viewed Papp as a shrewd business owner making decisions to keep his theatre afloat. He says,

> Papp was astute enough to realize that in a cosmopolitan city like New York, popular theater would need to be multiracial in order to have the broadest possible appeal. It also made good practical sense for a project, constantly in need of funds, to cast its net widely so as to attract greater public and foundation support.[207]

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[206]Ibid., 9-10.

[207]Hill, 145.

Papp believed that support for his work would always be available and that colorblind casting could increase the support as long as the actors in his company were talented.[208]

Some critics supported Papp's use of colorblind casting and might even have argued that Papp's work was not racist in nature. One of the most supportive critics Papp encountered while producing in New York was Robert Brustein.[209] Brustein often lauded Papp's use of colorblind casting and believed that the practice was important to society. After seeing Papp's 1968 version of *Hamlet*, Brustein remarked that,

> "'I found the whole undertaking to be pretty courageous and while it has drawn a predictable response from those who prefer their Kulcher prepackaged, standardized and wholly digestible like a TV dinner . . . Mr. Papp's group remains, to my mind, the most audacious permanent organization in town, and the only one dedicated not simply to remounting familiar masterpieces but to trying to discover what theatre can mean to America in the sixties.'"[210]

Brustein believed that Papp's work was important to the theatre and society.

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[208]David Graubert, "Latinos in the Acting Profession: A New Generation Battles the Stereotype," 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[209]Epstein, 292.

[210]Ibid.

Another way to appraise how Papp's work was perceived is to look as the responses from audience members who attended colorblind productions. It has been fifteen years since the last of Papp's productions at the NYSF and well over fifty years since he started using colorblind casting. As a result, there is a limited amount of material available on how the audiences responded to his colorblind productions. Because many of the personal letters sent by audience members to actors or the company are no longer available, the best information on the audiences' response to colorblind casting is from the Twentieth Century Fund study of the Delacorte Mobile Theatre audiences in 1964.

A report commissioned by the Twentieth Century Fund entitled *Shakespeare in the Neighborhood: Audience reaction to "A Midsummer-Night's Dream" as Produced by Joseph Papp for the Delacorte Mobile Theatre* found through audience surveys and personal interviews that the use of colorblind casting had a profound impact on many of the black audience members who attended the performances. The colorblind casting often evoked a response from black audiences that never occurred in white audiences. The stage directions in the play called for two of the characters to join hands while delivering their lines; the character of Theseus, played by a white man, clasped hands with his fiancée Hippolyta, played by an African American woman

(Lynn Hamilton), while they spoke their lines. In lower class black neighborhoods, this simple gesture often elicited a positive verbal response from the audience. In middle class African American neighborhoods, the positive response was often stronger. In one middle class black neighborhood, the response was so loud that it completely drowned out the actors.[211]

Middle class and lower middle class African Americans who were interested in civil rights especially appreciated the fact that the cast was interracial. Lower class African Americans were less responsive to the casting even though they were also interested in civil rights.[212] Many African American audience members were more interested in the performance's impact on race relations than in the play itself. They were interested in the colorblind casting and the fact that the performance was taking place in black neighborhoods where lower class blacks had access to the performances. Many individuals from the neighborhoods noted that they did not expect the cast to have African Americans or for the cast to be colorblind but they thought having an interracial cast was important in their primarily black neighborhoods.

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[211]Faust, 26.

[212]Ibid., 5.

Having African Americans in the cast also showed to some of the individuals in the neighborhood that there were blacks who could perform Shakespeare effectively. One African American woman noted that the people from the neighborhood did not know that any blacks were doing Shakespearean plays and the colorblind cast of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was a shock at first; however, it "made the people realize that [theatre] was not only for white people, but it was general for everybody."[213] The value of the colorblind cast was significant in the black neighborhoods as a symbol, telling African Americans that Shakespeare and theatre belong to them, too. Peter Francis James had a similar response as a child when he saw James Earl Jones in a colorblind cast as King Lear on a PBS broadcast from Central Park. He said of the experience,

> it absolutely shattered me and also opened my mind to the possibility, not really personally but culturally, I remember literally thinking I didn't know we could do that. I was not intending to become an actor although I was involved in acting, but that performance was singular in my memory for its power and the way I was moved. I thought "Wow, this is great. So what is the New York Shakespeare Festival? I will have to go watch a play there. If I ever get to New York I will have to do that."[214]

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[213]Ibid., 36.

[214]Peter Francis James, Interview by Charlene Widener, 22 September 2006.

Actor Moses Gunn noted a similar response from an audience member after his 1968 performance as Capulet in the NYSF's production of *Romeo and Juliet*. He stated that

> [i]n school, everyone is taught about the universality of these roles. Yet when a black goes to the theater and sees an all-white cast, he is bound to feel "what does this have to do with me?" You cannot imagine the psychological damage that has been done to a group who on TV, films and the stage never saw themselves represented at all. When I played Capulet, several black kids came up to me after the show and one 15 year old said: "I like that. We've never seen a black man play a role as commanding as that, and we could identify with you." It touched me.[215]

According to the fund study, the impact of black ethnic theatre seemed to be greater on the middle class black audience members than the interracial casting *of A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Many had seen a recent production of *Blues for Mr. Charlie* by James Baldwin and found that production reflected more of their personal experiences than Shakespeare's play. Even so the respondents did not feel that the Delacorte Mobile Theatre should produce plays by Baldwin because the material in those plays was too inflammatory for main stream audiences and went against the integrationist goals of the civil rights movement. However, the black middle class responders also believed

[215]Hill, 169.

that a play about civil rights and inequality would have a greater impact on racial injustice than handing out leaflets about civil rights.[216]

The majority of the individuals who attended the Delacorte Mobile Theatre were not from the middle class. Since most of the performances took place in the poorest neighborhoods in New York City, many of the audience members had never attended a live theatrical performance before. The study determined that for many of those individuals the fact that the performances were free made a considerable impact on their decision to attend.[217] Many of the audience members could not have afforded to pay to see the play. However, the fact that so few of the audience members had ever seen a theatrical performance did not seem to have an impact on the response to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Based on the research results, eighty to ninety percent of the Mobile Theatre audience members seemed to enjoy the performances with few people leaving the performance at intermission. The audiences who attended the performances of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seemed

> to have enjoyed it, even if they did not understand it. That is, it was common for people to have a favorable emotional response to the play based on a generalized appreciation of the scene, the setting, the novelty of the performance, and the excitement of the event, even if . . .

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[216]Faust, 37.

[217]Ibid., 20.

> they showed little comprehension of the story or appreciation of the Shakespearean language.[218]

Although many of the audience members seemed to have limited understanding of the plot, the performances in the boroughs were more significant as a theatrical event than as a learning experience.[219] Audiences liked the idea of having a Shakespearean play performed in the neighborhood and the excitement of the situation. They viewed the performance as a cultural event and social ritual, and as a result, the content of the play was less important than the event itself.[220] Many of the responses seemed to support Papp's assertion that the arts were important to society as more than just a form of entertainment.

While some people attending the performances saw the theatre as a means of broadening their horizon and personal growth, others sought personal comfort and escape from personal or world problems.[221] Going to the play gave audience members a topic they could discuss with others in the community and made them feel cultured. They felt that they were cashing in on something that had

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[218]Ibid., 4.

[219]Richard F. Shepard, "Papp Disagrees With Fund Study," *New York Times*, 13 April 1965, 32.

[220]Faust, 23.

[221]Ibid., 56.

previously been denied to them. Since they could not afford to attend theatrical productions, they were effectively denied this life enriching opportunity and cultural event. Having the performances take place in their neighborhoods added a level of prestige to the performances. The audience members did not need to go to Manhattan to find culture; they could find it in their own neighborhood.[222]

The study concluded that the Delacorte Mobile Theatre was successful in bringing more lower class and minority people into the theatre than Broadway or television had been capable of and that the importance of the performances in the boroughs did not lie in the numbers or the cognitive understanding of the audience at all but rather the moral importance of presenting Shakespeare performances to which the diverse audiences in New York City could relate.[223]

Even though the study focused on one production during the summer of 1964, thousands of audience members responded to the surveys and granted personal interviews. As a result, the value of the survey is significant in determining the perceived nature of colorblind casting at the NYSF. While it is clear that the minority audience members believed that the Negro theatre was more applicable to their lives, they also believed that the colorblind company was an important

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[222]Ibid., 63.

[223]Ibid., 65.

step in integration. For the audience members, the use of colorblind casting in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* created a new possibility in the acceptance of blacks in theatre. Black actors had the ability to perform Shakespearean characters and the opportunity to do so. Overall, the audience response was positive and many believed that the colorblind casting was important to race relations in the United States. It seems that the audience perceived the colorblind performance as non-racist. It is important to note, however, that the production took place in 1964, before the split in the civil rights movement. The perception of the colorblind cast might have been very different a few years later.

When looking at the perceived nature of colorblind casting, it is also important to discuss how the actors who worked in colorblind productions felt about the experiences. As with audience response, there is a limited amount of material available from the actors who worked with Papp over the years. The material included in this section is the best that is available from published interviews with the actors and a personal interview with Peter Francis James, an African American actor. Early in its history, the NYSF was a refuge for minority actors who had difficulty finding work with other companies. Papp's casting was not only important because it gave black actors an opportunity to perform, but because he was one of the few producers

in a major theatre company consistently hiring African American artists. His casting meant financial support for black actors and the opportunity for those actors to perform in classical roles which were not available to them in other companies.

Ellen Holly noted that, "[d]uring my years as a leading lady [at the New York Shakespeare Festival] it was the only work that, as a black actress, I could find. . . ."[224] Holly was first cast at the festival in 1958 as Desdemona in *Othello* and continued to work at the festival in various roles over the next ten years, including the role of Titania in the Delacorte Mobile Theatre production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1964.[225] About the experience, Holly noted,

> [t]he Mobile was high risk/high reward venture . . . and when you were in direct sync with that audience, you experienced the voltage of the second half of that equation in a way that the managerial types on the periphery could never hope to. . . . There is a special hunger in all true people of the theatre, not just to play for the dressed-up society audience but to engage in a form of theater that is much more basic and immediate. . . . The Mobile satisfied that hunger. And that was only one of its rewards. I chose to perform on the Mobile because of the largely black and Hispanic audiences and because my deepest satisfactions come from playing for my own people.[226]

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[224]Ellen Holly, "Why the Furor Over 'Miss Saigon' Won't Fade," *New York Times*, 26 August 1990, national ed., sec. 2: H7.

[225]John Joseph Gibbons, "The American Theatre's Attempts to Achieve Multiculturalism on Stage through Non-Traditional Casting" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1991), 22.

[226]Epstein, 180.

Holly was grateful to Papp for his work in colorblind casting:

> [t]he most remarkable thing about Joe was the color-blind casting he practiced as naturally as breathing, decades before it became the chic thing to do. Talent was the sole casting criterion and skin color was, for him, a completely irrelevant issue. For anyone to cast this way, not just once or twice as a matter of political posturing but as a matter of routine over the course of a career, was unprecedented.[227]

Furthermore, Holly believed that the NYSF was "not only the sole venue where I could work with some kind of consistency, but the sole venue in which it was okay to work with my own face."[228] For black actors such as Holly, being cast by Papp not only meant a paycheck, but also training and exposure.

Actress Gloria Foster said that Papp's casting of minority actors was the way she believed that theatre should work. She also noted that many minority actors did not want to work at other theatre companies because "'they knew that they were not welcome—that they were filling up a quota, that they were doing something odd and that after the production was over, they would no longer be welcome in the theater. Joe always made you feel that you had an open invitation to return many times.'"[229]

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[227]Ibid., 169.

[228]Ibid., 169.

[229]Ibid., 93.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s the country had changed significantly and colorblind casting was seen in an entirely new light. Many of the older minority actors who worked at the NYSF were grateful to Papp for hiring them at the festival. However, the

> younger, more streetwise generation saw the producer in a different light, calling him "Massah Joe," referring to the Festival as "Papp's Plantation." Accusations of racial or sexual bias at the Festival became routine. Twice, the Puerto Rican Actors Guild formally accused him of discrimination. And, a few times, the producer received death threats.[230]

During this time, colorblind casting was perceived as racist in nature and a form of control by some actors. However, Peter Francis James believes that Papp's work was not racist in nature. In a recent interview, James stated that Papp "could be autocratic-there is no question about that-but he was an equal opportunity tyrant when he was a tyrant. They were questions purely of power and never of race or gender."[231]

Actors who worked at the festival in the late 1970s and 1980s seem to feel more as the early pioneers did about colorblind casting. James, who first worked for the company in 1979, stated that "when I made the decision to become an actor and aiming at the classics, the New York Shakespeare Festival was absolutely a destination." He

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[230]Ibid., 311.

[231]James.

went on to say of Papp that

> Joe was not viewed as a benefactor. He was viewed as a street kid who knew the deal. How to get the man to do what the man did not want to do. How to shave him, blame him, and cajole him. Joe was a master of that—of appealing to conscience, of creating a disturbance if that would work—whatever it took. He was a deeply inclusive person, believed it in his bones. . . . Genuine and passionate. [Including minorities] was not a casual intellectual embrace. Every ounce of his being he was about that. He could be whimsical but there was absolutely no doubting his dedication. He could not have been anything else. This was not a choice. It did not emanate from a place of choice. It was deep.[232]

Jimmy Smits stated the following concerning his experience with the NYSF: "[i]t was the only theater in New York I felt connected to—because of the performances by Raul Julia and James Earl Jones and the Public's commitment to diversity. So when I graduated from college it was a natural thing that I came to a general audition at The Public."[233] Overall, it seems that the actors who worked at the festival appreciated and supported Papp's use of colorblind casting.

