The Representation of Minorities in American Musical Theater since the 1950s

Krstičević, Klara

Odsjek za anglistiku

Filozofski fakultet

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The Representation of Minorities in American Musical Theater since the 1950s

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Kandidat: Klara Krstičević

Mentor: dr. sc. Jelena Šesnić

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1. Introduction

Musical theatre has always had an important role in American history and culture. Broadway, as a physical place in which arts meets the wider population, proves its importance even today when movie musicals are becoming more and more popular. Musical theatre, like theatre in general, is a performative art which in most cases serves as a socio-political commentary on the era in which it was created. For example, the plot of *West Side Story* has apparently nothing to do with politics but at the same time it is a social commentary about the differences in positions that white people and people of color hold in American society. More recently, musical *Hadestown*, which won a Tony award for best musical in 2019, features a song "Why Do We Build a Wall", which, even though it came out in 2010 as part of a concept album, acquired a new meaning in the era of the Trump administration. Musicals, like most art, are a reflection of the society in which they are created, and most musicals tend to show the audience either an exaggerated portrayal of a certain social or political issue, or portray those issues discreetly while being concerned with other topics.

Musical theatre is interesting because it exists somewhere in the space between opera, plays, and forms of popular entertainment. It depends on audience accepting that sometimes characters burst into a song, or that a whole story is being told through a song; it requires actors to be able to act, sing, and dance; it depends on an orchestra and conductor, lighting, and entire crew in the backstage making sure nothing goes wrong. For Broadway audiences, seeing the spectacle of musical come to life every night must be an amazing experience. Musicals such as *Cats*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Wicked*, *Hamilton,* etc. which had or still have a long life on Broadway, and have been revived and toured around the world, prove that musical theatre is appreciated by audiences in America, but also around the world.

As an aspect of musical theater's social topicality my paper will focus specifically on representations of minorities in Broadway musicals since the 1950s to the present. To review

the presentation of minorities on Broadway stage this text analyzes five musicals which were produced in the period from the 1950s to today. The issue considered is not only the ethnic or racial background of actors or a creative team behind a musical, but also the manner in which a minority is presented in a musical, and how the time in which the musical was created influenced such a representation.

To discuss the evolution of representation of people of color on Broadway stage we'll analyze the following musicals. First is the analysis of 1967 all-black production of *Hello, Dolly!* which, even though it was successful, was criticized for its non-integration. The second musical discussed is *Hamilton* (2015), which earned praise and criticism over its casting of people of color in the roles of historically white figures. After the analysis of these two musicals featuring African Americans, the next two musicals discussed are *West Side Story* (1957) and *In the Heights* (2008), both representing the life of Puerto Rican immigrants in New York City, but in different ways. The last musical discussed is *Grease* (1972). *Grease* does not fall under the umbrella of 'representation of minorities,' but because of its importance and popularity in American popular culture it can be viewed as a quintessentially American musical or story, which is why it is important to review how the musical changed over the years. As we will see first productions of *Grease* shied away from presenting an integrated school in the 1950s, but as the times changed *Grease* adapted and evolved in some aspects, like representation of minorities, while in some it stayed in its original form. My argument is not meant to be an exhaustive examination of all Broadway minority productions but intends to offer a framework for considering a few crucial points in the relationship of the popular stage and exemplary minority representation. Thereby, I intend to outline on one hand the mimetic aspect of the theatre, and on the other its important public functions and outreach.

Even though the connection between the topics discussed in this text, race and musical theater, might not be self-evident, there is a historical precedent for the cross-section of

entertainment theatre and race in America which is nineteenth-century blackface minstrelsy. John Kenrick analyzes the evolution of theatre all the way from ancient Greece, and how it developed into what we today call musical theatre. In a discussion about development of theatre in the United States, Kenrick discusses the popularity and influence of blackface minstrel shows. He explains that blackface performers were present "in circuses and travelling shows from the 1790s onward" (Kenrick 52), but it was Thomas Rice in the 1820s who "caused a nationwide sensation with blackface song and dance act that burlesqued negro slaves" (52). Popularity of minstrel shows meant a growing number of companies performing these kinds of shows as John Kenrick explains, "The production and marketing of minstrel shows marked the beginning of American show business, with a nationwide complement of producers, managers, writers, and theatre personnel relying on minstrelsy for part or all of their income" (53). Even though blackface minstrel shows began losing popularity in the 1900s, Kenrick points out that the echoes of the form of minstrel shows remain in the popular culture today suggesting that "Jim Crow and Zip Coon [two stock characters in minstrel shows] are still appearing in movies and television sitcoms where black performers depict the shiftless fool or the conniving dolt" (58).

