

As the Last Become First: How Women of Color Leadership Revolutionizes the Creative  
Economy

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Major paper submitted to the faculty of Goucher College in partial

Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Arts Administration

2022

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As the Last Become First: How Women of Color Leadership Revolutionizes the Creative Economy

A US House of Representatives meeting was disrupted by a small statured, emboldened black woman in the late 1960s. Bystanders watched Shirley Chisholm take the House floor to address unreasonable expectations inflicted upon her by congressional superiors. Shirley Chisolm demonstrated the kinds of transformations that occur when women of color (WOC) leaders trailblaze new ways to overcome systemic barriers for the advancement of everyone.

Educator, activist, and first black Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm was an instrumental leader of the Women's Suffrage Movement. She advocated for equal treatment of all women and demonstrated that principle throughout her professional career. Chisholm's intersectional identity presented her with challenges beyond her colleagues. Kimberlé Crenshaw defined "intersectionality" in the context of employment discrimination as "the many ways black women were excluded from employment in industrial plants and elsewhere that were segregated by both gender and race" (Crenshaw 2:23-2:31). Chisholm navigated aggressive racist and sexist arenas as she stood against influential politicians for the sake of American women. She referred to a campaign win against candidate James Farmer for Congress in which she gained support from diverse women, stating, "Italian women, Jewish women—all the different kind of women decided that they were going to back Shirley Chisholm to go to Congress ("Conversation with Shirley A. Chisholm" 9:25- 9:33).

During an interview with The Center for American Women and Politics, Shirley Chisolm spoke candidly about her refusal to serve on the appointed Rural Villages and

Forests Committee. It was completely unrelated to meaningful disparities of her Brooklyn, New York community such as quality housing and good education (12:37-12:41). Disgruntled with the Congressional leaders' purposeful decision to ignore her request to speak, she demanded Congress adhere to fair assignment policies (13:58-15:07). As a result, congressional leadership made concerted efforts to only assign committees relevant to the needs of members' constituencies.

For the sake of this research, WOC are identified as African, Asian, Latinx, and Indigenous. Catalyst respectfully acknowledges this is a condensed articulation of its broad definition ("Women of Color"). Present day WOC leaders steer arts organizations on the shoulders of pioneers like Chisolm and others. The continuous exclusion of this oppressed group will further isolate the representation and agenda setting participation of marginalized individuals within arts and culture spaces-thus, lessening institutional diversity practices and weakening organizational culture. There is value in learning from the strategies of modern day WOC nonprofit arts leaders. Women of color in executive leadership positions are changing nonprofit arts organizations by demonstrating empathy, collaboration, and newness.

As the non-profit art sector employs measurable solutions to sustain inclusive leadership, this can be adapted by the for-profit sector of which only four percent of executive-level managers (C-suite) are women of color (McKinsey).

To best support WOC organizational leadership arts administrators must understand how WOC have endured disproportionate outcomes in fields like the arts, politics, education, healthcare, etc. (Kirby 2012). As an example, the imbalance of access to better education between white women and WOC became evident despite the passing of

the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA). Associate professor of Critical Race Theory and Education at The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Adrienne Dixon referenced gender equity legislation birthed from the Women's Educational Equity Act in terms of K-12 education. Dixon and Cecilia Conrad concluded "women of color's experiences with gaining access to greater opportunities have been uneven" (Conrad 4). Cecilia Conrad, Professor Emeritus of Pomona College, identified a core component in the legislation's minimal impact to implement societal change within its intended capacity. Conrad confirmed the passage of legislation was to have nationwide influence within every congressional district. However, the budget was incapable of delivering such results. Intersectional suppressions of the sort were discernable with female identified, African Americans (3).

There continues to be disproportionate representation of WOC executive leaders in nonprofit arts organizations. Arts administrators can look to the actions of past heroines like Grace Lee Boggs, an Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) activist who became a north star for mankind through exemplary collaboration. Her seventy-decade span of progressive leadership was rooted in feminism, labor and civil rights (Silver). Born above her father's restaurant in 1915, she recalled how adults verbally denounced her existence as a female, stating, "Leave her on the hillside to die, she's only a girl baby" ("AAPI Civil Rights" 0:27-0:31). Boggs recognized such disgraceful thoughts and behaviors as a threat to those of marginalized likeness. An empathetic nature compelled her to exemplify new, equitable societal norms. "Let's begin to create those human relationships that we need to evolve" said Boggs during her speech at a WOC conference in Oakland, California (A Conversation 43:55-44:02). Reimagining communities, industries and people through a

process Boggs called “visionary organizing” is necessary to equip individuals to properly respond in moments of change (25:49- 26:28).