While there are elements in the colorblind casting at the NYSF that can be perceived as racist, it is clear that for many audience members colorblind casting at the NYSF had a significant positive impact. Although many minority audience members did not find the

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[232]Ibid.

[233]The Public Theatre, "Celebrating 50 Years," http://www.publictheater.org/celebrating/reflections.php.

performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* applicable to their lives, they did believe that colorblind casting was important to race relations. In addition, while some actors believed Papp's work was racist, for many of the minority actors who worked with Papp, the NYSF was the only work they could consistently find. Based on the number of productions utilizing colorblind casting at the NYSF, there is no doubt that Papp's casting opened doors that had previously been closed to African Americans playing leading and supporting characters in Shakespearean plays. The nature of the work, however, is still complicated by the fact that Papp did not hire any minority directors to direct interracial Shakespearean productions at the NYSF. It is important to note that Papp might have contacted minority actors about working as directors at the festival without success. James noted in his interview that he was approached by the festival in the mid-1980s about allowing the festival to develop his talents as a director. Since he was more interested in working as an actor at the time, he turned the festival down.[234]

While Papp's early work with colorblind casting mirrored the integrationist ideology of the civil rights movement, as the 1960s progressed, the civil rights movement faltered and fragmented. In the late 1960s and 1970s the social and political environment in the United

[234]James.

States changed dramatically. Because of these changes, Papp began to believe that colorblind casting was no longer the best way of integrating African American actors into the NYSF.

Chapter Six

In the mid-1960s spending programs such as President Johnson's welfare reform spending, the space program, poverty programs, massive Cold War spending, and the escalating military operation in Vietnam caused the economy to overheat. The war on poverty proved to be a frustration because raising the standard of living did not wipe out the mass inequality that underscored poverty. Although Johnson's programs were designed to give more support to the poorest Americans, they did not redistribute wealth. Economic growth declined while inflation increased, marking the end of economic affluence. As economic affluence declined, the economy overheated and violence erupted in response to the civil rights movement. The social and political context brought on by the end of affluence and optimism, the rise of Black Power, the conflict surrounded American involvement in Vietnam and extrication of American forces, the Nixon

administration, and growing disillusionment created an environment which led Papp to attempt a very different type of racial project at the NYSF: uni-racial casting with African American actors. The decision was a conscious effort by Papp to bring the issue of racial inequality back to the forefront of American consciousness at a time when many people wanted to forget about the gains made in race relations

As the economy began to overheat and inflation set in, Johnson's advisors encouraged him to raise taxes, but he refused; he did not want to risk fueling opposition to the Vietnam conflict and criticism against the war on poverty from conservatives. The poverty reduction program had encountered significant opposition from the right, and while it was effective, the federal deficit increased significantly during Johnson's Presidency. In 1961 the federal deficit was three point tree billion dollars; by 1969 the federal deficit was twenty-five billion dollars.[235] The standard of living rose for most people in this time period, but it was often supported by credit which impeded future growth. The rise in the standard of living was also characterized by consumerism which produced waste and environmental exploitation.[236]

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[235]Alan Brinkley and Ellen Fitzpatrick, *America in Modern Times: Since 1890* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1997), 474.

As the economy spiraled out of control, the belief that the United States could solve any social or political problem began to deteriorate.

This deterioration was manifested in the fragmentation of the civil rights movement. The movement was successful in the early 1960s and resulted in legislation protecting blacks. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 "forbade discrimination in public places; authorized federal suits to desegregate schools; outlawed job discrimination for race, religion, and sex; and swept away barriers to voter registration based on technicalities and on supposed education deficiencies."[237] The Voting Rights Act of 1965 allowed the federal government to monitor elections in areas where the local government was impeding minority voters and forbade literacy tests as a prerequisite of minority voter registration. Both pieces of legislation were significantly successful; however ". . . they failed to satisfy the rapidly rising expectations of African Americans as the focus of the movement began to move from political to economic issues."[238] The legislation removed most legal claims to inequality still rampant in society.

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[236]Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowark, "The Precarious Prosperity of People's Capitalism," in *Major Problems in American History Since 1945*, ed. Robert Griffith (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1992), 224-225.

[237]Irwin and Debi Unger, *Postwar America: The United States Since 1945* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 103.

[238]Brinkley, 479.

Because of the heightened expectations of affluence, civil rights leaders demanded not only political equality but also economic equality, marking a shift in agenda for the movement. The struggle for equality became more heated as black aspirations outran the achievements of the war on poverty and a white backlash began in the middle of the 1960s. Whites felt that racial integration was happening too fast and recoiled in the face of black gains while African Americans were frustrated by how slowly gains were being made.[239]

Increased violence in the civil rights movement complicated the divide between blacks and whites and within the movement itself. While the non-violent tactics supported by the integrationists were useful in getting legislation passed, it came at a high cost and became an increasingly difficult stance to maintain. Because the violence against civil rights workers continued and the government was either unable or unwilling to protect them, the primacy of integration in the civil rights movement came under fire during the early 1960s. An undercurrent of disillusionment, anger, and distrust created a fracture in the movement and a portion of the movement began to reject the dominant culture as they moved toward radicalism.[240] This group

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[239]William H. Chafe, "The Social Politics of Race and Gender," in *Major Problems in American History Since 1945*, ed. Robert Griffith (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1992), 35.

[240]Ibid., 45.

wanted blacks to empower blacks (black power) and called for separation of the races.[241] They also believed that violence was a viable tool in the struggle for equality.[242] This splinter group gained support as peaceful civil rights demonstrations were attacked. Some of the attacks that led to the split in the civil rights movement include the attacks on the Freedom Rides, the Freedom Summer activists, and the Meredith March.

In May of 1961, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) initiated the Freedom Rides in an attempt to draw attention to the segregated train and bus stations in the south. While a recent Supreme Court decision prohibited segregation in terminals (*Boynton* v. *Virginia*), the decision was officially ignored throughout the south and pleas for enforcement to the government were fruitless.[243] The first group of Freedom Riders was attacked outside of Anniston, Alabama on May 4, 1961. The bus was fire bombed by a white mob and several members of the mob barred the bus doors so that the riders could not escape. Some of the riders escaped through broken windows and the others exited through the door after an exploding fuel tank scared the mob away from the bus. The bus was destroyed and some of the riders

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[241]Unger, 109.

[242]Ibid., 107.

[243]Ibid., 93.

were beaten by the mob.[244] The riders who needed hospital care were taken to a local hospital where they had to be evacuated in the middle of the night because members of the Ku Klux Klan threatened to burn down the building.[245]

Due to the escalating violence, some civil rights leaders wanted to cancel the Freedom Rides; however, leaders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), including Diane Nash, believed that the rides needed to continue. Nash helped to organize college students to continue the rides.[246] The rides continued but many of the participants were beaten and imprisoned for their involvement.[247] In some cases, law enforcement officers helped the mobs responsible for the beatings.[248] By the summer of 1964, the violence against civil rights activists had escalated.

The SNCC started a campaign in the South to educate and enroll voters in a campaign called Freedom Summer. Integrated civil rights workers created schools and registered voters. Early in the summer, three college students (2 white and 1 black) disappeared and were

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[244]Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 145.

[245]Ibid., 147.

[246]Ibid., 181.

[247]Ibid., 290.

[248]Ibid., 153.

later found murdered. Twenty-one men, including several law enforcement officers, were arrested for the murders but were released for lack of evidence. The Freedom Summer volunteers received almost no protection from the federal government and encountered severe hostility in Mississippi. Eighty SNCC civil rights workers were beaten, some were shot at, and over a thousand were jailed.[249] In some cases the FBI knew about potential danger to the activists but did not warn them because the FBI believed their role was to act as investigators, not as law enforcement.[250] The violent incidences created an undercurrent of disillusionment and increased support of separatism which reached a breaking point in the middle of the decade.

Friction between the two factions of the movement increased in 1966 when James Meredith, the first black student to attend the University of Mississippi in 1962, began a march from Memphis, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi to encourage black voter registration. When Meredith was shot and wounded, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), CORE, and SNCC decided that they would continue his march. While the organizations joined forces to finish the march, tensions were increasing between the

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[249]Unger, 108.

[250]Arsenault, 138.

members. A growing number of people in the SNCC in particular were angered by the government's inability or unwillingness to protect civil rights workers.

During the march, SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael began shouting, "'[w]e want black power! Black power!'"[251] Many of the older leaders in the movement objected to the term but Martin Luther King was concerned that denouncing black power would drive the young people away.[252] By this time, many young people in the movement felt isolated by the government and were identifying with black power rather than integration.[253] King's limited support at the march did not pacify the SNCC members who ridiculed his stance on nonviolence and integration. Both the SNCC and CORE expelled their white members soon after the march.[254] Increasingly the SNCC used anti-white rhetoric and called for allegiance to black power and separatism. Carmichael believed that,

> [o]ne of the tragedies of the struggle against racism is that up to [the black power movement] there has been no national organization which could speak to the growing militancy of young black people in the urban ghetto. There has been only a civil rights movement, whose tone of voice was adapted to an audience of liberal whites. It served as

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[251]Unger, 109.

[252]Ibid., 109.

[253]Brinkley, 482.

[254]Unger, 109.

> a buffer zone between them and angry young blacks. . . . For too many years, black Americans marched and had their heads broken and got shot. . . . After years of this, we are at almost the same point—because we demonstrated from a position of weakness. We cannot be expected any longer to march and have our heads broken in. . . .[255]

Furthermore, Carmichael considered integration a racist movement because it reinforced to both blacks and whites "the idea that 'white' is automatically better and 'black' is by definition inferior. This is why integration is a subterfuge for the maintenance of white supremacy."[256]

Although integration and nonviolence were still supported by SCLS and many in the African American community, the civil rights movement became more complicated morally and more difficult for whites to support as the SNCC shifted support from integration to the separatist idea of black power.[257] Liberal whites who had previously supported the civil rights movement were frightened by the rise of black power and were offended by the shift toward separatism. Many

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[255]Stokely Carmichael, "Stokely Carmichael Explains 'Black Power,' 1967," in *Major Problems in American History Since 1945*, ed. Robert Griffith (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1992), 364.

[256]Ibid., 366.

[257]William H. Chafe, "The African-American Struggle as an Unfinished Revolution," in *Major Problems in American History Since 1945*, ed. Robert Griffith (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1992), 396.

stopped working for racial equality and others turned against the movement.[258]

As the undercurrent of disillusionment surfaced within the civil rights movement and the push for separatism continued, the unity that made the civil rights movement so strong was lost.[259] Tensions within the movement increased and riots broke out in major cities across the United States including New York in 1964, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Chicago in 1965, and Detroit, where 43 people died, in 1967.[260] President Johnson assembled the Kerner Commission to study the causes of the riots and in March of 1968 the commission reported that the United States was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white-separate and unequal."[261] The report went on to state that more money was required for social welfare programs to address the inequality in urban ghettos and integrate blacks into areas outside of the ghettos.[262] But the American economy was already stretched thin by President Johnson's welfare reform spending, poverty programs, and the escalating military operation in Vietnam.

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[258]Unger, 109.

[259]Chafe, "The African-American Struggle as an Unfinished Revolution," 391.

[260]Charles Murray, "The Poverty of the Great Society," in *Major Problems in American History Since 1945*, ed. Robert Griffith (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1992), 325.

[261]U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *The Kerner Report* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 1.

[262]Ibid., 22.

Johnson actually believed that poverty could be eliminated and was fearful of what would happen in the United States if the government did not address the glaring gap between those who were sharing in economic affluence and those who were not.[263] His reforms helped to decrease poverty to twelve percent: the most substantial decrease in the history of the United States.[264] However, a glaring gap still existed between blacks and whites.

The racial equality movement was further complicated by the escalation of the conflict in Vietnam.[265] Johnson inherited the instability in Vietnam when President Kennedy was murdered. He believed that the only way to solve the problems in Vietnam was to fight a war of attrition by slowly escalating American involvement until the North surrendered.[266] By 1965, the economy began to overheat from the fast growth rate and it became increasingly clear that the economy could not support an ever escalating war in Vietnam and a war on poverty at home.[267] In addition, many whites, who were

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[263]Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1991), 211.

[264]Brinkley, 474.

[265]Ibid., 530.

[266]Ibid., 499.

[267]Ibid., 502.

uncomfortable with the focus on separatism,[268] funneled their energy into the antiwar effort instead of the civil rights movement.[269] Because of the fragmentation within the movement, the hardening of attitudes, and the Vietnam War, the late 1960s saw a decline in the possibility of cooperative solutions in the civil rights movement. The decline was exacerbated by the wave of riots (Chicago, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Detroit) set off by the assassination of King in 1968.[270] Supporters of the civil rights movement found little to be optimistic about as the decade came to an end.[271]

When Richard Nixon was elected President in 1968 he slowed the pace of school desegregation and used local police departments to crack down on radical groups.[272] He reduced or discontinued social welfare programs created by Johnson.[273] Nixon also began to extricate troops from Vietnam.[274] The optimism and sense of expectation of the 1960s turned into a sense of caution in the 1970s and, for some, a sense of defeat and disillusionment. Post World War

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[268]Unger, 107.

[269]Ibid., 111.

[270]Ibid., 111.

[271]Chafe, "The African-American Struggle as an Unfinished Revolution," 390.