Today's mainstream culture condemns the use of blackface (even though every once in a while there is a scandal involving a celebrity or a politician who did blackface), but the appropriation of the culture of people of color is very popular. For the musicals discussed in this text the only known use of blackface/brownface is in 1961 film adaptation of *West Side Story* in which actor George Chakiris, who portrayed Bernardo, was brownfaced. Frances Negrón-Muntaner explains, "brownface served the function of underscoring Bernardo's ethnicity; it was a clamp used to avoid any ethnic misreading, and hence, his 'realness' and potential reversibility" (91), but concludes, "Together with his flawed accent and eccentric Spanish pronunciation, the same devices designed to make him more authentically Puerto

Rican are responsible for his unconvincing performance – which nevertheless landed him an Oscar" (91).

If nineteenth-century popular theatre was rooted in blackface minstrelsy, in the twentieth century, in particular just before and during the period in which discussion in this text begins, another significant transformation was taking place. The revolution of Broadway in the 20th century began in the 1940s and 1950s when Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II joined forces and started working together. To assess the influence Rodgers and Hammerstein had on the development of Broadway Ethan Mordden lists seven of what he calls "R&H rules." Mordden lists these seven rules and discusses the musicals which followed the Rodgers and Hammerstein model, and some which did not. Rule number one is "Develop each story's community background, its culture and mores" (Mordden 158). Of the musicals discussed in this text this rule probably best applies to Lin-Manuel Miranda's musicals, especially *In the Heights*. Rule number two: "Write about people whose lives have meaning" (Mordden 158). This rule applies to all musicals, the difference being in the way characters search for meaning. This rule applies to characters such as Nina and Usnavi in *In the Heights*, Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr in *Hamilton*, etc.

Rogers and Hammerstein's third rule was "Start uniquely" (Mordden 160). Mordden describes that "Typically, a musical of the 1940s began with a lengthy overture, played in semi-darkness. As it was ending – or, after it ended, to 'curtain music,' the house lights darkened all the way, as if to usher the public into the ceremony of theatre, and the curtain rose" (160), while Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals - Mordden describes *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel* - began without an overture. Most musicals today begin in this fashion; for example, *In the Heights* opens with a radio voice announcing Fourth of July celebration, and with Graffiti Pete spraying Usnavi's wall. Usnavi yells at Graffiti Pete, and immediately the opening number begins. *Hamilton* opens with King George III addressing the audience, and

begins with the opening number. *West Side Story* opens by introducing the audience to the two gangs, the Sharks and the Jets, and by establishing a rivalry between them only through dance.

Rogers and Hammerstein's fourth rule says "Anchor the score with character traction" (Mordden 161). Mordden explains this rule as "the restless, searching monologue in which a character lays bare his feelings to the public, most often structured as a collection of songlets while his focus shifts from topic to topic" (161). The only character in *Hamilton* to whom this rule can be applied is Aaron Burr. In act one Burr reveals his feelings about love, life, and taking risks in life in a song called "Wait for It," which is his life motto. In the act two Burr explains what his ambition in life is in the song "The Room Where It Happens," and reveals that he wants to be in that "Room". *In the Heights* follows this rule through Nina, who in act one in song "Breathe" reveals her struggles with her identity, and nervousness about telling her parents about losing her scholarship. Then in act two, after Abuela Claudia dies, in the song "Everything I Know" Nina remembers her and promises she will "make [her] proud with everything I know" (Hudes 122). Dolly Levi in *Hello, Dolly!* goes through a backwards progress in which she finally moves on after her husband's death, and allows herself to be happy again.

Rodgers and Hammerstein's rule five says "Change your genre from show to show" (Mordden 162), but since this text follows only two musicals written by the same person, Lin-Manuel Miranda, only his evolution in themes can be followed. Miranda changed theme of the musical from slightly autobiographical depiction of life in Washington Heights, to not completely historically accurate biography of Alexander Hamilton. What remains consistent in Lin-Manuel Miranda's musicals is the use of different genres of music for different characters, but mainly the use of rap to tell the story. Rule six says "Don't have rules" (Mordden 164), while rule seven is "The second act should last half as long as the first with

twice as much action" (Mordden 166). The only actually available theatre performance of musicals discussed in this text is *Hamilton,* and even though act one and act two last for approximately the same amount of time, act two is definitely more action packed and fast paced than the act one.