Felicia Shaw, former Executive Director (ED) of the Regional Arts Commission (RAC) in St. Louis exhibited empathy as she reimagined possibilities for her hometown in Missouri. In an interview Shaw said she remembered being a young girl and feeling as if she had to seek inspiration outside of Missouri (Shaw). There were great people and communities, but she vowed to leave and never return after high school. To her surprise, she felt “called” to return home during the uprisings followed by the killing of Mike Brown (Shaw). Indigenous opera composer and activist Zitkálá-Sá also returned to her home at the Yankton Dakota Sioux reservation as an activist after she recruited children from her tribe to assimilate to a European identity at a boarding school in Pennsylvania (Barker). Zitkálá-Sá witnessed a loss of identity in the children from her tribe and worked to reform their cultural identities (Barker). She wrote of her people’s tribulations through song and revolutionized opera as a cocreator of the first Native American opera called *The Sun Dance Opera*.

Similarly, Felicia Shaw saw the people of St. Louis lose a sense of self and faith in each other. Shaw also believed the arts could help breathe life back into the community. Like many newly appointed EDs, she followed the tenure of only one former director. In other instances, newly appointed WOC leaders are just the second holders of such positions (Audelo). As ED Shaw reviewed regional grant disbursements from previous years and immediately recognized many grassroots organizations did not receive financial capital to satisfy overhead costs, payroll, programming, etc. (Kline).

Shaw said “too many people don’t participate in the arts, in part, because we’ve been tied to old allegiances and protocols...RAC receives public money, so we owe it to the community to create access to the arts for everyone, and to reward excellence. Hard choices mean that St. Louis’ very best—from major institutions to grassroots organizations—will thrive now and into the future” (Kline). Shaw made an impact following pioneering new funding directives beyond typical grant recipients.

Along with modern individual pioneers, regional pioneers include Repertory Theater of St. Louis (Midwest), Skirball Cultural Center (West), The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (South), Ballet Tech (Northeast) and Arts Administrators of Color Network.

Director of Learning and Community Engagement at The Repertory Theater of St. Louis Adena Varner identifies several methods arts administrators can exercise to optimize ideas WOC leaders devise in pursuit of equitable and inclusive organizations (Varner). Throughout her career, Varner has benefited from listening to voices of communities. A native of Baltimore City, Varner observes plights of conditional environments and circumstances that influence the participation or exclusion of certain groups from the arts. Upon becoming the Director of Learning and Community Engagement at The Repertory Theater of St. Louis Varner expressed the importance of paying attention to the needs of the community stating, “There were some similarities in the demographics of Baltimore and St. Louis, but I knew I had to come in as a student-willing to learn and appreciate the St. Louis culture the St. Louis way” (Varner). Varner expounded that her ancestry within African American culture demands that WOC show up as teachers and students simultaneously. Varner says that survival is contingent upon WOC’s capacity to learn and

trailblaze for their predecessors (Varner). When WOC answer to greater calls, the advantages are not reclusive. Therefore, all beings connected will benefit from the experiential nature of WOC having innate characteristics to problem solve and retain empathy for others in the process. Varner referenced a virtual read of “Black Like Me” in which she detailed a newly framed virtual talk back with multi-racial and intergenerational participation a success. The comfortability for vastly different people to experience the level of cohesiveness was “liberating” said Varner (“Flippin’ the Script”).

While seldom in quantity, WOC nonprofit arts organization leaders are frontrunners in teaching strategies that best support their success in executive positions. The for-profit sector can look to such women as examples of fostering inclusivity between organizational constituencies and developing systems that strengthen representation and participation from underrepresented and misrepresented groups of people. This can improve cultural democracy within creative and solidarity economies.