[272]Unger, 155.

[273]Brinkley, 542.

[274]Ibid., 532.

II economic affluence ended in the 1970s and, by the end of the decade, the United States was in a recession. The pace of racial progress slowed in the 1970s and the civil rights movement effectively ended as the country shifted its focus to the economic problems and the conflict in Vietnam. By the end of the 1970s, the American political atmosphere had shifted away from many of the liberal goals of the 1960s toward conservatism.[275] The new era of conservatism troubled Joseph Papp.[276]

As he witnessed the changes happening in society, he was concerned that the economic conditions of the late 1970s and the Vietnam War made Americans want to forget about black poverty, lack of jobs, and limited opportunity for African American in the United States.[277] He believed that his work should address social problems such as

> the threat of annihilation by war, pollution, dope, and the waste products of technology [a]long with the brutalization created by inescapable poverty and, what is more atrocious, the extinction of human life through impersonal massive bombings from the air and the very personal slaughter of the innocent on the ground. . .[278]

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[275]Ibid., 552.

[276]Joseph Papp, Handwritten Notes on Black/Hispanic Company, 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[277]Ibid.

which furthered his conviction that theatre should not only reflect life but should educate audiences on how to survive it. His work should lay a frame work for possible solutions to social problems. One of the solutions he thought might have validity in race relations was a separate black system in casting as opposed to integration.

While Papp continued to use colorblind casting in the 1960s and 1970s because he believed the practice was important for theatre artist and audiences, he was concerned with the widening economic gap between blacks and whites and the limited gains of a "colorblind" society.[279] He believed that colorblind casting at the NYSF no longer had the same impact that it did in the 1950s and early 1960s. He was concerned with the practice because colorblind casting was sometimes not colorblind at all. When the NYSF produced *King Lear* at the Delacorte Theatre in Central Park, Lear was played by an African American actor (James Earl Jones) as were all three of his daughters. As a result, the question arose about casting other characters. Papp questioned his casting choices stating: "shall Kent be white or shall Kent be black[?] That whole question began to raise questions that I hated to have to deal with because again it was dealing with tokenism

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[278]Joseph Papp, "Commencement Speech North Carolina School of the Arts," 5 June 1971, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[279]Ibid.

or a question of trying to cast by color. . . ."[280] Papp was discouraged because he felt that colorblind casting at the NYSF had become a quota system and he did not want the trend to continue. He stated that,

> I had done two productions in the park [in 1978] and there wasn't a single black actor in the company because I didn't want to get a single black actor in the company or two or three. . . . I felt that rather than go through this token bull shit (sic) again which was just to give somebody a job, I was depriving somebody [else] of a job in doing so.[281]

By this time Papp believed that colorblind casting at most theatre companies had proven to be a failure. In many theatre companies across the United States it had fallen into the clutches of tokenism with non-whites representing a maximum of ten to fifteen percent of any given company. He felt that, "no major cultural institution in the U.S. has gone beyond tokenism (underlining his)."[282] He agreed with many black artists who saw colorblind casting in the late 1960s and 1970s as tokenism.[283] It appeared that the industry was slowly opening its doors to African Americans, however, casts would often

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[280]Joseph Papp, "Formation of Permanent Black/Hispanic Shakespeare Company," 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[281]Ibid.

[282]Papp, Handwritten Notes on Black/Hispanic Company.

[283]Ibid.

include only one minority actor. Many African American artists became impatient with the limited gains of colorblind casting.[284] Furthermore, Papp came to believe that colorblind casting was a form of assimilation and blending that did not always benefit minority groups. He stated, "I believe in separation of certain things, and then the connections that you make. . . . Everybody wants to be blended, to become part of the big American dream. I'm against that."[285]

Papp felt that some of the progress that had been made with the civil rights movement was being reduced to tokenism without any real progress for African Americans in theatre or society.[286] For most of the 1970s, Papp had been concerned with the dwindling focus on racial equality.[287] He thought that some of the progress made by the civil rights and black power movements was fading away while blacks were increasingly powerless and ignored in urban areas, specifically New York.[288] Papp believed that the overt conflicts of the 1960s were more beneficial to American society than the silence of the 1970s when

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[284]George Goodman, "More Blacks in Theatre? Yes and No," *New York Times*, August 9, 1972, 20.

[285]David Graubert, "Latinos in the Acting Profession: A New Generation Battles the Stereotype," 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[286]Ibid.

[287]Ibid.

[288]Ibid.

frustrations were building up but the political environment did not allow for the expression of frustration and tension. He felt that the internalization of frustration could lead, "to another kind of riot that is much more destructive [than the riots of the 1960s]. It exposes itself in non-political terms like anti-social behavior, criminal activities and a kind of suicidal mania that drives a lot of people crazy. It's a real malaise and it makes me sick."[289] He was troubled by the lack of political activism and he felt that the United States had become apathetic.

This growing concern was highlighted by the U.S. Supreme Court's *Bakke* decision in 1978.[290] A white applicant, Allen Bakke, had been denied admission to the University of California medical school. The medical school only accepted one hundred applicants; sixteen of those slots were reserved for minority applicants. Bakke argued that his qualifications were better than some of the minority students who were admitted and that he deserved equal opportunity under the United States Constitution. The court ordered that Bakke be admitted to the medical school.[291] The decision concerned and depressed Papp

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[289]Bernard Carragher, "Black Theater Has Moved Beyond Revolution," *New York Times*, 29 April, 1979, D1.

[290]Papp, Handwritten Notes on Black/Hispanic Company.

because it represented a return to conservatism in terms of race relations in the United States.[292]

Furthermore, Papp believed that, with the rise of poverty and inflation, the government and people of the United States were weary of working to solve the racial divide in the country, and, as the optimism of the 1950s and 1960s died, it appeared that many people did not believe the divide could be eliminated. Many whites simply wanted to forget about the racial conflicts in society.[293] Instead of supporting the progress made during the civil rights movement, a backlash in the 1970s helped create a desire to ignore African Americans and the struggle for equality. It was because of this social and political climate that Papp decided to create the uni-racial Black/Hispanic Company under the umbrella of the NYSF.[294]

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[291]Elaine R. Jones, "Race and the Supreme Courts 1994-95 Term," in *The Affirmative Action Debate*, ed. by George E. Curry and Cornel West (New York: Perseus Books, 1996), 150.

[292]Papp, "Formation of Permanent Black/Hispanic Shakespeare Company."

[293]Papp, Handwritten Notes on Black/Hispanic Company.

[294]Ibid.

Chapter Seven

Due to his disillusionment with colorblind casting, Papp decided to create the Black/Hispanic Company at the NYSF. Papp suggested that his goal was not only to provide more opportunities for minority actors; he also wanted to change the power structure of American theatre.[295] The significance of his work can be seen in his intent, the extent of the uni-racial casting, and the nature of that casting as perceived by theatre critics, audience member, and the actors he worked with.

The Black/Hispanic Company was not Papp's first venture into uni-racial casting. In 1964 Papp created a mobile Spanish speaking

[295]Joseph Papp, Handwritten Notes on Black/Hispanic Company, 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

company as part of the NYSF.[296] The Black/Hispanic Company would also not be his last uni-racial company. In the mid-1980s he created another version of the Black/Hispanic Company called Shakespeare on Broadway under the direction of Estelle Parsons.[297] There are several significant differences between the Black/Hispanic Company and Papp's other ventures into uni-racial casting. First, Papp created the Spanish speaking company because he wanted to reach the seven hundred and fifty thousand Spanish speaking individuals living in New York City at the time.[298] This company was an instrument to reach a more diverse audience. While Parson's company was predominately minority actors, it did include white actors as well and would more appropriately be classified as an interracial company.[299] This company was very similar to the other colorblind work Papp did at the NYSF. While both of these companies were significant in the history of the organization, Papp created the Black/Hispanic Company for very different reasons. Papp created the Black/Hispanic Company in 1979 because he felt that the company was a natural progression of the casting done at the NYSF, he wanted his productions to relate to the

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[296]Helen Epstein, *Joe Papp: An American Life* (New York: Little Brown, 1994), 180.

[297]Heidi Griffiths, Interview by Charlene Widener, 22 September 2006.

[298]Epstein, 180.

[299]Griffiths.

increasing minority population of New York City, and he was concerned about covert racism and hostility against African Americans.

First, Papp felt that the development of the Black/Hispanic Company was a natural progression of the casting done at the NYSF since its inception.[300] The productions which included interracial casts in the early years of the festival helped build an acceptable base with the audiences (see Chapter Five). There had also been some previous experimentation at the NYSF with the uni-racial casting of African American actors in classical plays including a production of *The Cherry Orchard* directed by James Earl Jones. In the production, the peasant characters were played by dark skinned African Americans while the lighter skinned actors played the aristocratic characters. Papp found the production very revealing about race and class. The critical responses to the production increased Papp's desire to produce more uni-racial productions with black casts. He was interested in the critics that asked, "what are these people doing in this territory? It's sort of an invasion of a certain kind of area which has always been the domain of European and predominantly white area."[301] The reaction created a desire in Papp to develop a black Shakespeare company and

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[300]Papp, Handwritten Notes on Black/Hispanic Company.

[301]Joseph Papp, "Formation of Permanent Black/Hispanic Shakespeare Company," 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

that is how he originally planned to organize the company but decided to add a few Hispanic actors after the initial auditions.[302] Although the company was called the Black/Hispanic Company, most of the actors involved were African American.[303] Papp believed that the company was unique because it was primarily a uni-racial company. He noted that the company "is primarily black—so that a host of black talent will attempt to set the standard for the best classical acting of the day. This is far different—for the theatre itself and for the audience—than lauding one exceptional black talent in a sea of good white talent."[304]

One of Papp's primary concerns about colorblind casting was that it did not showcase natural accents, intonations, and rhythms of minority speech. He no longer believed that being colorblind, or at least ignoring cultural differences, worked in theatre or in society. He stated that,

> we in America are Americans and have American accents and we should deal with them. . . . [E]verybody, black, white, people who are Irish, people who are Italian, people who are Jewish and so forth are taught to be ashamed of their accents, ashamed of their speech. This assimulation (sic) sounds good on paper and it sounds very fine, but really to me, what is rich about the country is retaining the

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[302]Epstein, 356.

[303]Mel Gussow, "Papp's 3rd World Troupe To Be Classic Repertory," *New York Times*, 23 March 1979, C1.

[304]Clifford Mason, "A New Black Theater," *New York Times*, 22 July 1979, M7.

> roots of your particular origin and I think that should be encouraged. [305]

Papp considered the varied accents more acceptable than performances which used British accents. He believed that,

> subjecting the youth of this country (through a highly organized educational campaign allied with our school system) to educated British speech . . . exposing young Americans to Shakespeare for the first time in accents alien . . . [gave] the already accepted impression, that the Bard is for the elite and out of the ken of the average American. In addition, British Shakespeare reenforces (sic) the long held inferiority this country has had about its own native and varied patterns of speech, drawn from the democratic history of the nation—multi-national, multi-racial history that has enriched and energized our growth as a nation.[306]

He felt that the accents in the company were no more difficult for Americans to understand than British accents. In fact, Papp found Shakespearean productions where the audience spoke with British accents more difficult to understand than the actors in the Black/Hispanic Company.[307] In addition, Papp believed that black

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[305]Joseph Papp, "Formation of Permanent Black/Hispanic Shakespeare Company."

[306]Joseph Papp, "Theatre USA Speech," 30 April 1979, Joseph Papp /New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[307]Joseph Papp, Handwritten Response to Eder Article, 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

actors have a classical quality, created partially by sharp consonants and a cultural energy, which worked well in Shakespearean plays.[308]

Secondly, similarly to the Spanish speaking company, Papp believed that inner city minority audiences came to expect to see people who looked like them onstage at the NYSF productions and they attended interracial and uni-racial productions because they could relate to the characters played by minority actors. According to Papp, cities in the United States had traditionally spawned art while the suburbs had demonstrated no "capacity as yet for the innovation in the arts."[309] Therefore, artistic endeavors should reflect the racial make-up of the city population that inspired the art; minority actors should be performing in theatre to reach the diverse population of the cities. Papp noted that the creation of the Black/Hispanic Company was a further attempt to represent America's growing minority population in the major cities.[310]

For Papp there was an even more important reason to create the new company in 1979. He decided to make uni-racial casting a priority at the NYSF by developing the Black/Hispanic Company rather than to continue his standard colorblind casting practices because of

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[308]Gussow, C2.

[309]Papp, Handwritten Notes on Black/Hispanic Company.

[310]Ibid.

the political atmosphere at the time the company was founded.[311] The timing of the Black /Hispanic Company was significant in that Papp developed the company in 1979, far removed from the revolutionary atmosphere of the 1960s. He thought the timing of the company was important because it represented a divergence from what was expected in the late 1970s with the economic downturn and rise of conservatism.[312] His goal was to use art as weapon to strike "a blow against the wishy-washy tokenism concept of assimilation."[313] He considered the new company a political event and counter attack against the white backlash to the rise of separatism.[314] Papp created the company as a theatrical revolution in homage to the separatist divergence of the civil rights movement in the 1960s.

Before the creation of the Black/Hispanic Company, Papp had been criticized for the type of uni-racial productions he had produced at the NYSF. A critic for the *Black American* wrote:

> Joseph Papp presents himself as the major White producer, particularly concerned with the theatre of racial minorities. . . . [But] with a few exceptions, all the plays reflect Black street life, emphasizing the wounds and cries of Blacks, ignoring the wholeness and joys of the Black

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[311]Ibid.