Even though musical theatre can be viewed as an escapist genre, it cannot escape the fact that, from its beginning, it was steeped in a specific image of and skewed representation of race. But if musical theatre is 'only' an escapist genre then why is proper representation of minorities so important? This question is probably best answered in the section about *West Side Story* and *In the Heights*. These two musicals, with their representation of Puerto Rican immigrants, present different views of their society, culture, their position in American society, etc. Both musicals were a reflection of the times they were created in, *West Side Story* of a time when people of color were viewed as the 'other' to the white Americans, and *In the Heights* in a generation that sees the contributions of different cultures to the American culture. These two musicals are a testament of how socio-cultural conditions in the United States have changed, but also how a musical about a specific culture, in this case Puerto Rican, presented by a member of said culture leaves the audience with a better and more honest depiction.

2. African Americans in representations and productions of Broadway musicals

The turning point in the history of African American musicals on Broadway is marked, like overall history of African Americans in the United States, by the Civil Rights Movement. John Bush Jones writes: "Prior to the 1960s, every decade of the century had seen at least a few commercially successful black-cast musicals on Broadway, whether written by blacks, whites, or mixed-race creative teams" (203). Jones emphasizes that all musicals with black cast before the 1960s "depicted African Americans' differences from whites – their indigenous music, dance, humor, and folkways" (203 – 204). It is not unusual that these musicals were not popular during the 1960s because the era of the Civil Rights Movement emphasized the similarities between black and white communities and what they had in common so "the musicals that emphasized black singularity were out of sync with the times" (Jones 204). The second half of the 1960s was marked by an entirely different kind of protests fomented by the death of Reverend Martin Luther King in 1968. Protest became more "militant, giving rise to black separatism, black nationalism, Black Power, Black Muslims, Black Panthers" (Jones 204). This change in social order reflected in the way Broadway musicals were written. The emphasis on black pride gave rise to the black authors who wrote musicals for black audiences.

The end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s were marked by black writers, who "eschewing the separatist politics of black radical groups . . . began creating shows that would appeal to both black and white audiences" (Jones 216). This early 1970s era of black musicals ended in 1973 with *Raisin*, adaptation of *A Rasin in the Sun,* in which "a black family chases the American Dream, which after numerous setbacks they finally achieve in the form of a home of their own" (Jones 218). With a black family at the center and interracial crew of playwrights, producers, choreographers, directors and lyricists, the show "spoke both to the

black American experience and to the ideals and aspirations of all Americans regardless of color ...” (Jones 218).

After three years of absence from Broadway, musicals with an all-black cast came back in 1975 with *The Wiz. The Wiz*, as Jones describes it was a “happy deconstruction of *The Wizard of Oz* to Motown beat” (224). Warren Hoffman describes *The Wiz* thusly: “While many people think of it as an all-black version of *The Wizard of Oz*, it is an entirely original musical that looks at L. Frank Baum’s famous children’s story through an African American lens” (116). *The Wiz,* which had an all-black cast and crew with the exception of book writer, William F. Brown, won seven Tony awards including Best Musical.

In the course of just one decade Broadway musicals shifted from representation of African Americans as different from white Americans, to musicals that emphasized their similarities, then back to musicals which emphasized their differences, but this time those musicals were fueled by racial pride.

2.1. *Hello, Dolly!*

An important moment in the history of casting African Americans in Broadway musicals came in 1967, with staging of *Hello, Dolly!* with an all-black cast. *Hello, Dolly!* is a story about Dolly Gallager Levi, a widower who, as she proclaims, “ha[s] always been a woman who arranges things” (*Hello, Dolly!* 03:42-03:47). Dolly travels from New York City to Yonkers to arrange a marriage between Horace Vandergelder and Irene Molloy, but actually her plan is to marry Mr. Vandergelder herself. After a lot of Dolly’s scheming in the end everyone is happy and Dolly and Mr. Vandergelder get married.

Originally *Hello, Dolly!* opened on Broadway in 1964 with an all-white cast led by Carol Channing in the role of Dolly Gallagher Levi. The shift from all white to all-black cast in 1967 came without changing any aspects of the musical since “the names of all the

