

Declaration to Fight Systemic Racism

In our last email to students, we promised a comprehensive clarification of our institutional response to the ongoing anti-racist protests, and since then we received an open letter, signed by 250 alumni and students of the school, requesting that further action be taken.

Recent protests have accelerated a reckoning across our sector, forcing organizations and leaders to be held to account for their participation in the systemized racism faced by BIPOC* artists and communities. This holding to account has been difficult but overdue, creating new opportunities for discourse and, more importantly, change.

However, the burden of this work has once again rested on the shoulders of BIPOC community members who are forced to do the heavy lifting of educating organizations, despite the imbalance of capacity between those individuals and well-resourced institutions, and advocating for themselves, despite the precarity and potential harm they may face in so doing. This work has been rendered all the more difficult by the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic which has denied us all the chance to labour together, in person. We are grateful for all of those doing the work. We are committed to taking the burden of this work on our shoulders and supporting BIPOC artists with the full force of our organizational capacity. We are committed to making the work of dismantling racist systems a priority for the organization.

The National Theatre School is a product of these systems. It was built on an understanding of white supremacy that has long attempted to advance the interests of a dominant culture by excluding and minimizing marginalized voices. In so doing, it has accrued substantial resources, often at the cost of the communities it has excluded. It has developed traditions, practices and pedagogy that have sought to dictate what theatre in this country should be and exclude practices that did not reinforce that view of a dominant culture. **These are the legacies of systemic racism and the colonial system, and NTS has been a full beneficiary of its privilege.**

The School's founding mission was to seed a Canadian theatre that was separate from its colonial parentage. NTS has contributed to counter cultural movements over the decades and the artists it has trained (and the artists who trained them) have fought to oppose our colonial history. However, while this was a founding principle for the School, we recognize that NTS has not been a place where everyone feels served, safe or even welcome. We must look at the full legacy of this institution, reflect on and repair what is flawed and be inspired by its potential.

Over the past seven years, NTS has been working diligently to build a more inclusive and diverse school, ensconcing those principles in an institutional statement of values, and naming them as organizational priorities in our 2019 business plan, but now we must dig deeper and actualize anti-racist and decolonizing practices that will transform the whole school. **We recognize as well that in this work, we have not decentered whiteness and that our BIPOC community members have struggled and suffered. We are sorry for the role NTS has played in this.** Going forward we will reposition the School as a manifestly anti-racist and anti-colonial organization, working with BIPOC expertise to make the difficult changes that will be required to create an organization that not only refuses to participate in these systems but works actively to undo them, in our sector and beyond.

To that end, we begin this next chapter with the following actions in the immediate future, with much more to be announced in the coming weeks:

IN PLACE BY	ACTION
July 24, 2020	A rigorous communications plan that will include a new section on our website and monthly email communiques distributed across our community to hold the school accountable to its objectives.
August 21, 2020	Publish a Call For Proposals to find an external expert to help develop an anti-racism and decolonization Audit & Action Plan, to be selected and hired within four weeks.
September 14, 2020	Publish a full report on current EDI**, anti-racism, and decolonized initiatives in place.
September 28, 2020	Publish an initial three-year financial plan, to be adjusted per recommendation from the Action Plan in development. Announce, to accompany our current Ombudsperson, an Ombud's-service for BIPOC students, staff, and faculty to safely report experiences of racism or exclusion.
October 15, 2020	Publish preliminary report on Student Bursary Program review, working to ensure financial access to training is equitably distributed.
Before January 2021	Publish methodology, preliminary report and audit of Anti-Racism and Decolonization Action Plan.

Before March 2021	Complete Action Plan, including review with implementation and financing plan for next 24 months.
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This work will be underpinned by our commitment to:

- **Listening and Consultation:** nothing can advance without broad and deep conversation and consultation with our community, our stakeholders, our partners, and our BIPOC students and alumnae;
- **Full transparency and accountability:** keeping our community informed of the work being done (and not done), with real consequences in place for a failure to advance on our objectives;
- **Alignment:** being specific about the different perspectives within the school and creating a shared plan that will be applied across and at every level of the organization;
- **Investment:** acknowledging the real costs of this work, remunerating those doing the work, and creating a financial plan that will support it.

Through this, we hope to create greater transparency about the work that is happening and needs to happen with greater conviction at the school. We understand this moment as the beginning of a new chapter of transformation, possibility, and growth for the National Theatre School. We commit to supporting our extended community through this process and look forward to engaging with all of you in substantive ways to become the organization we believe we can be.

Gideon, Alisa and Frédéric

***BIPOC:** Acronym that stands for *Black, Indigenous, and People of Color*.

****EDI:** *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*.