*Women in the Workplace*, the largest study of women in corporate America acknowledges the existence of intersectionality and validates its complexities in the for-profit sector. In pursuit of equitable leadership advancements hiring managers should ensure mentorship and collaboration is available for WOC in entry level positions (McKinsey & Company). According to the report, eighty-six women are hired for every, one hundred men. This ratio confirms that women progress into positions of power unequal to men though WOC still rank last across every corporate position from entry level to C-Suite. According to the U.S Bureau of Economic Analysis, \$919.7 billion of America’s gross domestic product was generated from arts and cultural production in 2019 (BEA). McKinsey & Company’s London partner representative Tia Holt says incorporating

women not only in leadership roles but in the overall workforce would notably increase the gross domestic product. Limitations of distinct leadership groups interfere with nonprofits, agencies, and businesses power to add value to creative economy industries. Still, arts administrators must ensure their intentions to diversify leadership is a response that compliments systemic change (“Women in the Workplace 2020” 10:15-11:22).

Denise Gantt, author and Director of Education at The Lyric Opera House, links the nonexistent pipeline for WOC leadership succession to historical stereotypes that characterize black women as inadequate. Funding divergence is evident when analyzing philanthropic contributions (Gantt). Funding is lower for WOC-led organizations. According to research published by Ms. Foundation, a total of \$356 million in grant funds were reserved for women and girls of color in 2017. A closer look at the disbursement of those funds proved nominal investment. Of the \$356 million dollars, approximately 4.2 percent benefited black women (and girls), 2.4 percent benefited Latina women (and girls), 2.6 percent benefited Indigenous women (and girls), 0.8 percent benefited AAPI women (and girls), and only 0.2 percent benefited Middle Eastern women (and girls) (Pike).

From a societal perspective, underlying biases of WOC are visible through funder/leader relationships. “Some donors conflate women of color with being low income” said LC Johnson, founder of Zora’s House. Johnson said if funders only associate WOC-led nonprofit organizations to survival related themes such as food and shelter, it limits investment in leadership initiatives (Pike). Arts administrators must be direct about requesting funds specifically to evolve advancement probabilities for WOC leaders. Unsurprisingly organizational-dominant culture reflects societal-dominant culture. In this way nonprofit arts organizations might reinforce discriminatory practices against WOC

leaders like societal practices have shown. “Our social organizations entrain to the toxic dominant culture in which we swim” (Benedict, et.al 2022).

Leslie K. Johnson, the first African American Executive Vice President of the Skirball Jewish Cultural Center, was prepared to prioritize new initiatives with Skirball’s twenty-two-million-dollar budget. Johnson shared in an interview, “Our institutions must become healing spaces.” Arts and culture centers have long been associated with healing of communities and people, but the idea of extending rehabilitation to the internal ecosystems of organizations is much more contemporary. She is a proud follower of the Nap Ministry, an Instagram community dedicated to undoing ‘grind’ culture practices that result from toxic labor and capitalism. Johnson prioritizes self-care in preparation for the demands of her position. She accepted responsibilities that include supervising approximately four hundred staff members, as well as Skirball’s programs, exhibitions, and daily operations (Valentine). While there are institutional adjustments that require strategies responsive to the pandemic and race wars, Johnson confidently shows up a steward of more than thirty-years rooted in nonprofit management, arts education, and cultural leadership (Johnson). When asked how she maintains her identity while reporting to a European superior, Johnson replied “There is no pyramid. Upon accepting this position, my qualifications were evident. As it relates to my multiple identities, I am forthright when I communicate with our president who happens to be a woman about organizational priorities that will benefit the culture of all people at Skirball.” Johnson stated she has an ally in Skirball’s President and CEO, Jessie Kornberg. They share collaborative leadership acumen as cocreators of exhibits, programs and community

transactions that uphold the core belief of Skirball Cultural Center “that arts and culture have the capacity to transform and uplift” said Johnson (Valentine).

Allyship in the for-profit sector has progressed during the last six years, but it is threatened as employee turnover and increased micro aggressions for black women continue during the pandemic (McKinsey & Company). Shruthi Mukund, arts administrator, creative cultural leader, and CEO of the Indian Dance Educators Association, said in an interview (Mukund) if we expect to reform our arts and culture organizations introspectively that allyship is imperative. Once hired, Mukund connected with staff members to learn which leaders were committed to develop relationships and systems that welcomed people of color (POC) to give feedback on current operations. As a woman of color, Mukund shares her intentionality to show up as her full self in predominately white-led organizations wearing bright patterns and nose ring, aesthetics of her culture.