characters remained the same, the action took place in Yonkers and in Manhattan, and the time was the 1880s" (Pao 180). The all black cast was led by Pearl Bailey in the role of Dolly Gallagher Levi and Cab Calloway in the role of Horace Vandergelder. Fredrick O'Neal, who was the president of Actors' Equity at the time, commented on the all black cast of *Hello, Dolly!*: "this seems to be a favor in reverse. It's very difficult for our policy to get through to producers – casting should be done according to ability" (Pao 182). His opinion of the production was that "... we are sacrificing our principles for a few bucks" (Pao 182). Angela C. Pao emphasizes that "Once the show opened, the initial reservations of some critics were apparently overcome by the quality of the performances in the leading and supporting roles, and the effectiveness of the production as a whole" (182). It seems that, no matter what reasons producer David Merrick had for staging *Hello, Dolly!* with an all-black cast, the result was a production that "brought down the house and received nothing but rave reviews, which praised the production for giving new life to the long-running musical" (Pao 180). Even though some critics expressed that at first they thought that casting an all-black cast in a production was a form of segregation and all of the reviews mentioned that the cast was all black, "many reviewers merely noted the fact without further comment regarding any special significance or possible controversy" (Pao 182).

Pearly Bailey appeared on Broadway stage as Dolly Gallagher Levi again in 1975 as a part of revival production that was touring the United States. This time the cast of *Hello, Dolly!* was racially mixed, but "this show was less enthusiastically received than the original 1967 Bailey-led production" (Pao 182). The new interracial cast brought comments about casting of previous productions. Martin Gottfried wrote:

> The only thing good about the revival is that the engagement is limited. No. One more thing. It isn't the segregated modern day minstrel show that Pearl Bailey's original "Hello, Dolly!" was. This is a fully integrated company rather than that one whose

> main identity was not the show, or even the star, but the fact that everyone in it was black. Could a black actor work only in an all-black show? And what in the world did "Dolly" have to do with a completely black setting? This Bailey version is admirably interracial. (Pao 183)

New production of *Hello, Dolly!* obviously sparked comments about the all black casting of the 1967 version, but while Martin Gottfried states that the main identity of 1967 production was its all black cast, critics in 1967 commented on the racial structure of the musical but they noted that the quality of performance and overall production overshadowed the fact that the cast was all black. The second part of Martin Gottfried's quote concerns the position of Dolly in a black setting. It is interesting to note that he did not question Dolly herself being played by an African American actress, but only her position among black cast. Angela C. Pao argues that the central topic of the musical, matchmaking and mating, is "a preoccupation common to all human cultures in one way or another, [and] was easily shifted to a different cultural group" (184). The only part of the setting that required some suspension of disbelief from the audience was placing the characters in Yonkers where, in reality, African Americans moved in only after World War II (Pao 184).

Title character's full name, Dolly Gallager Levi, is the only marker of her ethnic identity since "... the character's ethnic or religious identity is never explored in the script of the musical ..." (Pao 196). Her maiden and married names give some insight into her ancestry: "As an obvious index of Irish and Jewish cultural origins and affiliations, the name suggests Dolly is an Irish American (at least on her father's side of the family) who married a Jewish man, Ephraim Levi" (Pao 196). Angela C. Pao points out that none of the critics, either of the all black or interracial cast, commented on the relationships among the characters. More precisely, no one asked the question, "Was there a feeling the producers had eschewed a black and white cast in order to avoid dealing with the issue of having an actor of one race playing a

character romantically pursuing a character played by an actor of a different race" (Pao 184)? The 1975 cast of *Hello, Dolly!* had an interracial cast, but the changes only affected members of the ensemble. These characters had no romantic relationships with each other so there was no fear of provoking outrage by presenting an interracial relationship. Both productions marked an important moment in the history of casting African Americans on Broadway, but it seems that, although the producers took some risks with the casting, they still had a long way to go.

2.2. *Hamilton: An American Musical*

The opening of *Hamilton: An American Musical* on Broadway in 2015 coincided with the campaigns for presidential elections in 2016 (the Republican party's first presidential debate was held on the same day). The presidential campaign and the following election showed that American people today have different opinions about what they consider as real American values. The story of *Hamilton* fits perfectly into this conversation because it follows the lives of America's Founding fathers and the creation of a new nation, but as Lin-Manuel Miranda, the creator of the musical, says "This is a story about America then, told by America now" (Delman). Donald Trump's slogan for the 2016 election "Make America Great Again" recalls the time when America was created, but Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical shows that the founding fathers of America were, although courageous and intelligent, very flawed people. The debates spawned by the musical allow us to consider how the question of popular representations impacts the discussions of the content of national history showing an imbrication of popular culture and other public domains.

