

DOBAMA
T H E A T R E

**LOVE &
RESPECT**

A L I V I N G D O C U M E N T F O R
A N T I - R A C I S M A C T I O N A N D A
C U L T U R E O F A U T H E N T I C I N C L U S I V I T Y
A T D O B A M A T H E A T R E

DEDICATION

This document is dedicated to the activists and artists from the BIPOC, Trans, Queer, Disabled, and Women's Communities, as well as all other activism from marginalized bodies who have been treated inequitably and who have done the work of anti-racism and equity publicly and privately in this industry. Your work on the front lines has brought our field to this moment of reckoning, and we are grateful to be called to greater action.

We acknowledge and apologize for the harm caused by Dobama and other theatre institutions that made that activism necessary. This living document is our next bold step in repairing that harm in concrete ways, moving beyond platitude and into new investments of time, money, and resources.



AN INTRODUCTION

When Founding Artistic Director Donald Bianchi established Dobama Theatre in 1959, he did so to produce important new plays for the Northeast Ohio community with a culture of “love and respect” – a phrase that he signed letters and notes with throughout his tenure and a tradition that Dobama continues to this day.

This creed of “love and respect” is seen throughout Dobama’s history, in the stories that have been told onstage, the people who have helped to tell them, and in important decisions like the commitment to artist safety and fair pay. Now, 60 years after Dobama’s founding, both our mission and our core values remain the same.

“The show must go on” is not our mantra. We believe that the people are the art. Prioritizing the safety and well-being of people above all else is an ethical and moral imperative. By fostering an environment where artists and staff feel safe and supported, we’re able to create the best possible art. Yet we recognize that there is so much more that must to be done to fully and authentically love and respect every member of the community we serve.

Whatever we do will not be enough, but we must try anyway in the attempt to create a place where everyone is safe, is cared for, and can use their gifts to create better art.

WHAT DOES "LOVE & RESPECT" MEAN AT DOBAMA?

To *love* is to care for each person who works with Dobama by supporting them in their entirety, not just in regard to the work they can do for the theatre. To *respect* is to revere each individual’s work, training, words, feelings, time, life experience, and world outside the theatre’s walls.

WHAT IS THIS DOCUMENT?

This is a living document for anti-racism action and the next steps in creating a culture of authentic inclusivity at Dobama Theatre. The document is divided into three parts: **The People, The Work**, and **The Process**. *The People* come first in this document, as they also do in our core values. These steps care for the whole person and create a larger, more equitable table for all to pursue our mission together. *The Work* outlines what actions are being taken to root out white supremacist and patriarchal structures and to replace them with organizational tools built on consensus, communication, trust, and circular management models. *The Process* describes how we will move forward in equitably representing and investing in the community we serve, and how we will continue to assess our progress, remain accountable, and determine further action in years to come.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Dobama Theatre has a history of putting safety and equity first. From the move to become a union theatre in 2014 to being recognized with the AEA's Kathryn V. Lamkey Award for representation on and off stage, this work has been central to who we are. But we recognize that systemic racism and patriarchal practices continue to exist in every level of our organization. Bold, immediate structural reforms are required.

For the past ten months we've found ourselves, like so many others, in a unique time. The convergence of a shutdown due to global pandemic and a renewed focus on the epidemic of racism in America that resulted from BIPOC activism following the murder of George Floyd created a moment when we found it essential to intensely examine our practices and those of the American Theatre.

We are unendingly grateful for those who have been at the forefront of antiracism work for decades, and must particularly acknowledge the gracious and thorough work of the theatre artists that created the BIPOC Theatre Demands resulting from the #WeSeeYouWhiteAmericanTheatre movement. Dobama began by shifting our operational model to one of consensus and circular management. Then, we formed a Task Force consisting of staff, board members, and community representatives to create a plan of action. We contracted with ALJP Consulting and, led by Leandro Zaneti, held weekly Task Force meetings from September through January. This document was the result of that work.