Black women with allies are twice as likely to report feeling they can bring their entire identity in the workplace compared to black women who lack allyship (McKinsey & Company). This data is not exclusive to America’s for-profit sector. McKinsey & Company’s regional partners in London and Africa also share common barriers that impact diversity in the workplace with a reported one-third of companies that have actualized diversity plans (McKinsey & Company). Research confirms that managerial and executive talents are being replaced instead of strengthened. The for-profit sector should refer to Americans for the Arts to create regional, accelerator programs that engage current arts administrators and emerging leaders who identify as WOC. Through the Diversity in Arts Leadership program (DIAL), Americans for the Arts provides resources that include but

are not limited to mentorship, and professional development for undergraduate students across the country whose identities prevent them from participating fully as transformational leaders (Diversity in Arts Leadership Internship).

Transformational leadership is evident as Deputy Director of The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Janice Bond posed the question “what is not art?” on *The Civic Leader* podcast. Further, Bond addressed newness in the concept of dimensional thinking when referencing the creative economy and the idea that the arts impact the quality of life for everyone. Bond advocates for the normalization of philanthropic shifts. She shared childhood memories of observing her mother, even with modest resources, annually donate a portion of her earnings to support charities (“The Creative Economy” 41:36-42:05). The decision to support artists and to reconsider whose dollars we accept to fund our organizations is one of Bond’s priorities as a leader. Bond challenges organizations to invite artists to the decision-making table, despite their net worth, and to focus on creating equitable power structures within the Creative Economy rooted in decision making and redistribution of resources (36:00-37:56). Artists who have a stake in an organization contribute to an authentic process of decision making that improves the visibility and participation of community members. Bond, whose first role at an art institution was as a gallery guard and assistant at the former Griffith Gallery recalled observing art on the walls of her childhood church (Rothstein). That initial exposure accounted for her ingenuity in the cross fertilization of art and everyday life. She leads with the belief and practice of art as an interwoven fabric of our society.

Arts Administrators of Color Network demonstrates the power of regional collaboration. Since its conception in 2016, the nonprofit has supported over one thousand

arts administrators in the Washington, DC, and Maryland region and more than 200 leaders nationwide (Floyd). Arts administrators within regions as defined by the US Census Bureau can create initiatives that identify disparate statistics between regional demographics and executive leadership represented throughout their arts and culture institutions. Organizational goals can be defined with assistance from experts who equip current leaders with practical mechanisms that decentralize exclusive management models. President and Chief Executive of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Daniel H. Weiss said, “We no longer have to persuade each other that we should be doing this at the expense of something else” (Pogrebin). Data parallels between regions in tandem with state and municipal level observations can prepare us to determine goals by which to measure our improvement of inclusive leadership as natural components of our organizations as opposed to an obscure condition.

Dr. Antonio C. Cuyler, PhD, “the first black man to earn a PhD in Arts Administration (Department of Education) and author of *Access, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Cultural Organizations (Insights from the Careers of Executive Opera Managers of Color in the U.S)* said in an interview that despite minimal quantitative data, naturalistic generalization allows us to identify experiences of WOC leaders and their contributions to stratify solutions to common organizational barriers (Cuyler).

Quanice Floyd, founder of the Arts Administrators of Color Network and current Doctor of Education candidate at Drexel University, teaches it is not the responsibility of marginalized individuals to educate white leaders— the very practice of this behavior is triggering and counterproductive (Floyd). In an interview, Floyd explained her investment in arts administrators of color was not established to create an anti-white environment. The

network was designed instead to discuss the challenges facing arts administrators of color in professional and creative atmospheres. Similarly, Shaw's objective to purposely align the St. Louis RAC's resources with smaller organizations which happened to be governed by people of color, did not imply non-support of larger, white-led organizations. Shaw and Floyd's identities helped them to collaborate in new ways empathetically and strategically with members of their communities and region who require greater depths of accessibility, education, and investment.