The genius of *Hamilton: An American Musical* lies in Lin-Manuel Miranda's lyrics, his use of historical documents for narration throughout the performance, representation of different characters by different genres of music, and the way in which certain ideas, such as "I am not throwing away my shot," persist though the entire musical. Another important

aspect of this musical is its casting of people of color in the roles of white historical figures. The difference between casting people of color in *Hello, Dolly!* and *Hamilton* is that all the characters in *Hello, Dolly!* are imaginary and the audience does not have any previous assumptions about what they should look like. On the other hand, audience that comes to see *Hamilton* already know the story about founding fathers, and have seen their pictures in history books. Casting people of color in the role of George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and other historical figures requires a higher degree of suspension of belief to truly appreciate the story being told. Ron Chernow, whose book on Alexander Hamilton inspired Lin-Manuel Miranda to write a musical about his life, and who was a historical consultant in the writing process, talked in an interview about the moment when he first saw the cast, "I remember poking my head into the room and seeing eight actors standing in front of eight music stands, thinking, 'Oh my goodness, they're all black and Latino! What on earth is Lin-Manuel thinking?'" (Delman), but he further explains "after a minute or two I started to listen and forgot the color or ethnicity of these astonishingly talented young performers. Within five minutes, I became a militant on the subject of color-blind casting" (Delman).

The reviews of the musical are full of praise for Lin-Manuel Miranda, director Thomas Kail, choreographer Andy Blankenbuehler, and composer Alex Lacamoire, but opinions on the casting differ from one extreme to the other. Kendra James, a woman of color, praises the casting choices because she thinks "Lin-Manuel Miranda has done what many history curricula fail to do: allow young people of color to see themselves in history". She points out that she loved learning about American history in school, but as a woman of color "I was never encouraged to see myself as an active participant in it — at least not until they got to Rosa Parks" (James). Reading Kendra James' article is to understand what impact proper representation can have on people of color. For Kendra James seeing people of color cast in

the roles of white historical figures is a positive step forward to seeing themselves as a part of American history. Lyra D. Monteiro has a completely different opinion about not just casting choices, but also the story told in *Hamilton*. Monteiro argues that although *Hamilton* has racially diverse cast it falls short in portraying actual historical people of color who lived at the time of the Revolutionary war and helped white historical figures whose lives are presented in the musical. She explains: "With a cast dominated by actors of color, the play is nonetheless yet another rendition of 'exclusive past,' with its focus on the deeds of 'great white men' and its silencing of the presence and contributions of the people of color in the Revolutionary era" (Monteiro 90). Monteiro also points out that that famous description of the musical "America then, told by America now" is problematic because it "is misleading and actively erases the presence and role of black and brown people in Revolutionary America, as well as before and since. America 'then' *did* look like the people in this play, if you looked outside of the halls of government" (93).

Ishmael Reed in his review of *Hamilton* explains the tendency of predominantly white historians who study Revolutionary era to present Alexander Hamilton as an abolitionist. Reed points to two historians, Michelle DuRoss and Alan McLane, who argue that Alexander Hamilton married into slave owning family (the Schuylers) and that he participated in "purchase and transfer of slaves on behalf of his in-laws and as part of his assignment in the Continental Army" (Reed). Actors Chris Jackson and Daveed Diggs explain their views on portraying George Washington and Thomas Jefferson in PBS's documentary about *Hamilton*. Chris Jackson, who portrayed George Washington in original Broadway cast says:

> Washington is revered as a father of our country, but our understanding of history goes awry when we only seek or care to listen to one part of the story. From the moment I knew I was gonna be playing Washington, that was the first thing that came into my mind - the slave question - the reality of the fact that he owned people. I'll never make

> peace with it. I tried to, till I stood in the slave quarters, and there's no way to reconcile that. If anything, it brings to bear the entire truth of who this man was. And some parts are ugly. Some parts are abhorrent. But there's nothing I can do to change those things. And there's nothing in my portrayal that would suggest we forgive any of that. ("Hamilton's America")

Chris Jackson's understanding of who George Washington was, and awareness of all the good and bad things he did in his life, makes an interesting take on why it is important for this kind of portrayal of historical figures. Jackson explains that he does not forgive the horrid reality of slavery in which George Washington participated, but tries to portray him with both his virtues and flaws. In Charlie Rose's interview with the cast of *Hamilton* he asks Chris Jackson "What's the best part, or best line, or the best moment for you as George Washington?" ("'Hamilton' Charlie Rose") to which he explains his actions in the final song of the musical "Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story" when Eliza makes sure to tell his story explaining "I raise funds in D.C. for the Washington Monument" and continues "I speak out against slavery" (McCarter 281). Chris Jackson explains:

> The part that I think affects me the most is one of the last lines of the show, and Eliza sings it. When she - when I step forward and claim that she tells my story because she was instrumental in the funding and the building of the Washington Monument. And she says, as I am standing behind her, in the moment of 'She tells my story' and revel, and the spirit of Washington is reveling in the fact that he has been remembered by such a strong and wonderful woman. But she says 'I speak out against slavery' and in that moment that spirit that Washington, that moment Washington realizes that he didn't, and it's a moment of shame for him. And as I slowly bow I back away from that. ("'Hamilton' Charlie Rose")

Even though, in his will, George Washington asked for slaves on Mount Vernon to be freed after his wife's death, Erica Armstrong Dunbar explains that this is in contrast with his efforts to avoid abolishing slavery or freeing his slaves during his life. She explains: "At the time of his death, 318 enslaved people lived at Mount Vernon and fewer than half of them belonged to the former president" (Dunbar). Martha Washington respected her late husband's wish and freed the slaves on their property, but only those who were owned by him. Stephen E. Ambrose writes about Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, and the fact that they were slaveholders, but argues that their contributions to the new nation made possible the progress made later. He explains:

> Jefferson knew slavery was wrong and that he was wrong in profiting from the institution, but apparently could see no way to relinquish it in his lifetime. He though abolition of slavery might be accomplished by the young men of the next generation. They were qualified to bring the American Revolution to its idealistic conclusion because, he said, these young Virginians had 'sucked in the principles of liberty as if it were their mother's milk' (Ambrose).

Trusting that the next generation which was raised on the principles you subscribed but did not adhere to will do the right thing is a stretch, but in the case of the United States it worked. Even though George Washington freed his slaves only after his death, his actions still made an impact on the future. Thomas Jefferson, on the other hand, did not do such a thing which is why Ambrose writes: "He spent much of his life in intellectual pursuits in which he excelled and not enough in leading his fellow Americans toward great goals by example" (Ambrose).

Case can be made for *Hamilton* presenting George Washington and Alexander Hamilton as morally above Thomas Jefferson, because the question of slaveholding is

connected only to Jefferson during the "Cabinet Battle #1" in Act 2. "Cabinet Battle #1" is a discussion about assuming state debt when Jefferson claims:

> If New York's in debt –
>
> Why should Virginia bear it?
>
> Uh! Our debts are paid, I'm afraid.
>
> Don't tax the South 'cause we got it made in the shade.
>
> In Virginia, we plant seeds in the ground.
>
> We create. You just want to move our money around. (McCarter 161)

Alexander Hamilton raps in response "A civics lesson from a slaver. Hey neighbor./ Your debts are paid 'couse you don't pay for labor./ "We plant seeds in the South. We create." Yeah, keep ranting./ We know who's really doing the planting" (McCarter 161). Daveed Diggs who portrayed Thomas Jefferson in the original Broadway cast explains his views of Jefferson in PBS's documentary:

> You don't have to separate these things with Jefferson. He can have written this incredible document and several incredible documents that we all sort of – with things that we all believe in. And he sucks. You know, I think those are both true, and those have to be both true. I think we really have to stop separating them, because that's where you get into trouble. That's when you stop letting people be whole people. ("Hamilton's America")

Both Chris Jackson and Daveed Diggs' awareness of the fact that the people they are portraying were not saint-like figures, like they are usually portrayed in history books, is a step forward in assuring that history is not only told by the winners. The whole musical in

itself is stepping away from the stories usually told about the Founding Fathers in history books and portrays them as real people who did both amazing and horrible things.

The question of casting choices still remains unanswered. Was it a right choice to cast people of color in the roles of white historical figures, or not? It seems that everybody who encounters *Hamilton* has an opinion about this, but there is no simple answer to this question. When it comes to representation of people of color on stage, casting in *Hamilton* is definitely a step forward because, as Kendra James explains, now they have a chance to see themselves as participants in American history. Lyra D. Monteiro's opinion is possibly best explained by the sentiment "Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story" from the musical. In the musical "Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story" refers to Alexander Hamilton and his life, but it can be applied to the whole musical. Even though actors of color portray white historical figures *Hamilton* misses the mark of presenting actual historical figures of color and their contributions in creating the United States of America[1]. The stories of these people have not been told, not because their contributions have been irrelevant, but because of their position it the society in which they lived.

This whole discussion does not undermine the sheer brilliance of *Hamilton: An American Musical* proven by eleven Tony awards including Best musical, but serves to remind us that representation of people of color on Broadway stage is still in its beginnings. There is still more work to be done, more musicals about people of color, written by the people of color telling stories we as the audience have never heard, and need to be told about.