[312]Ibid.

[313]Ibid.

[314]Papp, "Formation of Permanent Black/Hispanic Shakespeare Company."

> experience. The plays reinforce a stereotyped ghetto image. . . .[315]

When Papp created the new company, he decided that the uni-racial cast would perform Shakespearean plays. Papp decided to make the Black/Hispanic Company a Shakespearean company because he thought it served as a training opportunity for black actors, created a sense of pride in minority audience members, opened up lines of communication concerning race relations, and provided a model for societal change. Papp agreed with his critics that many of the plays he produced in the 1960s and 1970s dealt with black street life because many of the plays written during that time were "ghetto plays."[316] He wanted to support black playwrights and actors but did not feel that the plays were good vehicles for classically trained actors like James Earl Jones and Roscoe Lee Browne.[317] However, in colorblind casts, only one or two performers were black so there were few opportunities for classically trained black actors and limited opportunities for training young black actors in classical roles. The Black/Hispanic Company solved both problems; black actors with previous classical training had

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[315]Epstein, 353.

[316]Papp, "Formation of Permanent Black/Hispanic Shakespeare Company."

[317]Ibid.

more opportunities in the company and young black actors with no experience received training in classical acting.

Furthermore, Papp believed that his audiences would respond positively to a uni-racial company. He thought that seeing black actors play kings and nobles could instill a sense of pride in those members of the audience who were also black.[318] He believed that seeing Shakespeare performed by people who represented the blacks in the audience would create a connection between the play and audience that was missing when they observed white actors.[319] Black audience members could relate to the Shakespearean characters and plays themselves because the characters looked and sounded like the audience members.

Not only could casting blacks in leading roles have an impact on African American audience members, Papp believed the casting could make white audience members more accepting of blacks in leadership roles in society. He thought the casting opened up lines of communication about racism in society and opened the consciousness to the possibilities of what was acceptable and correct as far as characters in positions of power and nobility.[320] In Papp's opinion, it

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[318]Papp, Handwritten Notes on Black/Hispanic Company.

[319]Papp, "Formation of Permanent Black/Hispanic Shakespeare Company."

was far easier for white audiences and critics to ignore the anger of many African American playwrights because of a backlash to the black power movement.[321] When seeing Shakespearean plays, the audience would not come in with the same anger and resentment because the plays did not deal with the same social problems. However, Papp felt that seeing African American actors playing Shakespearean roles and making connections with those characters based on the oppression they have experienced in the United States had the potential to affect change in modern society.[322] The very existence of the company would demonstrate possibilities for the development of race relations in the United States. He believed that it could be the catalyst for "a significant movement which has the potential of affecting both art and the political-cultural structure of the country."[323]

The structure of the company was one significant change which Papp believed could positively impact the racial structure of society. According to Papp the Black/Hispanic Company represented a new distribution of power in theatre and society. One obstacle for minorities in the United States in 1979 was limited power in the

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[320]Papp, Handwritten Notes on Black/Hispanic Company.

[321]Ibid.

[322]Ibid.

[323]Ibid.

current social structure. Papp noted at the time: "'[w]e live in a city where blacks and Hispanics fall to the bottom. They can't get power out of politics, but they can develop it in the theater.'"[324] For equal justice to materialize in society at large, Papp believed that there must be a redistribution of political power to the oppressed, that unity must exist within the oppressed group, and that oppression and poverty must be eliminated. He stated that, "only when blacks are a force to be reckoned with, can . . . equal opportunity and justice, be achieved."[325] The creation of the Black/Hispanic Company was an attempt to give blacks the power to create a company that reflected their artistic impulses.

To that end, Papp gave the company members the power to control who was invited into the company and who was excluded. [326] The company members had the power to decide when and if white actors would be invited into the company.[327] While Papp did not invite any white actors to participate in the company and was against the inclusion of white actors until after the minority members of the company felt that they were comfortable in leadership roles, he left

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[324]Carol Lawson, "Papp Pushes Minority Troupe," *New York Times*, 14 February 1979, C15.

[325]Papp, Handwritten Notes on Black/Hispanic Company.

[326]Papp, "Formation of Permanent Black/Hispanic Shakespeare Company."

[327]Ibid.

the inclusion of white actors open as an option for when the black artist were ready to expand the company.[328] Papp discouraged the inclusion of white actors because he felt that it would detract from the purpose of the company. He stated: "I cannot see integration taking place properly in either a theater company or on the outside, without true equal opportunity and equal justice. . . . [W]hich means having some power to control your own destiny in your profession."[329]

Papp believed that integration without power was a mistake and did not want the new company to add white members until the minority members felt that they owned the company.[330] Peter Francis James said that Papp's exclusion of white actors was an important aspect of the company:

> Joe said that he wanted to establish a permanent Shakespeare company and it was important to him, fundamental in his thinking, that minorities be an integral part of that. He said that if I had started in the other way, it's not going to happen. His idea was to add white actors later. He said that "I am all in favor of including them, everybody else starts at the other end. I am starting at this end. I am all for including them—perhaps next year."

He also did not want white actors setting the performance standard for the minority members.

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[328]Papp, Handwritten Notes on Black/Hispanic Company.

[329]Papp, "Formation of Permanent Black/Hispanic Shakespeare Company."

[330]Lawson, C15.

Papp believed that the Black/Hispanic Company was unique because it was "primarily black."[331] Black actors would set the standards for quality in classical acting instead of being compared to white actors in the same play.[332] Papp was not interested in turning out productions where black actors attempted to emulate white actors. He did not want the Black/Hispanic Company to present novel versions of Shakespearean plays that a white company could have produced. Instead he wanted the company to create "avant-garde" theatrical productions where the black actors brought their ethnicity to the performances to create truly original portrayals of characters that illuminated the play.[333] He did not want to ignore cultural and ethnic differences. Papp clarified his position in a speech about the creation of the new company:

> what I'm saying is that we are entering a whole area of recognition of the differences and the sameness—it's very interesting, but I love the differences. People have been pushing the sameness. Everybody's the same. We are all human and all that. No, we're not all the same. We're all different. Yes, we're all human, but we have different things to utter. Different things to articulate. We've had different life experiences and we have different kinds of ways of looking at things. I think that richness on the stage, spilling on the stage, will create a very, very vital and fervent kind of theatre.[334]

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[331]Mason, M7.

[332]Ibid., M7.

[333]Papp, "Formation of Permanent Black/Hispanic Shakespeare Company."

An important aspect in the creation of a vital theatre would be the development of black playwrights, administrative staff, directors, and theatre critics. Papp wanted young, black playwrights to join the company because he believed the actors in the company needed modern plays to keep their acting abilities well rounded.[335] In addition, the company included an apprenticeship program to train young company members in administrative areas. He believed that unless efforts were taken by the NYSF to train black directors and administrators, the company would evolve into a first rate black acting company but there would be a racial divide in the company.[336]

Papp also hoped that the new company would encourage blacks in other areas of theatre including criticism. He felt that black critics needed to be working for major news organizations to review uni-racial productions. He believed that the cultural experiences of white critics were often limited, so much so that some of the symbols they saw in plays written and performed by African Americans seemed foreign. White critics missed important elements in uni-racial productions, and Papp felt that "sometimes it happens to be the point of the play."[337]

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[334]Ibid.

[335]Ibid.

[336]Ibid.

Papp originally wanted to create a company that worked for six months the first year and then performed for the entire season during its second year. The initial investment into the company was between half a million dollars to a million dollars with a projection that the company would be self-sufficient by its second year with a budget of two and a half to three million dollars.[338] The first season actually lasted for nine months and the company developed two productions: *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* (there was a revival of *Coriolanus* at the Delacorte theatre in the summer of 1979).

While Papp utilized colorblind casting in a significant number of productions, uni-racial casting was rare in Shakespearean plays at the NYSF. Of the one hundred and thirteen productions of Shakespeare's work, Papp used colorblind casting in only five of those productions and none of those productions were directed by Papp. Two of the productions were Spanish speaking productions directed by the only minority director to direct a Shakespearean play at the festival between 1964 to 1989, Osvaldo Riofrancos.[339] While the Black/Hispanic Company produced only three productions, those

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[337]Joseph Papp, Untitled Response to Critics of the Black/Hispanic Company, No date, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[338]Papp, "Formation of Permanent Black/Hispanic Shakespeare Company."

[339]New York Shakespeare Festival List of Minority Directors and their Productions, no date, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

productions created a firestorm of responses from critics. It is from those reactions and the responses from audience members and the actors in the company that the nature of the theatre productions can be determined.

When Joseph Papp announced in 1979 that he was going to develop a professional Shakespearean repertory company of black and Hispanic actors, responses were mixed. Some critics believed the company would be important to race relations while others believed that it was "intellectual snobbery cloaked in purity."[340] Many critics responded with anger and resentment to the idea of uni-racial casting. Critical responses to the Black/Hispanic Company's productions focused on speech problems, untrained actors, and the racial implications of uni-racial casting. In addition, the creation of the new company was criticized by black artists from other uni-racial theatre organizations.

The most significant issues facing the new company, according to critics, were problems with speech. Although Papp thought the varied accents made the productions seem more American, many theatre critics believed that the actors were not effective in playing Shakespearean characters because they did not use affected British accents and because they lacked the proper voice training. The actors

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[340]Joseph Papp, Handwritten Notes on Black/Hispanic Company.

were allowed to speak with their natural and varied American dialects which the critics believed lacked continuity and accuracy.[341] Other critics did not feel that English accents were required, but wanted a single accent for all of the actors. In response to the company's first production, *Julius Caesar*, critics pointed out that many of the actors had different accents which was confusing and made the entire production difficult to understand. Martin Gottfried said of the production:

> Whoever is to blame—Papp or Langham—the idea was either perverse or dumb. It is hard to believe that Papp or Langham or anyone literate enough to vote would seriously want black and Spanish ghetto accents stressed in a production of Shakespeare. Perhaps if *all* the company stressed accents, or perhaps if the accents were at least similar, some rationale might apply, but to have everyone Elizabethan except a super-black Caesar and super-Hispanic Antony is genuinely bizarre. It was as bizarre as the white middle-class audience who obediently applauded. Could Papp have been trying to make fools of them? Does he think he is less a fool because he can jeer at the liberals? . . . The theatre is no place for this nonsense [italics his].[342]

In *Coriolanus*, the second production by the Black/Hispanic Company, only black actors were cast in leading roles which eliminated some of the criticism concerning accents for the production. However, critics

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[341]John J. O'Connor, "TV View: The Bard's Genius Gets Through," *New York Times*, 29 April 1979, D1.

[342]Martin Gottfried, "Shakespeare for White Liberals," *Saturday Review*, 31 March 1979, 40.

still believed that the actors were unable to present the dialogue with the crispness and stress required for the language.[343]

Other critics believed that the productions were not well put together and that the minority actors in the company were not ready for the productions. Richard Eder said of *Coriolanus*: "[a]part from the ragged speech, there is a ragged standard of performance. Some of the actors are simply not up to their parts; in other cases the performances, while adequate, do not mesh with one another."[344] John Simon, a long time critic of colorblind casting, said of the new company: "[t]o have a group of black and Hispanic actors, almost totally untrained in Shakespearean acting . . . do Coriolanus ranks as advanced dementia."[345] The most striking comments about the new company came from critics who thought the new company was blatantly racist.

Many critics felt that Papp was not completely open about his intentions when he created the Black/Hispanic Company and that the company actually did more harm, in terms of race relations in theatre and society, than good. Martin Gottfried stated that the company was offensive because it was racially divided and hypocritical. Whites were

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[343]Richard Eder, "Stage: '*Coriolanus*,'" *New York Times*, 15 March 1979, C19.

[344]Eder, C19.

[345]John Simon, "From Wheel to Woe," Review of *Coriolanus* by William Shakespeare (New York Shakespeare Festival, New York), *New York Magazine,* 2 April 1979, 85.

arbitrarily eliminated from the acting company; however, Papp hired a white, British man, Michael Langham, to direct the company's first production.[346] By hiring Langham, Papp was essentially reconstructing the racialized structure of society: blacks controlled by whites. At the very least, critics thought that the creation of the company and Papp's call for black playwrights and critics amounted to reverse racism. [347] Clive Barnes mocked Papp's use of uni-racial casting stating, "interesting Julius Caesar. How about alternating it with a white cast? . . . [T]hen for a final switch, Papp and Langham might try intergration (sic)."[348] Townsend Brewster, an African American critic, stated in an article about minorities in classical theatre that, "[i]f one of the reasons for establishing this black-hispanic company was to demonstrate the deficiencies of minority actors in traditional classical acting, they have almost succeeded."[349] He went on to state that African American actors were unable to play the characters in *Coriolanus* effectively because the class-conscious arrogance of the characters in the play was outside of the realm of understanding for

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[346]Gottfried, 40.

[347]Papp, Untitled Response to Critics of the Black/Hispanic Company.

[348]Clive Barnes, "Accent is on '*Julius Caesar'*," Review of *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare (New York Shakespeare Festival, New York), *New York Post,* 26 January 1979: 42.