Former Equity in Arts Leadership Program Manager at Americans for the Arts Nikki Kirk proactively develops programs to leverage instructional and experiential preparation for arts leaders of color. In an interview Kirk shared experiences of subtle and overt micro-aggressions during her journey as a leadership development and cultural equity practitioner. Distinctive, firsthand accounts of enduring gaslighting and being isolated as a woman of color prepared her to recognize and rectify repressive patterns within programmatic frameworks. When asked how lack of diverse leadership affects engagement, Kirk replied, "There is no way to be fully responsive to the needs of our community members if organizations lack decision making roles occupied by those who have shared experiences" (Kirk). Community must be realized as ever evolving. This is true for local, state, regional, national, and international communities. Arts and culture institutions should respond to communities' changing dynamics through staffing, programming, and funding. Consider a grant writer who is unfamiliar with the cultures of a community. Their inability to appropriately narrate the demands of the constituency can result in minimal funding, or an offensive depiction of the represented cultures. Kirk describes political linguistics as skillful articulation. She continued, "It impacts how we

speak about our missions and services. Language effects how foundations or individuals give. White saviorism explodes with the perception of ‘needy’ children. Perpetuated language becomes diminishing in terms of people’s values. We mostly see this disconnect between nonprofit arts organizations in black and brown neighborhoods” (Kirk).

Higher education attainment has alluded to a scarcity of diverse candidates of color. Young Invincibles conducted a study in 2016 that reported that “between 2007 and 2015, the gap between the share of white adults with postsecondary degrees and Latinx and African Americans with postsecondary degrees increased by 2.2 and 0.4 percentage points, respectively” (Medina). Further, only six percent of African Americans were ED’s of America’s largest nonprofits and foundations. Eighty-seven percent of all EDs and presidents were white, with 42 percent female. Hispanic EDs totaled four percent with Asian American leadership ranking last at three percent (Medina 2017). Nonprofits and foundations should prioritize diverse leadership. A misconception about organizational diversity is that there is greater benefit in underserved communities. Arts administrators can help debunk the idea that hegemony is acceptable in any regard. Reciprocated cultural engagements deepen connections for everyone who participates. Arts administrators do not need to exhaust themselves to resolve inequitable leadership behaviors. “Simple exchanges can break down walls between us, for when people come together and speak to one another and share a common experience, then their common humanity is revealed” (Barack Obama, 2009).

In 2017, the National Endowment for the Arts Office of Research and Analysis conducted a broader study, *Demographic Characteristics of U.S Business Owners in the Arts*. Organizations founded by women or minorities are not accounted for in this survey

report (NEA). This analysis gives an overview of demographic factors used to ameliorate equitable promotion of ownership. Minorities constitute only 18.5 percent of business owners in the United States and only twenty percent of arts business owners; eleven percent ownership of performing arts companies and nine percent of arts, entertainment, and recreation businesses. An important statistic related to arts education is the percentage of fine arts schools' owners. In 2017, fifty-five percent were owned by women compared to less than twelve percent were owned by racial/ethnic minorities.

Demographics of the Baltimore-Washington region also reflected significant disproportions between people of color (POC) ED's and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC). According to the 2009-10 Urban Institute *Baltimore-Washington Survey of Nonprofit Economic and Diversity Issues*, "nearly half (forty-nine percent) of the population in the Baltimore-Washington region is people of color." However, only a reported twenty-two percent of nonprofit organizations in the region had EDs of color (Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance). This study does not incorporate how much, if any, of the twenty-two percent of EDs were WOC. Discrepancies between (BIPOC) populations and EDs of color expanded in Maryland counties outside Washington, D.C. Sixty-three percent of the population were POC, compared with only twenty-two percent of nonprofit ED's. Programming, outreach efforts, audience building, and development are contrived and enforced differently according to the leaders who manage these functions.

Broadway musical theater professional Dionne D. Figgins of Dance Theatre of Harlem carries the torch of Artistic Founding Director Eliot Feld at Ballet Tech—a New York City classical dance company that affords youth (primary) early exposure to the world of classical dance (Rabinowitz). With more than a twenty-year career as a teaching artist,

Figgins incorporates her values for art education and community service into her position. Co-founder and Creative Director of Broadway Serves, a nonprofit that connects theatre specialists to community service needs, Figgins exhibits responsibility in maintaining cohesion between the arts and citizens (Rabinowitz). Such endeavors prepared Figgins to lead as a respondent. While she commits to the expansion of foundational principles instilled by Eliot Feld, she offers services in response to recipients' needs. During childhood, Figgins received classical dance instruction from black teachers. During a conversation with *Beyond the Thread: The Arts of Activism* Figgins shared she was oblivious to societal imparities that many black children in ballet experienced. She continued that she never perceived herself as a minority, stating that "Black excellence was normal" (40:20-40:34). Figgins prides herself on celebrating the fullness of her blackness in whatever space and roles she occupies. The artistic direction of a WOC leader gives Ballet Tech students the ability to explore and rethink subconscious ideals about who is qualified to lead within the construct of a Eurocentric genre.

