PRODUCER'S NOTE ON CASTING FOR 1776

Our production of 1776 has inspired a great deal of internal conversation about how to cast it. We put together a *1776* cast that is diverse in many ways. But because the show (SPOILER ALERT: Heading into a major plot point here…) hinges on the dramatic fight between the founders who wanted to abolish slavery and those who insisted on keeping it, we had to think hard about whether we should cast African Americans. *1776* is a historical retelling of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It shows us how, in our desire to create a union and a nation unlike any other in human history, we allowed a decision to be made that denied people their rights, their humanity, and their ability to be full citizens. We allowed people to be considered property.

In the end, we chose not to cast African Americans, because we wanted you to feel and see their *absence* from the conversation at this crucial moment in history. The authors of *1776* show us how horrifying compromises were made in pursuit of the signing. The union was formed with a fatal flaw that would lead to the Civil War—and to a nation still struggling with the results of those compromises. One way to comprehend that decision is to realize that it was made possible because so many were not in the room.

When I work with our creative teams to cast a Muny production, we always take in a variety of ideas, needs influences, beliefs, desires, and obligations. Above all, we are committed to diverse casting, color-blind and color-conscious casting. Given The Muny's civic roots and tradition, it's especially important that as often as possible, our diverse audiences see themselves reflected on our stage.

Understanding the wide range of shows we produce—from different eras, of distinctive styles, with unique histories—we start by looking at a particular show's story. Specifically, we study the lives and stories of all the characters. What are their journeys? What do we know about their backgrounds, and how the writers have both defined them and also not defined them? What are we being told about the time and world in which they live? And does that matter to the story?

When we're creating shows that are broad fantasies or reimagined children's stories, those characters are so metaphorical that we have great room to define or redefine them on our stage. A dancing candlestick is a dancing candlestick.

But when a show's storyline contains characters and ideas that reflect, or question, aspects of race or gender, then we begin a deeper analysis. For example, in *Hairspray*, you have to honor the racial truth of the characters in order for the story to make sense. *The Gershwins' Porgy & Bess* must be performed by African Americans.   When we produced *THE WIZ* last season, we honored its history, and we had an all African-American cast.

If you then also layer into the process, as does *1776*, characters pulled straight from history, that adds yet another dimension. You study if and how the real-world history impacts the story on stage, and you then decide whether or not to take that history into account with your casting. You have to ask if you are re-enacting history or reflecting upon it. The extraordinary and landmark musical *HAMILTON* explores American history, for example, but the question of slavery is not its dramatic axis.

Artistic decisions are never perfect, and I'm the first to acknowledge that there may be a different approach to casting this show. I also need to acknowledge that I wrestled heavily with the idea of putting an African-American actor on stage for this show, asking him or her to listen to arguments eradicating their humanity.   This is not to hide the history, or to assume they could not accomplish this acting challenge. It was a question for me of what I could ask another human to endure in pursuit of a production, and what might be gained and or lost in that pursuit.

We believe that what you will see on stage achieves what we set out to create: a production of *1776* that illuminates, respects, and inspires us all.