[1] Monteiro points to Crispus Attucks, "one of the first men to die in the Revolution was a man of African and Native American ancestry," and to Cato, "Hercules Mulligan's slave . . . who bravely assisted Mulligan's efforts to spy on the British. In *Hamilton*, Mulligan sings about these accomplishments as if they were his alone" (94 – 95). Colette Coleman writes about the contributions of Salem Poor, Colonel Tye, Phyllis Wheatley, Peter Salem, and James Armistead Lafayette.

3. An overview of the history of Puerto Rican representation on Broadway

The second minority which will be highlighted in my presentation due to a role it has played in the history of American musical theatre are Puerto Ricans. The history of immigration from Puerto Rico to the United States began while Puerto Rico was still one of the Spanish colonies in the 19th century. After the Spanish-American War ended with Treaty of Paris in 1898 Puerto Rico became the United States territory, but Puerto Ricans were not granted US citizenship (Thomas 5 – 6) Definitions of immigration and migration are important here because at this point even though Puerto Rico was the United States territory, Puerto Ricans moving to mainland were not migrants, but immigrants because they did not have US citizenship. The question of Puerto Pico's political status was resolved in 1917 with the passing of the Jones Act, but even though Puerto Ricans were after this point granted US citizenship, they did not have the same rights as people living on the mainland.

The most intense migration from the island to the United States occurred in the 1950s named the Great Migration. Bauer writes: "the overarching reasons for the migration were: island officials warning of serious problems resulting from overpopulation and a postwar economic boom on the mainland" (4). Virginia Sanchez Korrol describes the reasons behind large scale migrations from Puerto Rico to the US mainland, and specifies: "following the Second World War, the number of Puerto Ricans in the United States escalated from 69,967 individuals in the decade of the 1940s to 887,662 in the 1960s." Even though about 85% of migrants from Puerto Rico would settle in the New York City, Korrol details Puerto Ricans migrating to the other parts of the United States, working on farms, and organizing into unions. Those who remained in New York struggled with language barrier, discrimination on the basis of skin color, etc. Solomons writes: "Throughout these waves, new terminology

began to spring up, and the name Nuyorican initially started as a kind of insult towards assimilated Puerto Ricans or second and third generation Puerto Ricans who have lost touch with their island roots" (Solomons).

The representation of Puerto Ricans on films began in the 1950s when "The general image of Puerto Ricans was that of 'clannish men, knife carriers, oversexed liars not fit to live in cities. This simplistic and adulterated image made its way into books, plays and consequently into films creating the stereotype ..." (Menéndez 293). Lorrin Thomas details the history of Puerto Rican activists who fought to resolve the issue of the island status as part of the United States, or fought for the island sovereignty. She explains the duality of images (mostly between men and women) of Puerto Ricans in *West Side Story*, and the influence it had on American society's view of Puerto Ricans:

> Although the show offered a dose of liberal sympathy for those who, like Maria, tried to succeed in the United States, the more dominant symbols were those of the knife-wielding Puerto Rican youth who was inescapably drawn to delinquency and violence. The young Puerto Rican men in the play were portrayed as even more predatory than their 'native' gang counterparts, shifty foreigners who would satisfy their hunger for power by violent means . . . the idea of 'stopping the volatile Jets resonated with the fifties' sense of urgency about stopping the dangerous Puerto Rican radicals who were certainly anti-American and possibly also red. (Thomas 164 – 65)

There is an important difference between the characters in the muscials discussed in this chapter, in *West Side Story* all the Sharks were part of the Great Migration in the 1950s, while characters in *In the Heights* are first and second generation migrants from the later migrations. While the Sharks are discriminated against on basis of their skin color, their accent etc., this

issue is not raised with the characters in *In the Heights.* Here they are more concerned with their identity being split between the country their family came from and the United States.

3.1. West Side Story

West Side Story has become an undeniable classic since its first staging on Broadway in 1957. The idea for a modern musical adaptation of a Romeo and Juliet type of story set in New York City came to choreographer Jerome Robbins, who first conceived it as a love story between "an Italian-Catholic girl from Little Italy and an Orthodox Jewish boy from Mulberry Street and set at Easter-Passover time"(Jones 191). Eventually, the premise of the story changed from being set on the East Side (initially they titled the musical East Side Story) and covering love affair between a Catholic woman and a Jewish man, to the West Side and a love story between a Puerto Rican woman and a Polish American man. The decision to change setting, and ethnic or religious background of the characters was not motivated by "explicit apathy toward nor active interest in the lived experience of Puerto Ricans in New York City" (Herrera 233). It was the creative team's opinion that "the Jewish-Catholic premise [was] not very fresh" (Negrón-Muntaner 90) so spurred by the newspaper article about gang violence between Mexican Americans and Anglos in Los Angeles, they changed the rivaling groups, but kept the story in New York City where Puerto Ricans had migrated en masse in the past decade.