Engaging WOC leaders fulfills the National Endowment for the Arts' (NEA) statement of "equal access." As stated by the NEA, "Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the Arts Endowment supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America's rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America" (Nat'l Assembly). While this quote summarizes intentions to promote equal access to the arts throughout all of America's communities, there remains dissonance between promotion and execution of this idea. Arts Administrators cannot risk waiting for the federal granting organization to design leadership models relevant to the

cultural needs of our local, state, and regional communities. Women of Color in the Arts (WOCA) member Natalia Laneras and cowriter Caroline Woolard provide grantors with solutions to support “culture workers” (Grantmakers in America) in *The Solidarity Economy*, a report funded in part by Grantmakers in the Arts. The report encourages grant makers to learn from the progress that has already been done by Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) “culture workers” and to invest in the amplification of that work (Grantmakers in America). Jacqueline Martinez Garcel, CEO of the Latino Community Foundation, and Michele Siqueiros, President of Campaign for College Opportunity, made an integral statement to *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, “Aqui estamo- we are here” (“Why Were Latinos”). A discussion to converse challenges encountered by nonprofit leaders of color completely disregarded Latinx leaders. Garcel and Siqueiros drafted a letter to the editor to express the detriment of non-investment of Latinx-led organizations (Philanthropy). Again, the disproportionate inequality of the Latinx population (more than eighteen percent in America) versus accounted leaders is staggering. Of the three percent of nonprofit Latinx leaders, only a 1.1 percent morsel of philanthropic dollars are allocated to their organizations (Garcel et. al.). Grantmakers are urged to follow WOC leaders as they redevelop what it looks like to propagate cultural democracy without the “top down” hierarchy.

Women of Color in the Arts (WOCA), a national service organization founded by Kaisha S. Johnson proliferates the education and promotion of racial and cultural equity for WOC arts administrators (Mission, Vision, and Values). The leaders promote collaboration with members and affiliates of WOCA through modern affinity spaces. “Solidarity is a verb”, said Kaisha S. Johnson during a Solidarity Economy virtual meet

(“We Got Us” 30:52-30:55). She continued, “In order to gain power—in order to relinquish power to others so that we have more distributive power—we don’t need trust. “We need us” (“We Got Us” 32:14-32:30). Johnson elaborated about the importance of making space for WOC leaders. Otherwise, the work to be conducted might be hindered.

One major disadvantage WOC leaders face upon joining westernized organizations is exclusion from networks that guide and construct connections between current and potential constituencies. There must be improved communication and reliance between WOC managers and superiors of European descent. A report conducted by Catalyst confirmed that black women are more accustomed to withholding information and reluctant to ask for help. “To admit a need for help may undermine an image of extreme competence but to not ask for assistance when it is actually needed is itself risky” (Catalyst 8).

“Cultural institutions are recruiting people of color to direct their transformation efforts. But bringing in one manager doesn’t mean the work is done” (Pogrebin). Diversity hires can be problematic. Research has identified that “diversity hires” contribute to massive burnout for those who accept gender and race-specific positions. “Checkbox Diversity” (Anand) the blanket effect of organizations to cover entrenched, generational issues and systemic traumas by hiring individuals who ‘fit the part’ is an example of backlash. Smith said, “Backlash can look like one step forward, one step back, or obstacles and resistance” (“Backlash, Burnout”). Yet it suffices as an attempt to disassemble racial and cultural traumas exposed in nonprofit organizations. “[Checkbox diversity] often manifests as quick fixes to codifying a group or population and making sense of their beliefs and behaviors” (Anand).