[349]Townsend Brewster, "Theatre: Minorities and Classical Theatre," *Routes, A Guide to Black Entertainment*, 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

blacks. He believed the project was potentially detrimental to black consciousness.[350]

Other critics thought that the new company deprived black actors of the opportunity to get the training required to perform in classical plays. Edwin Wilson stated that,

> [n]o one would quarrel with Mr. Papp's notion that minority performers should have the necessary training, and every possible opportunity, to appear in the classics. The question arises, though, whether his is the best approach to the problem. Would it not be more helpful—and result in better productions—to train minority actors in fully integrated casts?[351]

Wilson's sentiments were echoed by Eileen Blumenthal who noted:

> Papp's commitment to minorities in mainstream theatre, as both creators and spectators, is longstanding and vigorous—and for years he has been casting blacks and Hispanics in major Shakespeare roles. . . . [His] rationale for this new company is unclear. . . . If he simply feels that despite his and other producer's efforts, minorities still do not get their share of classical roles (and this is no doubt true), why not intensify the commitment to cast them rather than create a solely black and Hispanic company?[352]

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[350]Ibid., 33.

[351]Edwin Wilson, "Shakespeare: The Interpretation's the Thing," *Wall Street Journal*, 10 July 1979, 22.

[352]Eileen Blumenthal, "Some Thanks for Most Sweet Voice," Review of *Coriolanus* by William Shakespeare (New York Shakespeare Festival, New York), *Village Voice,* 26 March 1979: 89.

Clive Barnes noted that while the company was inclusive of blacks and Hispanics, the company included no Asian actors.[353] Many of the critics believed that colorblind casting was a more effective policy than uni-racial casting.

The fact that the performances took place at the Public Theatre also created controversy. While Papp stated that he wanted the new company to create characters onstage with whom the ethnically diverse population of New York City could relate, the productions did not tour the urban ghettos, as some of the colorblind productions had. Instead the plays were performed at the Public Theatre where, "the audiences [were] overwhelmingly white and educated and able to afford the luxury of theatre-going. So Papp's nonwhite Shakespeare [was]n't really for minority audiences."[354] Some of the most interesting responses in terms of how the nature of Papp's uni-racial casting was perceived come from other uni-racial companies already established in 1979. Individuals from those primarily black companies were concerned with the social implications of the new company and with how the new company would impact their work.

The Black/Hispanic Company was by no means the first theatre company for minority artists. The increased interest in separatism in

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[353]Brewster, 33.

[354]Gottfried, 40.

the 1960s led to the rise of the black theatre movement. Like separatism in society, early members of the movement were angry with the limited changes in race relations and were frustrated by the history of cultural stereotypes perpetuated by white playwrights. In a,

> search for personal and ethnic identity Blacks began to write for, direct for, perform for and speak for and to Blacks. Rather than copying the style, content and form of White theatre, Blacks searched for style, content, and form appropriate to the Black heritage and appropriate for expression of the Black experience in American.[355]

Many of the plays written early in the movement were angry and militant while other plays were self pride plays. Companies were founded in several large cities including New York, Cleveland, New Orleans, and Detroit.[356] While many of the theatres represented an ethnocentric, militant stance early in their tenure, as the social climate changed in the United States, the theatres became increasingly focused on material that would appeal to mainstream audiences. The focus on more universal themes was solidified by 1977 when the director of the Black Arts/West Theatre wrote: "'[t]he term 'Black Theatre' ultimately may be unnecessary. The aim is to do good theatre, and it is Black by virtue of what the audience sees.'"[357] The

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[355]Michele Menichols, "The Great American Pie: Theatre as a Social Force in Race Relations in Contemporary America" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1984), 98-99.

[356]Ibid., 99.

[357]Ibid., 100.

difference between Papp's Black/Hispanic Company and other uni-racial companies was that it was being supported by a white producer and would be part of the NYSF, which was run primarily by white administrative staff members.

Early in the development of the Black/Hispanic Company, there was suspicion about the development of the group from the black artists involved and the black community. Blacks were suspicious because they had been promised real change in the past with little change in reality.[358] The fact that Papp had been committed to casting minority actors at the NYSF since its inception did soothe some fears; however, many blacks were still concerned about how that new company would affect established uni-racial companies. Some black theatre artists were afraid that a company run by whites would dry up the limited funding available to black companies presenting black plays, companies which struggled to survive and lived on the brink of extinction. Artists from the established companies felt that the Black/Hispanic Company threatened an autonomous black theatre and, "[t]heir concern and outrage [were] directed not so much at Papp himself but at a system which embrace[d] and support[ed] him in his aspirations while "systematically" denying them the funds necessary to

[358]Papp, "Formation of Permanent Black/Hispanic Shakespeare Company."

fulfill their own."[359] Black artists were angered because Papp reaped the benefit of being white. As a white producer, he received funding for the development of a black company that would have been denied to black artists specifically because they were black.[360] Hazel Bryant of the Richard Allen Center for Culture and Art stated, "I resent highly the fact that when the money was finally made available for such a cross cultural experiment, it went to a white producer."[361]

Other black artists were angered by the creation of the Black/Hispanic Company because they felt that it was a further attempt to protect the racialized structure of society. They believed that Papp's goal was to exercise almost total control over black theatre in New York City under a white power structure.[362] Douglas Turner Ward of the Negro Ensemble stated,

> [e]ven if it is his intention for [the company] to be autonomous, it will not be as long as his is the final decision. The *final* distinction in ethnic theatre is who makes the final decision about what is being done. *The sort of paternalism that Papp's project represents begins to threaten all our independence* [italics his].[363]

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[359]"BTA Responds to Papp's Move on Black Theatre," *The Black Theatre Alliance Newsletter*, vol. 4 no. 5, 5 May 1979, 5.

[360]Ibid., 5.

[361]Ibid., 5.

[362]Ibid., 5.

[363]Ibid., 5.

Woodie King, Jr. of the New Federal Theatre noted, "[t]hose government and funding people who are racists have found another way of putting a plantation overseer in charge of black theatre. Papp's company is a perpetuation of the white power structure in America, a white concept in black face."[364] Ernie McClintock of the Afro-American Studio Theatre believed that the money put into the Black/Hispanic Company would have been "better spent on the development of a black theatre of national prominence whose primary purpose would be to perform contemporary and traditional black theatre classics of Afro-American, African and Caribbean origin."[365] While a few critics supported Papp's uni-racial company, many were concerned by the company and perceived the company as a racist venture.

Another way to gauge perception of Papp's work as racist or non-racist is to look as the responses from audience members who attended the uni-racial productions. Because the Black/Hispanic Company existed twenty-seven years ago, a limited amount of material is available on how the audiences responded to the company. The best available information on audience response can be found in the letters sent to the NYSF concerning the company available at the New York Public Library, recollections from audience members who

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[364]Ibid., 5.

[365]Errol Hill, *Shakespeare In Sable* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 190.

attended the productions, and anecdotal evidence from actors who recall how the audience responded during performances.

Many of the audience members who wrote letters to the NYSF concerning the productions had read the reviews of the company productions and wrote to the festival to share their personal responses to the productions. For example, Cheryl Welsh wrote that she was concerned with uni-racial casting of black actors because there were a limited number of classical roles available in American theatre.[366] She was concerned that white actors would not have opportunities to play Shakespearean characters.

Other respondents were angered by the negative reviews submitted by critics. Playwright Ntozake Shange sent a letter to Papp expressing her outrage to the critical responses of the 1979 production of *Julius Caesar* stating:

> i cdnt believe that at this late date/white people wd still claim that they cdnt understand us/or that white people cd forget so quickly that 30 years ago we cdnt go to a number of cultural institutions at all. . . . their sniveling graspy desperate attempts to malign the NYSF's JC with remarks that are purely racist/make me think that the lack of imaginative dexterity. . . dooms them/to narrow bleached visions/like all they can see in shakespeare is their own cultured 'last white hope' [lower case letters and spelling hers].[367]

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[366]Cheryl Welsh, New York City to Joseph Papp, New York City, 23 March 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Shange also stated in her letter:

> i believe that the NYSF Afro-Latino—as I prefer to call it—repertory company is one of the most important ventures of our theatrical reality. . . . i cant (sic) quite explain the great pride i felt at curtain/when so many black and latin artists took their bows in the arena that had known so few of us except as moors/sprites/& sword carriers/maybe since i am one of that generation of afro-americans who did in fact experience the 'last segregated childhood' i waz (sic) able to have an unadulterated commitment to shakespeare for the first time in my life (lower case letters hers).[368]

As an audience member and theatre artist, it seems that Shange believed the Black/Hispanic Company was not racist in nature.

Other audience members agreed that the critics had missed the point of the new company. One audience member, Phineas Kadushin, wrote in response to a review by Walter Kerr that,

> [t]he performance of Shakespeare, [Kerr] informed us, has a long tradition behind it and only those with many years of schooling in its language can properly roll out its sublime cadences. The unfortunate black and Hispanic actors who can not (sic) prounce (sic) Shakespeare in the right fashion or even manage simple clarity of speech, well . . . that's too bad. Langham who truly knows Shakespeare and how it should sound did his best, but the attempt was doomed from the start. If we follow Kerr's argument—the Bible should never have been translated, for in the very same fashion, the people who wrote the glorious and sonorous phrases of the original Old Testament in Hebrew could not possibly condone a

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[367]Ntozake Shange, New York City to Joseph Papp, New York City, 3 February 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[368]Ibid.

> translation lacking all meaning and understanding by some silly Teutonic primitives. The King James version, at its very outset, must result in a total abortion. Those who quote the Bible whether in Greek, Latin, English or Chinese have no right to sully its purity of expression by their barbaric ignorance of the original Hebrew. Fact is, that Shakespeare and the Bible are an expression of ideas that transcend the culture in which they originated. Sure they lose in translation. But they may also gain.[369]

Kadushin went on to note that some of the original intent of Shakespeare's work is lost in all productions, however, he felt that the Black/Hispanic Company could shed new light on the meaning of the plays.[370]

Roseanne Leto, a teacher and member of Actor's Equity praised Papp's work in a letter she wrote to the New York Shakespeare Festival:

> The phrases "too ethnic" and "not ethnic enough" are ones which make me shudder. As a fourth generation American, it is a little discouraging to be told that I don't look American enough for a particular part. . . . Discrimination injures us all, and I hope that your work in removing the constraints of "type" will make the business better for everyone.[371]

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[369]Phineas Kadushin, New York City to Michael Langham, New York City, 4 February 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[370]Ibid.

[371]Roseanne Leto, New York City to Joseph Papp, New York City, 9 March 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Leto took a group of high school students to see the Black/Hispanic Company perform *Julius Caesar* and noted that the students understood the varied American accents better than the affected British accents they had heard in other productions. She stated that several of her students had tuned into a BBC production of *Julius Caesar* shown on television and,

> they grumbled that it was boring because they couldn't understand what the characters were saying. I think that this is as good a point as any to be made in favor of American productions of Shakespeare. . . . Shakespeare on TV should be reaching this enormous expanse of young people who are television addicts and as such, are not used to English accents and pronunciation. Shakespeare is difficult for many younger readers, why compound the difficulty?[372]

She went on to say that her students, "were surprised that they not only understood what was going on during [the Black/Hispanic Company's performance of *Julius Caesar*] but that they could also appreciate finer points, such as characterization."[373]

Another audience member who attended the Black/Hispanic Company's *Julius Caesar* approached Papp after the performance with a similar response. She said that she did not understand all of the negative reviews written about the production. She enjoyed the performance and thought that the actors spoke like real people which

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[372]Ibid.

[373]Ibid.

helped her understand the play.[374] This audience member had read the negative reviews and attended the production anyway to make her own decision about the production rather than rely on the critics.

Peter Francis James believed that the audiences' response was similar to any other theatrical production. In 1979 James was twenty-two years old and fresh out of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He participated in a national audition for young actors out of training programs and was selected as a finalist. When the finalists gathered in Chicago to audition for casting directors and artistic directors from across the country, Rosemarie Tichler (the casting director at the NYSF) was one of judges and spoke with him about the Black/Hispanic Company at the NYSF. In late September, James was scheduled to read for Michael Langham and was hired on the spot. As an actor in the company, James heard a lot of positive comments that were the same as would have happened in any company: "the plays were received by the audience as plays. They worked. They both worked well. . . ."[375] James also noted that white actors who saw the productions defended the company. James shared one experience from a performance that still stands out in his memory today:

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[374]Joseph Papp, "Formation of Permanent Black/Hispanic Shakespeare Company."

[375]Peter Francis James, Interview by Charlene Widener, 22 September 2006.

> "I remember one performance [of *Coriolanus]* when the play culminated in a confrontation between mother and son. He breaks away and refuses an embrace of hers that happens in silence. The rejection of her and the tension was so severe that the audience really gasped and one night there was some guy who in the silence before they moved into the next line who yelled out "That shit is perfect" and then there was a gentle but spontaneous round of applause of acknowledgement because it was perfectly rendered. . . . I remember it to this day and I was onstage for it, just watching, holding a spear as a 23 year old kid with my jaw on the ground."[376]

James believed that the audience was supportive of the uni-racial company.

David Crespy was an 18 year old senior in high school preparing to attend Rutgers in the fall when he saw the Black/Hispanic Company's *Julius Caesar* in 1979. Although very young, Crespy had been attending productions at the NYSF for many years because his "parents philosophically agreed with Joe Papp."[377] Crespy stated that "my parents wanted us to see Shakespeare and they loved Joe Papp and they thought he was the next PT Barnum of the theatre or David Merrick of downtown. He was such a huge figure."[378] He also noted that, although some of the reviewers of the uni-racial company's *Julius Caesar* were concerned with accents he was not surprised by the casting nor did he find the accents a problem:

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[376]James.

[377]David Crespy, Interview by Charlene Widener, 23 October 2006.

[378]Ibid.