The Board of Directors unanimously adopted the "Love & Respect" document on March 8, 2021. Dobama has made this commitment to action and we will be held accountable. To read more about Dobama Theatre's Anti-Racism actions, including our solidarity and accountability statements, visit: dobama.org/antiracism.

THE PEOPLE

- REDESIGN THE PRODUCTION PROCESS TO CARE WHOLLY FOR EVERY INDIVIDUAL.

Create space for building trust and providing support to each company member to prioritize physical, emotional, and mental well-being above traditional productivity.

- Institute 5-day rehearsal weeks (formerly 6-day rehearsal weeks).
- Add an additional week to every rehearsal process.
- Add a full-day “Company Cooperative” for collective conversations and training at the start of every rehearsal process.
- Eliminate all 10-out-of-12 technical rehearsals and add more days for technical rehearsal within the production process.
- Make space for trust-building in rehearsals and meetings.
- Build in decompression training for actors to promote self-care and support in “taking off their character” and re-centering after rehearsals, performances, and/or production runs.
- Make time for substantive check-ins at the start and end of every rehearsal for all in attendance.
- Consult with actors about all hair & wardrobe before final approval.
- Create a content advisory agreement for all artists working on a show.

- REIMAGINE THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

Ensure that the Board is representative of the community it serves.

- Relaunch the Dobama Theatre Board of Directors and at least double the current size of the Board.
- Set the goal of at least 20% of the Board being BIPOC by the end of 2021.
- Recruit Board members who specialize in inclusion work.
- Recruit Board members who have relevant experience by bringing more artists on to the Board.
- Add more representation of all kinds to Board by thinking outside the traditional non-profit, American Theatre box of what job background, experience, age, income a Board member has. This includes (but is not limited to) welcoming small business owners, teachers, artists, theatre artists and other members of the theatre community, as well as rotating positions for GYM playwrights, emerging artists, and Dobama interns.
- Craft new, clear board responsibilities that extend beyond the traditional model of fundraising and rubberstamping.

- **ENSURE REPRESENTATION IN EDUCATION PROGRAMS.**

Hire theatre artists from marginalized communities to build careers and combat harmful, antiquated stereotypes.

- Move internship program to a paid model to remove financial barriers for access to theatre mentorship. This includes an hourly wage for season post-undergraduate internships, college credit for undergraduate internships, and production stipends for interns in all departments. Target: Fall 2022.
- Collaborate with more BIPOC and LGBTQ+ teaching artists in the Dobama Emerging Artists Program (DEAP).
- Bring together a more representative group of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ theatre artists at all levels of the Marilyn Bianchi Kids' Playwriting Festival.

- **EXPAND, ENHANCE, AND EMPOWER CREATIVE TEAMS.**

Include and collaborate with theatre artists and professionals whose position is dedicated to the safety and well-being of the entire company.

- Include an Intimacy Director, Intimacy Choreographer, and/or EDI Advocate on every production staff.
- Include one or more production team members with EDI training to focus on these protections and safeguards.
- Create a Casting Associate position who will assist in expanding thinking around casting possibility and help guard against implicit bias based on race, ethnicity, gender, sex, sexual orientation, disability, or body shape.

- **CARE WHOLLY FOR EVERYONE THAT WORKS WITH THE THEATRE.**

Be an organization that respects every employee by serving them in their entirety.

- Establish employee joy as a priority for the organization.
- Offer paid time off to all employees, full and part-time.
- Modify policies that prioritize customers at the employee's expense.
- Use circular management structures built around consensus so that every employee has agency and contributes in decision-making.
- Continue our obligation to a living wage for staff and our commitment to increasing compensation for freelance artists and production teams.

THE WORK

- ORGANIZE AND PREPARE FOR ACTION.

Center equity, representation, and inclusion in all organizational planning.

- Make the Love & Respect Document widely available to the public using multiple platforms and create forums to discuss its creation and content.
- Create a new Strategic Plan that integrates active social justice work at every level of the organization.
- Review the wording of the current Mission, and create new Core Values and Vision statements that center social justice / de-center whiteness.