Arts administrators should reflect upon their models of diversity, equity and inclusion and determine if reformation can take place. Smith said implementing new or reconditioning previous models intended to increase visibility and managerial selection are only surface-level solutions (“Nonprofit Leadership”). People and WOC undergo emotional and mental turmoil when hired to govern institutions as simply black and brown faces. Such practices are widespread, especially during times of global health crisis and racial unrests. Once hired, these leaders are tasked with unfeasible expectations and may self-identify as tokens, consequently prolonging status quo mechanisms. It is possible self-identified tokenism can show up as negative exchanges between organizational constituencies. Smith said, “The suffering is palpable: white nonprofit leaders and rising leaders of color, many of them women, find themselves in relationships full of anguish and confusion” (“Nonprofit Leadership”).

Further, racial burnout precedes tokenism. A distinct form of burnout, it exists by way of personal obligation to solve or alleviate racism (Smith). Of this kind, WOC leaders maneuver racist dynamics throughout their personal, academic, and business lives. Studies must be conducted that synthesize numerical evidence to measure racial impact on WOC leaders in nonprofit arts organizations.

Many WOC leaders endure passive aggressive encounters as they fulfill tokenism but fail to withstand internal, Western-rooted prejudices. Unfortunately, assimilation is a harsh reality. Grantors who are committed to allocate funds see diverse leadership as a tell-tale sign that an organization is pioneering inclusive methods to construct contemporary leadership models reflective of current demographics. Dissension arises as varied management and communication styles become conflicted with deficient diversity

measures (Anand). Diversity hires can be weaponized and possibly separate arts administrators further from their societal and institutional goals—to consider, collaborate and invest in WOC leaders’ innovative thoughts for an expansive cultural democracy. Some feel providing additional financial support specifically for communities of color as discrimination (Lim).

How then does leadership diversity account through quantifiable measures without only appealing to mandatory quotas? The influx in WOC leaders during the past two years should be celebrated but also investigated. Without proper preparation and stewardship of resources, those appointed as front-facing are likely to fail. Failure does not necessarily result from those individuals being unqualified or ill-equipped but can result from pressures associated with microaggressions (McKinsey & Company). In lieu of tokenism, strategic assimilation has been practiced by some WOC for tactical advancement within white-led institutions. If truthfully addressed by both human resources and new hires, this does not have to be problematic. Instead, it can be a shared reality without the expectation that diversity hires will end years or decades of systemic oppression. The state of tokenism is inevitable when WOC are first or second representatives to take the seats of tenured predecessors.

Socioeconomic and cultural needs present an opportunity to create refreshed systems and models under new leadership. “Twenty-first century society yearns for a leadership of possibility, a leadership based more on hope, aspiration, and innovation than on the replication of historical patterns of constrained pragmatism” (Adler 487). The Academy of Management describes the investigation of companies looking to the arts and art processes within strategic management and leadership. Nonlinear models that

encompass the restructuring of organizational pipelines to support WOC leaders for their roles as directors, managers, development experts, board chairs, etc. must include measurable actions not limited to education, and mentorship. Performance evaluation reviews will spearhead data collection and be accessible for future research efforts.

The Collective Leadership Circular Model designed by Arts Connect International encourages a co-director archetype. A circular model ensures constant acknowledgement of all culture bearers and sharing of information amongst thought leaders without limitations of linear power structures (Brinkerhoff and O'Neill). Board, philanthropic, community and program development all benefit from collective leadership. It is imperative to unify an array of people and representatives to convene and reimagine how our experiential collaboration evolves our organizations. Shared responsibility should be at the center of this model (Brinkerhoff and O'Neill). Broader topics that include artistic, educational, political and all other socioeconomic forums will be fortified as arts administrators operate with collaborative leadership lenses.

Several theaters in San Francisco have adopted the distributive leadership model for shared learning and accountability. These advances stemmed back to 1971 when the San Francisco Mime Troupe rose to ally for black longshoremen at the Longshoremen and Warehouse Union Strike (Janiak). Joan Holden, writer at the Mime Troupe realized the most authentic manner to stand against racial oppression was to contribute to the transparency of the lived reality on stage. As intentional space was made for artists of color to collaborate in the accurate depiction of such realities, all members of the collective retained a sense of power and responsibility to improve inequitable conditions (Janiak).