> For me the production of *Julius Caesar* was not particularly shocking. I was just amazed at the quality of the acting and the quality of the language. I did not notice that the actors were not as well trained in voice as white actors. I had not seen that many productions and this was the first production of *Julius Caesar* that I had seen. So oddly, all the weird and negative reviews that people were giving, I think came out of their own prejudices. I had not seen that many professional productions of Shakespeare and I just assumed that this is what you did. I remember being blown away by Earle Hyman's voice and how powerful it was. . . . The thing that struck me the most was how fantastic the voices were. I was used to seeing more black performers. My impression of the production was that the casting gave a stylistic coolness that made it seem more alive, relative, fun, and interesting.[379]

Crespy also believed that other audience members were not shocked by the uni-racial casting and that casting actually had a positive impact on the audience. He stated that

> the lobby was energized with people wanting to get into the shows. . . . I remember it being a full house and it was very exciting. I certainly did not experience anyone having a shocked reaction or anything like that. I think that the audience—to the best of my memory—was involved. You could feel the electricity when you were down at the Public Theatre during the time of Joe Papp, at any production, but certainly at any production where there was an investment of his social issue or ideas. All of those productions you could feel the energy in the air. You could feel it in the lobby.[380]

Overall, the audience response was positive and it appears that many of the audience members who attended the uni-racial productions perceived them as being non-racist in nature.

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[379]Ibid.

[380]Ibid.

As with colorblind casting, when looking at the perceived nature of uni-racial casting, it is important to discuss how the actors who worked in Black/Hispanic Company's productions felt about the experience. As with audience response, there is limited material available from the actors who worked with the company. The material included in this section is primarily from a personal interview with Peter Francis James and a published interview with Morgan Freeman.

When asked how he felt about the new company being produced by a white man, Freeman responded:

> 'it is like the white man who started the N.A.A.C.P. But so what? . . . If Papp doesn't do it, it won't get done. And give him credit. He's got the guts not only to do it, but to do it all out. You can't say no to a man like that. If Joe's going to do a thing, he's going to do it all the way. And that's all that counts.'[381]

Freeman clearly believed that the company was important to black actors and that, even though Papp was white, the company was in existence and that was what mattered. James has a similar response when asked if he believed that the Black/Hispanic Company was racist because Papp created it and he hired a white director. James noted that he did not believe the company was racist and that

> anyone from the African American or Hispanic acting communities knew who Papp was. He did not have to explain himself. There was a clear understanding there. Joe did not have to come out with some kind of defendable

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[381]Mason, M7.

> intellectual treatise on this. He had a track record so everyone understood what Joe was doing. All those people in the room-it just spoke for itself.[382]

James did not perceive the creation of the company as racist and did not feel other actors in the company felt that way either.

For James the company had a significant impact on his life. The company opened doors for him and he was able to financially support himself by working as a classical actor in the United States for the next ten years. He stated:

> The direct cause of that was certainly what Papp had done. By the time I got there in the late 1970s Joe had set the standard and that was the standard then for Shakespeare in this country because the best stuff being done was being done by him and that was the way it was being done. So he really set that goal. He was able to reach that goal in part because of the support of the white actors who were willing to be onstage with actors of color.[383]

Although much of that work was in colorblind casts, he attributes the opportunities to the work of Papp.

While it appears from the available resources that the actors who worked with Papp did not perceive the creation of the Black/Hispanic Company as racist, based on the limited material available, it is difficult to draw a conclusion about how the actors in the company perceived its nature. Heidi Griffiths, the current casting director at the NYSF noted in a personal interview that “looking back on it, it seems

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[382]James.

[383]Ibid.

to me almost like slightly ghettoizing actors of color." However, she noted that in 1979, society was very different than it is today and that the company should be viewed from the perspective at that time. Papp had a history of colorblind casting minority actors in Shakespearean plays because he was committed to providing training opportunities to young actors of color. She stated:

> He felt a huge responsibility to creating the next generation of classically trained actors. The [Black/Hispanic] company was, in a way, a training ground for young actors of color so that they could hone the classical muscles in a way that one would in a conservatory program or a masters acting program. That has changed a lot today. . . . Sometime in the late 1970s and early 1980s that tide began to turn and now there are wonderful actors of color coming out of almost ever training program I can think of. . . . What was going on in the late 1970s was that there was an effort to bring and train young actors of color into the community here and then I think that a lot of training programs did begin to step up and meet the challenge and begin to fill that gap themselves. So I think the need to create that kind of a program now is far less."[384]

While Griffiths noted that she understands how the company might be perceived as racist from today's perspective, the original intent was certainly non-racist.

The Black/Hispanic Company did not have a second season at the NYSF. In the spring of 1979 Michael Langdon directed both *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* at the Public Theatre. After his initial contract

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[384]Griffiths.

with the NYSF ended, Langham refused to continue with the Black/Hispanic Company and Wilford Leach was hired to direct a revival of *Coriolanus* in the summer of 1979 for the Shakespeare in the park series at the Delacorte Theatre. Papp's initial investment into the company was absorbed by the productions and, while he was still interested in producing uni-racial productions, he became more focused on the financial future of the NYSF as a whole rather than the Black/Hispanic Company. The NYSF had been using profits from the Broadway run of *A Chorus Line* to subsidize projects. When the musical ended its Broadway run, the financial situation at the NYSF became tighter.[385] The organization could no longer afford to fund the Black/Hispanic Company. Papp continued casting African American actors in his work at the NYSF including a production *of Mother Courage and Her Children* produced in the summer of 1980 which included some of the actors from the Black/Hispanic Company.[386] Papp continued to employ both uni-racial and colorblind casting throughout the remainder of his career to similar critical response.

While the Black/Hispanic Company produced only three productions, the debate about the existence of the company was

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[385]Ibid.

[386]Barbara Lee Horn, *Joseph Papp: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 166.

significant in the NYSF's history. Clearly, many of the critics believed that the company was blatantly racist. While the responses from audience members and actors are limited and primarily anecdotal, the responses that are available indicate that the audience members and actors did not perceive the nature of the company as racist. The nature of the work, however, is still complicated by the fact that Papp hired a white director for the company. For the individuals who responded to the creation of the Black/Hispanic Company and the company's productions, the company did open up lines of communication about race in society and theatre and helped to sustain that discussion.

When Joseph Papp died in 1991, he had been using non-traditional casting, both colorblind and uni-racial, for almost forty years in the professional theatre scene of New York City. His work helped to expose generations of minority and white New Yorkers from all classes to minority actors playing characters written for white actors. The nature of that work was debated while Papp was still alive and continues to be debated today. There are however some conclusions that can be drawn from the intent of Papp's work and the long-term impact of Papp's work at the NYSF.

Chapter Eight

While it seems that the intent of Papp's work was to create opportunities for minority actors, accusations of paternalism and the continued perpetuation of the racialized social structure plagued Papp's work. The evidence suggests that audience members who attended the colorblind and uni-racial productions did not believe that the productions were racist; however, others believed that the productions could be perceived as racist. Many of the published interviews from actors suggest that the NYSF provided them with opportunities that would have otherwise not been available in professional theatre. It is clear from much of that material that they considered the work non-racist. Peter Francis James acknowledged that he and other actors who worked in the Black/Hispanic Company knew that Papp was attempting to close the racial divide in theatre and believed that his intentions were non-racist. However, for a time in the 1970s some

actors who worked with Papp considered him racist; they called him "Massha" behind his back and referred to the Public Theatre as "Papp's Plantation."[387] In addition, theatre critics and historians have considered aspects of both the uni-racial productions and the colorblind productions as racist in nature.

Papp's casting is further complicated by the fact that Papp hired only one minority direct for his Shakespearean productions between 1964 and 1989 and that director was hired to direct two Spanish language productions. According to the NYSF's list of minority directors, available in the Billy Rose Collection at the New York Public Library, none of the directors of colorblind Shakespearean productions in the same time period were minority. The evidence suggests then that the nature of Papp's work is fraught with complexity. While aspects of it can be perceived as non-racist, there are elements that support the racial stratification of society.

There is one additional way to look at the nature of Papp's work in terms of the racist verses non-racist nature of the casting. While the casting is certainly a micro-level racial project, it also had a larger impact. After seeing Papp's work, producer Howard Lichtenstein

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[387]Helen Epstein, *Joe Papp: An American Life* (New York: Little Brown, 1994), 311.

announced he would cast black actors in classical plays at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Of the decision, Lichtenstein stated:

> "I've hired David Jones, an Englishman, to lead my new classical company, and I so applaud what Joe Papp is doing that I took David down to see his black 'Julius Caesar' the night he got off the plane. He was dead tired and warned me that he might have to leave after intermission. He never got out of his seat until the show was over. We'll have an integrated company. We have to; that's part of the reality of the city as it exists. We have to and we want to."[388]

This indicates that one of the significant effects of this racial project was that it inspired other artists to use non-traditional forms of casting.

Additionally, because of Papp's public profile, his work created a forum for debate. Papp's work had a huge impact on New York City theatre. In an article in the *London Observer*, the author calls Papp "the most important—and most terrifying—man in New York theatre."[389] However, Papp's reach went beyond the theatre in New York City. The same article points out that Papp's range of influence has been far greater:

> . . . there are the cable deals, the television deals; a stint (not notably successful) at running the large theatre at Lincoln Center; the support of causes both theatrical and political. You pick up a glossy magazine and there is Joe Papp, protesting about Cambodia. A newspaper—and

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[388]Clifford Mason, "A New Black Theater," *New York Times*, 22 July 1979, M7.

[389]Victoria Radin, "The Hard-nosed Idealist," *London Observer*, 19 June 1983, Arts page.

> he's not only protesting but *in* Vietnam. The telly—and he's leading an epic struggle to save two Broadway theatres from demolition. You turn on the radio—and he's singing [italics hers]. [390]

The author also points out that Papp was on the cover of *Newsweek* the same week he was arrested twice for protesting in Washington.[391]

In 1974 Neal Ashby stated that

> Papp has been called the most influential producer in the theater today. Jack Kroll goes even further: "First, Papp is the single most important catalyst for young playwrights, actors, directors and designers in the scene today. Second, we're in an extremely significant period in the theater when the primacy of commercial theatrical ventures is fading. There are only a fraction of the number of shows running on Broadway that we once had. It's harder and harder for producers to make money on Broadway. . . . And an energetic, dynamic leader in Papp is here to lead this movement in a good direction. He is a very significant figure in the history of the American theatre. . . . right alongside people like Belasco and the Shuberts. Now all the great individuals are gone—except Papp.[392]

In an article published a few days before his death, Papp was even called a "cultural czar."[393] He was considered an icon of culture.

His reach was so significant that Greg Jackson asked Papp in an interview if he believed that Joe Papp has too much power. Papp

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[390]Ibid.

[391]Ibid.

[392]Neal Ashby, "Joseph Papp: Play Producer for the People," *Lithopinion* (Fall 1974): 78.

[393]Phoebe Hoban, "Going Public," *New York*, 28 October 1991, 44.

responded that his power was not given to him but achieved, and that his power supports actors, writers, and other artists. Furthermore, Papp stated that he did not believe power is always corrupting; his power allowed him to produce any play, cast any actor, and maintain artistic control at the NYSF.[394]

This is significant because the fact that his company was a high profile company meant that Papp's choices would be discussed and debated by individuals in theatre and other members of society. This created a forum for debate which is certainly a step toward changing the racialized system because it calls attention to the problem of racism in society and can help to create change. This debate worked as a racial project which helped keep the state of racial politics off balance in terms of racial formations.

Omi and Winant consider the state of racial politics in the United States an unstable equilibrium. They note that

> racial order is equilibrated by the state—encoded in law, organized through policy—making, and enforced by a repressive apparatus. But the equilibrium thus achieved is unstable, for the great variety of conflicting interests encapsulated in racial meanings and identities can be no more than pacified—at best—by the state. Racial conflict persists at every level of society, varying over time and in respect to different groups, but ubiquitous. Indeed, the state is itself penetrated and structured by the very interests whose conflicts it seeks to stabilize and control.[395]

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[394]Joseph Papp, Interview by Greg Jackson, 1982, *Signatures, Part I*: CBS, VHS.

This unstable equilibrium can last for years or even decades without being disrupted. When the tenuous stability is disturbed by a racial project, social agencies will either attempt to restore the status quo or reform the current policy to restore equilibrium. Omi and Winant identify the cyclical patterns of disruption and restoration of racial order as the trajectory of racial politics.[396]

Racial movements and the racial state both have an impact on the unstable equilibrium and on each other. Racial injustices (racist racial projects) in the racialized state create racial movements (non-racist racial projects) which in turn disrupt the unstable equilibrium by attempting to rearticulate the dominant racial philosophy. The current condition of institutions and agencies in the racialized state are the result of the absorption of the moderate elements in past racial movements.[397] By absorbing parts of the racial movement, the state insulates itself from changes in the racial order by trumpeting the moderate changes. The racial movement then undergoes internal divisions as the moderate aspects are absorbed into the state while

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[395]Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 84-85.

[396]Ibid., 85.

[397]Ibid., 85-85.

the remaining segments are radicalized.[398] A new racial ideology is developed based on the themes of the racial movement, and the unstable equilibrium is restored until another racial project disrupts the equilibrium bringing about another cycle in the trajectory of racial politics. While this model is used by Omi and Winant to discuss the racialized state, the unstable equilibrium theory can be used to understand the nature of Papp's racial projects.