- EDUCATE AND TRAIN OUR TEAMS.

Provide training in anti-racism and implicit bias at every level of the organization.

- Provide training for audience engagement facilitators, specifically around interrupting racism and being an accomplice in anti-oppression work.
- Provide Anti-Racism, Implicit Bias training for Front of House, Board of Directors, Staff, Designers, Cast, and Crew.
- Provide community training at the start of season and at first rehearsals.
- Provide formal training to the Board on Anti-Racism and anti-oppression efforts.

- DO THE WORK OF WELCOMING.

Become a more visibly inclusive, available, and inviting place for our entire community, both audiences and collaborators.

- Recruit ushers and front of house staff that are more representative of the community we serve.
- Invest in expanded marketing and outreach that targets underserved communities, particularly related to our expanded Pay-What-You-Can program.
- Increase marketing for marginalized communities in the places they are.
- Contract a BIPOC Marketing consultant to assist in equity efforts.
- Be a venue for community conversations.
- Add Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ+ flags in front of / inside of building.

- **CONSTRUCT A PIPELINE OF ACCESS.**

Create more accessibility, opportunity, training, and support for our entire community.

- Create a mentorship program for early career BIPOC theatre leaders and artists.
- Take action to address pipeline issues for Designers of Color in collaboration with Karamu House by expanding training, networking, and opportunity.
- Focus on creating mentorship and training opportunities for low-income emerging artists.
- Be a venue for conversations around equity in the theatre community.
- Create paid opportunities for technical theatre artists and stage managers who have greater socioeconomic and financial barriers to access.

- **HOLD OURSELVES ACCOUNTABLE.**

Evaluate where we are and take responsibility for further action moving forward.

- Create community agreements around accountability.
- Complete our expanded handbook so artists know the kind of organization they are working with and see our core principles in concrete actions.
- Create documents of accountability for the standards set by the organization.
- Administer more extensive surveys of demographic information for audiences and theatre workers at Dobama Theatre on an ongoing basis.

THE PROCESS

- REIMAGINE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES AND OPERATIONS.

Prioritize feminine and indigenous strategies over top-down, patriarchal structures.

- Read Anti-Racism statements and Inclusivity statement at monthly meetings, first rehearsals, and include written copies in organization packets.
- Add a full-company postmortem to the end of every production process.
- Increase socializing between each production's company and staff.
- Do a wage assessment to ensure that the disparity in compensation between the lowest-earning and highest-earning staff member does not exceed 200%.
- Institute circular management models instead of top-down structures.
- Create regular check-ins to discuss action item progress and feedback.
- Sustain a culture of calling in / out racist, sexist, ableist, homophobic, xenophobic, and oppressive language.
- Integrate Emergent Strategy*, (an indigenous and feminine-inspired approach based on consensus centered decision making), into every element of the organization. **Emergent Strategy is intentionally creating an ecosystem of trust, presence, space, focus, respect, empowerment, agency, and equity where a group can engage in simple interactions that generate many possibilities (even contradictory ones), then explore, experiment with, and adapt those opportunities into action that supports movement toward a shared goal.*

- INVEST FURTHER IN AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

Devote more resources and time to serving our neighbors in more substantive ways.

- Continue to create community volunteer opportunities as an organization. (i.e. volunteer at Food Bank, City Mission, etc.)
- Formalize partnerships with public school districts and community organizations (i.e. Boys and Girls Club, CMSD, The Centers, etc).
- Develop expanded partnerships with local Black-owned businesses, and establish parity for each service.
- Support local businesses and get to know their owners and leaders.

- **EXPAND VITAL PARTNERSHIPS AND DEEPEN IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS.**

Partner more holistically with the dynamic arts organizations serving the underserved.

