



June 21, 2021

Dear Friends,

In the fall of 2020, Detroit Public Theatre committed to taking a number of actions in response to the open letter from We See You White American Theatre (WSYWAT) calling for the dismantling of systemic inequities in the theatre industry. The WSYWAT movement and our commitments to specific actions have deeply informed planning for our upcoming season and the long term priorities of Detroit Public Theatre. Today, we share with you updates on the initial actions to which we have committed. This update is a living document. The progress shared here is the starting point for our work and is by no means the end of the journey. The actions DPT committed to in the fall have touched nearly every area of our work and include: executing a vendor audit; codifying a five-day work week for our artists; formalizing our equitable, accessible ticketing and audience engagement practices; and engaging EDIA (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility) consultants, among others.

**[PLEASE CLICK HERE TO READ THE FULL UPDATE](#)**

This is our first update, and there will be more as we continue to develop, deepen, adopt, and adapt our practices and center them in WYSWAT's call to action: the road map by which DPT's staff and board are committed to contributing to the necessary work of making a just and equitable theatre industry and society.

Detroit Public Theatre pledges to continue engaging with, listening to, and regularly updating you—our community—as we journey with you and progress.

Sincerely,

Courtney Burkett, Sarah Clare Corporandy, Dominique Morisseau, and Sarah Winkler  
Artistic Leadership Team of Detroit Public Theatre

## **Full Update**

In the fall of 2020, Detroit Public Theatre committed to taking a number of actions in response to the open letter from We See You White American Theatre (WSYWAT) calling for the dismantling of systemic inequities in the theatre industry. The WSYWAT movement and our commitments to specific actions have deeply informed our planning for our upcoming season and for the long term priorities of Detroit Public Theatre. Today, we share with you updates on the initial actions to which we have committed. The progress shared here is the starting point for our work and is by no means the end of the journey. The actions DPT committed to in the fall have touched nearly every area of our work and include: executing a vendor audit; codifying a five-day work week for our artists; formalizing our equitable, accessible ticketing and audience engagement practices; and engaging EDIA consultants, among others. (To see our original letter, please [click here](#)/scroll down.)

## **CENTERING BIPOC ARTISTS AND EQUITABLE HIRING PRACTICES**

Detroit Public Theatre is committed to centering the work of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color) theatre artists and professionals in our productions and throughout our organization. This commitment includes continuing our practice of building long-term relationships with BIPOC artists; expanding our efforts to recruit new-to-us BIPOC artists in order to build production and creative teams with at least 50% representation; and redoubling our efforts to recruit BIPOC candidates for open positions on our staff and board of directors.

We are prioritizing this commitment in all of our current work, upcoming collaborations, season planning, strategies to recruit new staff and board members, and long term strategic planning. Our 2021-22 season will feature robust representation from BIPOC artists; these include designers, playwrights, directors, and performers. We have reached out within the theatre industry to build an extensive internal database of BIPOC artists whom we will contact

directly to discuss upcoming projects. We will also be recruiting candidates for three new staff positions in the coming year. For both potential artists and staff members, we will post notices beyond our traditional avenues of Artsearch and AEA to actively reach and recruit a more diverse candidate pool; we have reached out to community partners and organizations to assist and advise us in these efforts. Importantly, we are raising salaries throughout the organization and offering additional benefits to all full-time staff members .

### **STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL EQUITABLE PRACTICES**

Detroit Public Theatre has included in our budget a new and dedicated line for equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism (EDIA) work with our board and staff (full-time, part-time, and contract employees). We are working with [Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion](#), which will assess DPT as an organization and provide EDIA training for our staff and board on an ongoing basis. We have also committed to hiring a cultural consultant for any production whose director is from outside the play's culture/context; this practice is now embedded in the planning and budgeting for each show.

We are committed to partnering with and supporting the work of BIPOC-owned and operated organizations and businesses, as well as those with publicly stated anti-racism policies. We are in the process of conducting an audit of our vendors, and we have already begun relationships with new vendors with BIPOC leadership and/or ownership. We will continue to apply this process to new vendors as we prepare for our return to production.

Detroit Public Theatre has made a five-day work week standard practice since our founding. We have also utilized "8 out of 10"-hour technical rehearsal days rather than "10 out of 12"-hour days. We have now codified these practices and built them into our upcoming season schedule and production calendar.

### **AUDIENCE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Since our founding, DPT has been committed to being a *truly public* theatre. We recognize that the theatre industry has long engaged in practices that have alienated BIPOC community members and artists, and we are addressing this systemic issue with the creation of a new staff position dedicated to community and audience responsibility and engagement. This staff

member will join current staff and a newly formed board committee in ongoing and new partnerships with community members, leaders, and organizations.

We have committed to applying the same practices we employ and maintain in our relationships with current donors to those that we cultivate with BIPOC audience members. In order to more deeply invest in and foster reciprocal relationships with BIPOC communities, DPT's new Community and Audience Engagement Manager will lead this work. We have already identified specific donor practices and pathways and have begun to create a detailed plan to nurture our relationships with BIPOC audiences employing those same practices. We have begun—and our new Community and Audience Engagement Manager will continue—to hold community conversations to ensure that our community's concerns are at the forefront of these efforts. We have been using the insight gained from these conversations to ensure that our theatre is a warm and welcoming space for our community. Audiences and artists will not be policed in any of our spaces, including the lobby and rehearsal spaces, and they will not be policed in their responses during performances. We will prominently display DPT Executive Producing Artistic Director Dominique Morisseau's "Playwright's Rules of Engagement" in our lobby and in our programs.

We will formalize and expand our affordable ticket price initiatives, both existing and new. When we begin to welcome audiences to our productions again, we will make pay-what-you-can tickets available to all audience members throughout our season. We have always offered these on a limited basis but will now include the initiative alongside all ticket pricing and subscription information. We are creating a plan to set aside blocks of tickets to every performance for same-day ticket buyers. This is merely the starting point; we are researching other theatre companies' initiatives as we continue to develop our own.

## **EDIA WORK AND LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT STATEMENTS**

Detroit Public Theatre has committed to creating an Anti-Racism statement to guide our EDIA efforts and to share at the start of every casting, PR, marketing, rehearsal, and tech process. We have researched many such statements and have drafted our own, which we will finalize in collaboration with the EDIA consultants we have engaged to guide us in our process.

Detroit Public Theatre is located on the contemporary and ancestral homelands of three Anishinaabe nations of the Council of Three Fires: the Ojibwe, Ottawa, and Potawatomi. We commit to acknowledging and raising awareness of this appropriately at the first rehearsal of each production, during production design meetings, during all board and staff meetings, at all public meetings and events, and at the beginning of every performance. We have researched our geographic location's history and best practices in creating land acknowledgement statements. We have drafted a full and detailed statement of our own. Our next step is to engage with this region's First Nations advocacy groups. Following their reviews of our statement, we will begin using it regularly.

## **CONCLUSION**

We look forward to updating you on our progress again in the late spring/early summer of 2021.

With continuing gratitude to the We See You White American Theatre coalition and movement and continuing commitment to this important ongoing work,

Detroit Public Theatre