Papp believed that theatre could illuminate the past and current situations; however, he felt that it had the most significant impact when it was developing the potential to change the current situation into a better tomorrow. Papp called this the potential for "permanent revolution."[399] Instead of accepting the unstable equilibrium, Papp wanted to disturb the balance by constantly making choices that were unexpected. Peter Francis James said of Papp's desire for permanent revolution that

> Joe loved to be contrary. It is not simply based on proclivity but is a fundamental need in a democracy. An informed citizenry is important to its survival and health. The role of the critic of society is not just important but is a patriotic imperative. Any artist who isn't criticizing the society isn't doing his job and democracy, this country; the republic will die if the artist does not do his job. That is really what Joe believed. He saw art as being integral to

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[398]Ibid., 86-87.

[399]Joseph Papp, "Commencement Speech North Carolina School of the Arts," 5 June 1971, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

> the democratic process and to anyone who said he had a contrary notion about art Joe would say that if you are not doing that, then you are not doing the job.[400]

Papp believed that casting in the theatre could be used to create positive changes in the racialized social structure of the United States only if the casting was a constant revolt against the status quo, whatever the status quo happened to be.

Colorblind and uni-racial casting could have a positive impact on racial formations if the casting continually interrupted the unstable equilibrium. Papp used colorblind casting for the first time in 1952 when it was rare and provided a new model for racial formation in the theatre. He created the Black/Hispanic Company at a time when many Americans wanted to forget about separatism. He chose to focus on separatism because he felt that many theatre companies had turned colorblind casting into tokenism. Both methods of casting created a significant amount of debate and opened lines of communication about racial issues. Papp wanted the dialogue to continue because he believed it could lead to change.

Public debates about colorblind and uni-racial casting have the ability to bring unprecedented attention to the problems faced by minority actors. Papp's use of the two methods of casting helped to sustain a dialogue on race in theatre which lasted for thirty-nine years.

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[400]Peter Francis James, Interview by Charlene Widener, 22 September 2006.

The dialogue continues today and other controversies have fueled the discussion. The Wilson/Brustein debate discussed in Chapter One brought much needed attention to discrimination in theatre. Keryl McCord wrote that a major "benefit from the conflict between August Wilson and Robert Brustein is that attention has been focused upon the state of health of black theatre in America. This is a good thing."[401]

The creation of the Non-Traditional Casting Project (NTCP) in 1986 and the *Miss Saigon* controversy also helped keep the lines of communication open about racism in theatre. NTCP "is a not-for-profit advocacy organization whose purpose is to address and seek solutions to the problems of racism and exclusion in theatre, film and television."[402] The NTCP has created many programs to address inequality in casting including two national and nine regional conferences on non-traditional casting; a newsletter; national diversity forums; and many smaller forums and panels.[403]

Early in the history of the organization a brochure sent out to professional theatre companies explaining non-traditional casting was returned anonymously to the NTCP with comments scrawled in the

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[401]Keryl E. McCord, "The Challenge of Change," *African American Review,* vol. 31 (Winter 1997): 601.

[402]Non-Traditional Casting Project, http://www.ntcp.org.

[403]Ibid.

margins. The anonymous respondent wrote that non-traditional casting is "the casting of inferior talents, semi-illiterate, and incompetent minorities.'" The writer also stated that "'the vast majority of black/hisp [sic] 'ethnic' actors are ill-educated poor of speech and not intelligent enough to assume featured roles they are unsubtle and can't even speak English properly.'"[404] While the NTCP did not anticipate such blatant racist responses from members of the theatrical community, the writing did point out that the organization was needed to help continue a dialogue about racism in theatre.[405]

In 1990 a controversy erupted when the British actor Jonathan Pryce was set to repeat his West End performance as a Eurasian pimp in a Broadway production of *Miss Saigon.* Actors Equity attempted to bar him from playing the role. However, as Frank Rich pointed out, the controversy ran much deeper than the right of one actor to perform one role;

> [o]stensibly the battle was about Jonathan Pryce's right, as a white British actor, to repeat his London performance as a Eurasian pimp in the Broadway production of a West End hit. In reality Mr. Pryce wasn't the issue at all but a symbol, merely the wrong man in the wrong place at the wrong time. . . ." Mr. Pryce's case proved to be a catalyst for the release of racial tensions that had been building up for some time and were bound to explode sooner or later in the theater industry, with or

[404]Harry Newman, "Holding Back: The Theatre's Resistance to Non-Traditional Casting," *TDR*, vol. 33, no.3 (Autumn 1989): 28.

[405]Ibid., 28.

> without "Miss Saigon." . . . [W]hile Equity's quixotic stand on Mr. Pryce was eventually reversed, the wounds opened up by the episode are not going to heal so easily. Though "Miss Saigon" was an absurdly ill-chosen battleground for a debate about racial equality in the theater—the show is likely to employ more minority performers for more months than any Broadway production in decades—the debate continues to be a real and challenging one, as yet attracting more demagoguery than solutions."[406]

The outgrowths of protest and controversy surrounding public debates such as the Wilson/Brustein controversy, the creation of the NTCP, and the *Miss Saigon* controversy can be very positive for minority actors. For example, a controversy over interracial casting in Chicago led to the submission of plans by area theatres to increase multi-racial casting for the 1991-1992 theatre season.[407]

While many of the critics who viewed Papp's non-traditional productions believed that they lacked artistic merit and that the productions were undermined by the use of minority actors, the critics were actually helping Papp reach his goal by simply publishing material on the productions. The reviews and articles created a forum for public debate. Papp was interviewed by local news affiliates. Articles were written by and about Papp in local, national, and international

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[406]Frank Rich, Reality Nearly Upstaged a Paradoxical Year, *New York Times*, 30 December 1990, 5.

[407]John Joseph Gibbons, "The American Theatre's Attempts to Achieve Multiculturalism on Stage through Non-Traditional Casting" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1991), 22.

publications. For example, John Simon's 1989 review of the colorblind casting used in *A Winter's Tale* was covered not only by local newspapers, but by the international press as well. A Toronto paper published an article about the controversy that developed because of Simon's review.[408] In addition to prompting a response from Papp, Simon's review provoked responses from both the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Actors Equity. The NAACP said Simon should apologize to Woodard and to every black actor in the United States for the review, which was "dripping with racism. . . . Colleen Dewhurst, president of Actors Equity, said outright that Simon should be fired, calling him 'a very dangerous man.'"[409]

Community members sent in editorials responding to the reviews, sent letters to Papp and the NYSF, and attended the productions to see if the critics were correct. When Charles Marowitz wrote a less that flattering article about Papp in 1975 titled "The Trouble With Joe Papp," he set off a firestorm of responses in the editorial section of the *New York Times*. One of the letters published in the newspaper was written by Bernard Gersten who was the

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[408]"New Yorkers Demand 'Racist' Critic's Ouster," *Toronto Star Newspaper*, 3 April 1989, C7.

[409]Ibid., C7.

Associate Producer of the NYSF at the time the article was written. Gersten wrote that

> [e]very year of its existence the New York Shakespeare Festival and Joseph Papp have been the subject of extraordinary review—in the public press and in government and private councils. And each year the Festival has been awarded another year of life. This sustenance is earned by its achievements in theater arts and its cogency as an arts institution. The real trouble with Joseph Papp is that there is only one of him.[410]

Other responses were written by Paul Libin, Managing Director of the Circle in the Square theatre in New York City; John Houseman, Artistic Director of the Acting Company in New York City; Omar Shapli, Chairman of the Acting Department at New York University; author Stuart Little; and other individuals who had attended NYSF productions. One such letter came from actor/director Andre Gregory who stated in his letter: "[i]n Joseph Papp we have a man who has changed the face of the American theater, given jobs to thousands, taken countless risks, and, in the production of 'Hamlet' which he himself directed, created the only innovative American Shakespearean work I have seen in my 20 years in the theater."[411] Papp felt that the

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[410]Bernard Gersten, New York City to Editor of the *New York Times*, New York City, 5 October 1975, 129.

[411]Andre Gregory, New York City to Editor of the *New York Times*, New York City, 5 October 1975, 129.

public debate generated by his work could have a significant political impact.[412]

In a 1997 interview playwright and professor Ed Bullins was asked what kind of productions used black actors in a way that provided intelligence and truthfulness. He responded that "[t]he 'Coriolanus' production at the New York Shakespeare Festival[,] Joseph Papp's theater[,] did. I thought it was a wonderful production. 'The Cherry Orchard' with Gloria Foster and Raul Julia and a black cast and a Hispanic cast, you know, I liked that."[413] *The Cherry Orchard* was produced at the NYSF in 1973 and *Coriolanus* was produced in 1979; however two decades later the significance of Papp's uni-racial productions still resonated and the productions were still being discussed.

While the nature Papp's work has been perceived as both racist and non-racist, it certainly met his goal of opening the lines of communication about race and racism in the United States. Because this is an important first step in any significant change in racial formations, I feel that it says a great deal about his intent in utilizing

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[412]Joseph Papp, Handwritten Notes on Black/Hispanic Company, 1979, Joseph Papp/New York Shakespeare Festival Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[413]Ed Bullins, Interview by Kim Pearson, 17 February 1997, transcript, http://kpearson.faculty.tcnj.edu/Articles/kp%20interview_with_ed_bullins.htm.

colorblind and uni-racial casting, regardless of the way that casting has been perceived.

The application of Omi and Winant's racial formation theory to the colorblind and uni-racial casting employed by Joseph Papp at the New York Shakespeare Festival illuminates Papp's work as racial projects. The evidence suggests that Papp started colorblind and uni-racial casting in the United States in a sustained and visible way and supports a larger notion that Papp had not only a micro-level impact in terms of his racial project, but a macro-level impact as well.

The long-term consequences of Papp's work at the NYSF also indicate that his casting was a macro-level racial project. Papp selected JoAnne Akalaitis, a director known for colorblind casting (and other forms of non-traditional casting) in classical productions, as his successor at the NYSF. Akalaitis' theatrical ideology was similar to Papp's in many ways. In an interview shortly after moving into her new position with the company, she stated that "I have a personal quota system. I arbitrarily just say half the people in the play have to be people of color. Because if that's not our goal, then we won't do it, because it's easier not to do it."[414] Akalaitis was replaced the following year by George C. Wolfe, an African American artist who shared

[414]Hoban, 47.

similar values and was dedicated to making Papp's dream a reality.[415] Heidi Griffiths noted that "the culture that Mr. Papp started was shepherded on by JoAnne and then George and now Oskar [Eustis, current artistic director] taking over and continuing on and maintaining Mr. Papp's vision and his dream for a truly inclusive and diverse theatre. . . ."[416]

Griffiths stated that Papp's casting and values still have a significant impact on the NYSF but that the culture of the Public Theatre is significantly different now than it was under the direction of Papp. Griffiths originally worked with the company as the casting intern in 1988 and then stayed with the company as the casting assistant for another two and half years before moving onto another casting position. She returned to the Public Theatre in 1993 and has served as one of the two casting directors employed by the organization for twelve seasons (the other casting director is Jordan Saylor). As the casting director, she is responsible for casting all of the productions at the Public and Delacorte Theatres.

While there is no written policy about the casting of minority actors at the NYSF, Griffiths noted in her interview that

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[415]Errol G. Hill and James V. Hatch, *A History of African American Theatre* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), 425.

[416]Heidi Griffiths, Interview by Charlene Widener, 22 September 2006.

> there is an expectation that we are the Public Theatre/New York Shakespeare Festival and part of our mission is to represent all of the diverse cultures of New York. Whether we do that by programming diverse work by playwrights of color or whether we do that by casting all of our productions non-traditionally, it is just woven into the fabric of what this theatre is at this stage.[417]

In fact, she stated that colorblind casting

> . . . is so engrained in us all that it's not something the we ever think about until we are forced to on the very, very rare instances when a director is hired who has never really experienced what it means to cast a diverse company of actors and those instances are so unbelievably rare. I take it so for granted that this is the way we work and 99% of the artists who come to work here take it for granted because of all of the work Mr. Papp and the other people he hired to work for him. Because of all of the work they did all those years ago, it is just our culture. This is who we are. It is so deeply engrained in everybody who works here. I can't work any other way which is part of the reason I came back the minute that I could. . . . I am not sure that I could go and work anywhere else where the conversations which happen here on a daily basis never happen. It would be like somebody cutting off an airway. I would not be able to do what I do with those kinds of restrictions. Luckily I do work here.[418]

Griffiths stated that the work of Papp and his casting director, Rosemarie Tichler, paved the way for the casting that is currently used at the NYSF, however, the casting today is in one way significantly different than in the early days of the festival;

> I think that big change is that what you call colorblind casting and what we often call non-traditional casting has become something that is in our blood. There is less talk

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[417]Ibid.

[418]Ibid.

> about it, we just do it. The reason why we can is because of the pioneering work that Mr. Papp did starting fifty years ago and people like Rosemarie.[419]

Griffiths concluded our interview by stating:

> I hope the work you're doing will continue the conversation about how we cast our shows and what that says about the world we live in because we are privileged to work at this institution. But I am not naïve enough to think that it is like this everywhere. I know that there are a lot of other institutions in New York and across the country where the conversation does not take place. People do not sit down and read *Hamlet* and say let's have Jeffery Wright come and play this part.[420]

Fifteen years after the death of Papp, the NYSF is still concerned with keeping a conversation about the casting of minority actors in Shakespearean productions going. Papp's legacy at the organization supports his work as a macro-level racial project, and like other macro-level racial projects, Papp's casting has helped to keep discussions about race relations in the forefront of American consciousness.