Hope Mohr Dance demonstrates collaborative leadership in its blueprint in which African American and Latina leaders Cherie Hill and Karla Quintero “co-lead” with founder Hope Mohr (Janiak). Mohr described the uncanny awareness of separation between equity-projected programs and the white-dominated infrastructure of the company as a precursor to embrace the newest leadership model. She proposed there should not be so much emphasis for founders to abandon their work or be replaced by a more “fitting candidate” (Janiak). WOC leaders cannot escape the innate role of educator. Whether or not it is a position arts administrators anticipate, educating white female and male counterparts is undoubtedly a part of the journey (Varner). The narrative being projected can in fact be one of shared capacity. Mohr expressed that “One habitual white response to perceived challenges is just to withdraw. I’m curious about what it means to stay in these difficult conversations” (Janiak).

Eliminating supremacist language can promote feelings of inclusion as leaders address each other with merit not undermined by titles such as “senior” or “assistant” (Schiller). Blinklist, a multi-million-dollar European start up, exchanged titles for roles through a process called Holacracy and immediately saw increased employee productivity. Holacracy supports employees utilizing all talents that contribute to overall organizational goals (Schiller). Minimized feelings of professional isolation and decreased needs for external recruitment can preserve time and money. This can redirect efforts to strengthen pipelines of advancement using present WOC talent, committed to carrying out the mission and vision of nonprofit arts organizations. Arts administrators can utilize innovative communication to further support advancement of WOC leaders. “The ego with which a job title is naturally freighted melts away and what replaces it is common sense and, usually

greater freedom to solve problems rather than protect hurt feelings” (Schiller). While arts administrators address critical yet sensitive issues, Holacracy creates space between problems and the people designated to participate in solution-oriented processes.

### **In Conclusion**

WOC leaders are improving constituencies by designing programs reflective of community needs, broadening outreach efforts and redirecting new development pipelines to expand funding for underrepresented artists. Their efforts have been exemplified for decades.

Arts administrators must appoint WOC leadership within designated timeframes. Such goals should include mentorship and allyship programs that connect rising WOC leaders with experts in nonprofit arts fiscal management, development, marketing, customer relations management databases, etc. After goals are codified, arts administrators can proceed with designing a metric system that captures correlation between WOC leadership and new donor acquisition, expansive programs, community and audience engagement, etc. Currently, there is little to no data available to use as guidance for municipal, state, regional or national advancement.

As Chief of Learning and Community Engagement, Makeeba McCreary became the first person of color on the leadership team at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. (Pogrebin). She addresses the need for managers to be evaluated by “clear criteria.” “When managers argue they can’t find candidates of color, for example, organizations should say, ‘you don’t get to hire anybody until you find someone, or you don’t get a merit increase. We have to have consequences” (Pogrebin). Aligning nonprofit arts organizations’

objectives with contingencies will quantify WOC leadership and create accountability protocol within the nonprofit arts sector.

State and regional arts organizations can request funds through the National Endowment for the Arts to conduct annual qualitative assessments that calculate the ratios of WOC arts organization leaders to communities of BIPOC representation. Annual assessments can serve as benchmarks for progress or regress in increasing executive roles for WOC arts administrators. In either case, arts administrators can investigate what actions evolve or restrict inclusive leadership models that specifically support the success of WOC leadership.

Lastly, a preparatory incubator cohort can prepare WOC leaders to proficiently sustain or redirect organizational success. Preparatory incubators can include the participation from founding or tenured EDs. They can serve as resources to educate emerging WOC arts administrators of past and present organizational systems. Nonprofit arts organizations can be a model for best practices to implement during transitional leadership.

This call to action for all nonprofit arts administrators to acknowledge the work that has been underway by revolutionary WOC leaders puts the economy ahead in achieving contemporary solutions with the adaptation of a collective renewed mindset. As a rising WOC arts administrator, I follow the examples of my ancestors who have paved ways for WOC to use intersectional identity as a tool for advancement not hindrance. It is my intention to assist the field of arts administration in conducting research that quantifies the value of WOC leadership with respect to communities across the nation. The tribulations of the past have been documented and discussed fervently throughout history. Arts

administrators can be among the firsts to reflect organizational change through the value it places on its WOC leaders- leaders who embody the intelligence, compassion, creativity and work ethic necessary to evolve arts organizations and the world.

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