- Further invest in our partnership with Karamu House, specifically in the community-wide discussions through Theatre Artists for Social Change (TASC).
- Move forward conversations with arts organizations around shared productions, education programming, young designer mentorships, and cooperative events.
- Schedule opportunities for Board members, staff, and the Dobama community in general to promote and attend "en masse" events offered by organizations that serve marginalized communities.

- **DEMOCRATIZE PROGRAMMING.**

Make space for representative voices in the season and programming planning process.

- Develop a production selection rubric that includes both anti-racism and representation as metrics.
- Create a programming advisory committee to ensure robust conversation around representation in all its forms during season planning.
- Goal of 50% of the board being BIPOC by 2023, including artist representation.
- Commit to representation and agency on the executive level by creating direct Board-report position(s) with equal artistic decision making and administrative authority.
- Revisit this document annually to assess our progress and adjust action items in an effort to hold the organization accountable and to continue Dobama's transformation into an equitable institution.

A CONCLUSION

Dobama Theatre is taking the essential steps outlined above out of our basic, shared responsibility. They are being released to the public so that we may be held accountable to these commitments. Publishing this document publicly also helps continue to set important standards regarding artist safety and informs the community we serve about what is being done in those efforts at Dobama.

This document is an important start in this next stage of the work of equity and inclusivity. The steps outlined above are actions that can be achieved within the next eighteen months. But this is a living document. It will be reviewed annually to track our progress and assess what further action is required. These are simply our next steps on the path to true inclusivity. Dobama Theatre will also conduct town hall events for community discussion about the important actions outlined in this document.

We submit these actions and practices with humility and openness. We don't have it all figured out, but we are committed to taking a stand, learning as we go, and adapting to the needs of our shared community. We must not wait to do this "perfectly." We cannot wait for more time or resources. The time for bold action is now. This is our opportunity for transformational change. We would rather be held accountable for our mistakes than forgiven our inaction [1].

We hope you'll join us in this vital work. It will take all of us to create a world that is equitable and safe. It will take all of us to nurture a community of love and respect.

[1] Adapted from the #Asians4BlackLives protocols as quoted in *Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge and recognize the land upon which we reside. We express gratitude to those who lived and worked here before us; those whose stewardship and resilient spirit makes our residence possible on this traditional homeland of the Lenape (Delaware), Shawnee, Wyandot Miami, Ottawa, Potawatomi, and other Great Lakes tribes (Chippewa, Kickapoo, Wea, Pinakahsw, and Kaskaskia). We also acknowledge the thousands of Native Americans who now call Northeast Ohio home. Dobama Theatre and the greater Cleveland area occupy land officially ceded by 1100 chiefs and warriors signing the Treaty of Greenville in 1795.

We're grateful to American author, doula, women's rights activist and Black feminist adrienne maree brown whose book *Emergent Strategy* has informed much of our work towards an indigenous, feminine approach to management, communications, and operations.

We admire the work of Edgar Villanueva and his book *Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance*, which helped inform many of the action steps in this document and will continue to guide strategic planning moving forward.

We're thankful for ALJP Consulting, particularly founders Jocelyn Prince and Al Heartley, for their expertise in this process and willingness to be a lead partner for Dobama in this vital work. We look forward to furthering this relationship and our work with ALJP.

Our heartfelt thanks to Leandro Zaneti of ALJP consulting for his mentorship, care, collaboration, guidance, and spirit that allowed these next steps to be created in a holistic, authentic, and organic way. This would not have been possible without Leandro.

Words cannot adequately express the presence that Nina Domingue Glover is for Dobama and for the Cleveland Theatre Community as a whole. We are deeply grateful for her work as part of the Task Force that created this living document and for her ever-present grace, leadership, truth-telling, artistry, and collaborative spirit. Her expertise was and is invaluable.

There is an enormous debt to be paid to the artists and community that created the #WeSeeYouWAT (White American Theatre) movement and the subsequent demands for action in the industry. We're ever appreciative of the emotional labor and immense effort put forth in the work that was done to this point. We acknowledge that labor, its cost, and direct everyone reading this document to understand the catalyst that was and is #WeSeeYouWAT.