In conclusion, Papp's use of colorblind and uni-racial casting is still a controversial issue today. While his use of the casting methods seems to emanate from a desire to challenge racial inequality, the hiring of a white director for the Black/Hispanic Company and white directors for the colorblind productions of plays written by a white

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[419]Ibid.

[420]Ibid.

playwright, reinforced the racialized social structure. However, the work did provide opportunities for African American actors that would have otherwise not been available and, especially with the Black/Hispanic Company, challenged traditional methods of casting in theatrical productions. Evidence suggests that Papp's casting was directly linked to his political goals; he hoped that the decisions he made in his theatre would create a forum for debate about inequality that could lead to real change for blacks in American society. While there are elements of both colorblind and uni-racial casting that can be perceived as racist in nature, in both cases, Papp was attempting to use the casting to address racism and inequality in American theatre and society. Papp's casting helped to keep the lines of communication open and there is still an intense need for this conversation to continue today. I hope that this study in at least some small way does contribute to that conversation.

APPENDIX A

List of Interracial Shakespearean Productions Produced by Joseph Papp

	1956
Titus Andronicus	Rosco Lee Browne-Aaron
Julius Caesar	Rosco Lee Browne-Pindarus
Taming of the Shrew	Rosco Lee Browne-Servant
	1957
Romeo and Juliet	Rosco Lee Browne-Balthsar
	1958
Othello	Ellen Holly-Desdemona William Marshall-Othello
	1959
Julius Caesar	Rosco Lee Browne-Pindarus
	1960
King Henry V	James Earl Jones-Williams
Measure for Measure	James Earl Jones-Abhorson
The Taming of the Shrew	Jane White-Katherine
	1961
A Midsummer Night's Dream	James Earl Jones-Oberon
King Richard II	James Earl Jones-Lord Marshall
Romeo and Juliet	James Earl Jones-Gregory Osceola Archer-Nurse Clebert Ford-Peter

	1962
King Lear	Rosco Lee Browne-Lear's Fool Frank Silvera-Lear
Merchant of Venice	James Earl Jones-Prince of Morocco
The Tempest	James Earl Jones-Caliban
	1963
Winter's Tale	Rosco Lee Brown-Autolycus Bill Gunn-Archidamus James Earl Jones-Camillo Robert Jackson-Dion
Antony and Cleopatra	Bill Gunn-Eros Ellen Holly-Iras Robert Jackson-Soothsayer Clebert Ford-Mardian
	1964
Othello	James Earl Jones-Othello Jamie Sanchez-Clown
A Midsummer Night's Dream	Ellen Holly-Titania Lynn Hamilton-Hippolyta
	1965
Troilus and Cressida	Rosco Lee Brown-Ulysses Al Freeman, Jr.-Diomedes Bill Gunn-Patroclus James Earl Jones-Ajax Jane White-Helen
Coriolanus	James Earl Jones-Junius Brutus Jane White-Volumnia
Henry V	Ellen Holly-Katherine Robert Hooks-King Henry V Lynn Hamilton-Alice

Taming of the Shrew	Ellen Holly-Kate Lynn Hamilton-Widow
Love's Labour's Lost	Jane White-Princess of France
	1966
Macbeth	Ellen Holly-Lady Macbeth James Earl Jones-Macbeth Raul Julia-Macduff Lynn Hamilton-Second Witch
All's Well That Ends Well	Al Freeman, Jr.-Charles Dumaine
Measure for Measure	Al Freeman, Jr.-Lucio Moses Gunn-Provost
	1967
Titus Andronicus	Moses Gunn-Aaron Raul Julia-Demetrius
Hamlet	Paul Benjamin-Guard
	1968
Hamlet	Cleavon Little-Hamlet Paul Benjamin-Ghost
Romeo and Juliet	Moses Gunn-Capulet
	1970
Henry VI, Part I	Fred Morsell-Papal Legate Albert Hall-Talbot's Captain
Henry VI, Part II	Albert Hall-Master
	1971
Two Gentlemen of Verona	Jonelle Allen-Silvia Clifton Davis-Valentine Raul Julia- Proteus Jose Perez-Speed

	Norman Matlock-Duke of Milan
Cymbeline	Jane White-Queen
	1972
Hamlet	James Earl Jones-Claudius Raul Julia-Osric
Two Gentlemen of Verona	Jonelle Allen-Silvia Clifton Davis-Valentine
	1973
As You Like It	Frankie Faison-Second Lord Raul Julia-Orlando Luis Avalos-Jaques de Boys Albert Hall-First Lord
King Lear	Rosalind Cash-Goneril Ellen Holly-Regan James Earl Jones-Lear Raul Julia-Edmond Lee Chamberlin-Cordelia
Two Gentlemen of Verona	Jose Fernandez-Speed Rozaa Wortham-Silvia Larry Marshall-Valentine
	1974
The Tempest	Jaime Sanchez-Caliban
The Merry Wives of Windsor	Jaime Sanchez-Pistol Dennis Tate-Nym
Richard III	Paul Winfield-Duke of Buckingham
	1975
Hamlet	Ruby Dee-Gertrude
A Midsummer Night's Dream	Richard Ramos-Bottom

	Larry Marshall-Puck
	1978
Taming of the Shrew	Raul Julia-Petruchio
All's Well That Ends Well	Pamela Reed-Helena
	1979
Othello	Raul Julia-Othello Castulo Guerra-Officer
	1981
The Tempest	Raul Julia-Prospero
	1982
A Midsummer Night's Dream	Michelle Shay-Titania
The Comedy of Errors	Mel Winkler-Solinus
	1983
Hamlet	Jimmy Smits-Switzer
Richard III	Peter Francis James-Lord Lovell Roc Dutton-Lord Mayor of London
	1985
Measure for Measure	
	1986
Romeo and Juliet	
Macbeth	
	1987
King Henry IV Part I	Angela Bassett-Lady Percy

Richard II	Graham Brown-Bishop of Carlisle
	1988
A Midsummer Night's Dream	Forrest inhabitants played by black actors
Romeo and Juliet	Peter Francis James-Benovolio
King John	Moses Gunn-Cardinal Pandulph Jane White-Queen Elinor
Coriolanus	Andre Braugher-Junius Brutus Moses Gunn-Cominius
Much Ado About Nothing	Brian Murray-Don Pedro
	1989
Winter's Tale	Alfre Woodard-Paulina Graham Brown-Antigonus
Cymbeline	Don Cheadle-Arviragus
Twelfth Night	Gregory Hines-Feste John Amos-Sir Toby Belch Andre Braugher-Antonio
	1990
Richard III	Denzel Washington-Richard Mary Alice-Queen Margaret
Macbeth	Raul Julia-Macbeth
Hamlet	Peter Francis James-Horatio Miguel Perez-Voltemand
Taming of the Shrew	Morgan Freeman-Petruchio Jose Perez-Grumio
	1991

Richard III Denzel Washington-Richard

APPENDIX B

List of Uni-Racial Shakespearean Productions Produced by Joseph Papp

1965

Romeo and Juliet

Spanish Mobile Theatre:
Eddie Alvarez-Musician
Diana Arostegui-Juliet
Pascual Blanco-Abram
Pilar Buchanan-Lady Montague
Ann Collins-Soprano
Mario R. Cueto-Paris
Carlos E. Davis-Benvolio
Rafael Delgado-Friar John/Beggar
Edmond Faccini-Page/Rug vendor
Felix E. Fernandez-Balthasar
Antonio Flores-Gregory
Alfredo Geroldo-Baritone
Jana Klenburg-Lady Capulet
Julio Lucia-Guard/Lucio
Marta Lucia-Livia/Fruit vendor
Gonzalo Madurga-Montague
Alfonso Manosalvas-Capulet
Manuel Morales-Counsel to the Prince
Jose Ocasio-Tybalt
Ramon Pabon-Peter Sampson
Norma Iris Pagan-Nurse
Lazaro Perez-Prince of Verona
Frank Ramirez-Romeo
Diane Reutter-Rosalina/Flower vendor
Osvaldo Riofrancos-Friar Laurence
Claudio Garcia Satur-Mercutio
Hector Sierra-Guard
Trudy Torres-Elena/Guide
Jorge Valdes-Page

1966

Macbeth

Spanish Mobile Theatre:

Eddie Alvarez-Servant/Ensemble
Maria Brenes-Lady Macbeth
Cesar Castro-Sergeant/Murderer
Jaime Castro-Ensemble
Vala Clifton-Third Witch
Ann Collins-Second Witch
Ali Colon-Messenger/Murderer
Ernesto Colon-Seyton
Michael Coquat-Old Man/Ensemble
Mario Cueto-Donalbain
Chan Daniels-Ensemble
Paul Delgado-Siward
Edmond Faccini-Porter
Felix Fernandez-Murderer
Antonio Flores-Murderer/Ensemble
Hermes Franqui-Young boy
Hernando Gonzalez-
Sentry/Messenger
Pilo Gonzalez-Fleance/Ensemble
Raul Julia-Macduff
Violeta Landek-First Witch
Julio Lucia-Caithness
Marta Lucia-Lady Macduff
Charles Lutz-Ensemble
Gonzalo Madurga-Banquo/Menteith
Alfonso Manosalvas-Ross
Dillian Martinez-Young girl
Norma Pagan-Lady
Francisco Prado-Angus/Hecate
Frank Ramirez-Lennox
Osvaldo Riofrancos-Duncan
Gregory Sierra-Doctor
Igancio Lopez Tarso-Macbeth
Lorenzo Weisman-Malcolm

1979

Julius Caesar

Black/Hispanic Company:
Frank Adu-Soothsayer
Mary Alice-Portia
Bimbo-Pindarus
Gylan Cain-Caius Cassius
Robert Christian-Metellus Cimber
Miriam Colon-Calpurnia

Keith Esau-Octavius' Officer
Jay Fernandez-Trebonius
Clebert Ford-Servant
Morgan Freeman-Casca
Arthur French-Flavius/Lepidus
Sonny Jim Gaines-Julius Caesar
Ben Halley, Jr.-Cobbler/Dardanius
Earle Hyman-Cicero/Messala
Peter Francis James-Octavius Caesar
Reginald Vel Johnson-Clitis
Jose Maldonado-Antony's Officer
Norman Matlock-Marullus/Strato
Clark Morgan-Publicus
Roscoe Orman-Marcus Brutus
Francisco Prado-Artemidorus
Reyno-Lucius
Jaime Sanchez-Marc Antony
Tucker Smallwood-Cinna/Titinius
Count Stovall-Decius Brutus/Lucilius

Coriolanus

Black/Hispanic Company:
Frank Adu-Junius Brutus
Bimbo-Patrician
Robert Christian-Tullus Aufidius
Keith Esau-Aufidius' Lieutenant
Frankie R. Faison-Aedile
Jay Fernandez-Officer
Clebert Ford-Sicinius Velutus
Gloria Foster-Volumnia
Morgan Freeman-Coriolanus
Ben Halley, Jr.-Servant/Watch
Earle Hyman-Cominius
William Jay-Aedile
J. J. Johnson-Patrician
Reginald Vel Johnson-Servant/Watch
Khayyam Kain-Young Martius
Gilbert Lewis-Senator
Robbie McCauley-Senate Aid
Cynthia McPherson-Senate Aid
Clark Morgan-Senator
Roscoe Orman-Nicanor

C. C. H. Pounder-Valeria
Francisco Prado- Servant/Watch
Jaime Sanchez-Titus Lartius
Michele Shay-Virgilia
Count Stovall-First Citizen/Officer
Maurice Woods-Menenius Agrippa

Coriolanus

Revival Black / Hispanic Company:
Frank Adu-Junius Brutus
Wayne Anthony-Ensemble
Bimbo-Patrician/Ensemble
Thomas Martell Brimm-Adrian/Senator
Christine Campbell-Gentlewoman
Robert Christian-Tullus Aufidius
Keith Esau-Lieutenant
Jay Fernandez-Officer/Ensemble
Clebert Ford-Sicinius Velutus
Gloria Foster-Volumnia
Morgan Freeman-Coriolanus
Castulo Guerra-Nicanor/Senator
Earle Hyman-Cominius
Peter Francis James-Servant/Watch
J. J. Johnson-Patrician/Ensemble
Khayyam Kain-Young Martius
Jose Maldonado-Ensemble
Robbie McCauley-Senate Aid/Ensemble
Cynthia McPherson-Gentlewoman
Clark Morgan-Senator/Ensemble
C. C. H. Pounder-Valeria
Francisco Prado-Servant/Ensemble
Jose Santana-Second Citizen/Ensemble
Michelle Shay-Virgilia
Catherine E. Slade-Gentlewoman
Count Stovall-First Citizen/Ensemble
Dennis Tate-Servant/Ensemble
David Toney-Senator/Ensemble
Denzel Washington-Aedile/Ensemble

Keith Wiliams-Aedile/Ensemble
Maurice Woods-Menenius Agrippa

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VITA

Charlene Widener was born in Texarkana, Texas but grew up in Hutchinson, Kansas. She comes from a family of nine children and has a twin sister named Darlene. Her parents are Helen L. Chism and the late Richard E. Widener. She married Patrick A. Reading in October of 1993. In her free time, Widener enjoys reading, traveling, and spending time with her niece and nephew, Kevin and Kelsey.

In addition to her Ph.D. from the University of Missouri-Columbia in Theatre, Widener has an Associate Degree from Hutchinson Community College, a Bachelor of Science in Theatre from Kansas State University, and a Masters Degree in Speech Communication from Kansas State University.

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