Even though the story primarily revolves around Tony and Maria's love story, *West Side Story* is also a story about ownership. The question of who owns the turf the two gangs, the Sharks and the Jets, are fighting over; the ownership of Maria, whose brother Bernardo promised her to his friend Chino, but she falls in love with Tony; and in a way the ownership of the American Dream. John Bush Jones argues that the American Dream as a myth of the United States as the "land of opportunity for *all*" is unattainable for members of both gangs. He claims: "The Puerto Ricans can't have their fair share since they're discriminated against

for their color, language, and ethnicity ... But the American boys blame the Puerto Ricans for also being cut out of the Dream" (Jones 194). The idea of living the American Dream for all the characters in *West Side Story* is best explained in the sentence: "*West Side Story* was bold enough to say that for both disadvantaged white youth and Puerto Rican immigrants the American Dream was more of a nightmare" (Jones 194).

Jerome Robbins, who conceived the story and worked as a choreographer for *West Side Story*, was joined by Leonard Bernstein, who composed the score, Stephen Sondheim, who wrote the lyrics, and Arthur Laurents, who wrote the book (Jones 191). One of the controversies connected with the original Broadway cast and the cast of 1961 film adaptation was casting of white actors in the roles of Puerto Ricans. Frances Negron-Muntaner argues that casting Natalie Wood (an actress of Russian descent) as Maria in the film adaptation of West Side Story served to avoid criticism over presenting an interracial relationship. He explains:

> Despite the fact that Rita Moreno [who was first considered for the role of Maria on Broadway] is light-skinned, given the narrative's overt articulation of ethnicity as racial difference, the union of Tony and Maria could have created anxiety in 1961 ... as any sexual contact between them could have resulted in interracial love and offspring. One way to alleviate this anxiety and allow white audiences to enjoy the interracial seduction without its consequences was to cast an actress whom everyone knew to be white. (91-92)

This anxiety over acceptance of an interracial relationship falls short considering that white actor George Chakiris portrayed Bernardo, who was in a relationship with Anita, portrayed by Rita Moreno, an actress of Puerto Rican descent. Frances Negron-Muntaner explains this discrepancy: "although Bernardo is played by a Euro-American actor, it is acceptable for

leading white men in Hollywood to seduce a nonwhite woman, an option rarely offered to actresses of color in relationship to unhyphenated American men" (92). Perhaps the same logic of avoiding interracial relationship on stage was applied when casting Carol Lawrence (an actress of Italian descent) as Maria, Kenneth LeRoy as Bernardo, and Chita Rivera as Anita in the original Broadway production.

Choosing young Puerto Rican immigrants as one group to portray, the creators who were all white men -- steered them into a stereotypical portrayal of their lives, or more precisely, Puerto Rican men as gang members, and women as sassy and virginal (Negron-Muntaner 83). Brian Eugenio Herrera points to Arthur Laurents' description of the rival gangs in *West Side Story: a musical* where he describes the opening scene of the musical. Laurents writes: "It is primarily a condensation of the growing rivalry between two teen-age gangs, the Jets and the Sharks, each of which has its own prideful uniform. The boys – sideburned, long-haired – are vital, restless, sardonic; the Sharks are Puerto Ricans, the Jets an anthology of what is called American" (11). Herrera describes the impact of choosing Puerto Ricans as the "other": "This selection of 'Puerto Ricans' as the group to rival the 'anthology of what is called 'American' thereby influentially paired the 'social problems' of youth criminality and Puerto Rican migration, which had not previously been particularly interconnected in the popular imaginary, let alone 'twinned' as they would be in *West Side Story*" (236).

This position of Puerto Ricans as the "other" is even more problematic considering the fact that Puerto Rico was already United States' territory and Puerto Ricans American citizens. Herrera also emphasizes the different description of youth criminality in the 1950s when "'juvenile delinquents' were increasingly understood to be individual, usually white kids gone astray, while 'gangs' were ethnically or racially identified groups of kids defending and violating ethno-racial boundaries" (235). Descriptions like these are all too familiar even today, and point to the ugly truth that even though the situation in America has changed since

the 1950s, racial biases still exist and influence the way in which people of color are treated in America. Frances Negron-Muntaner points out the irony of the "film's centrality in Puerto Rican identity discourses ... [and] the universal consensus by both critics and creators of *West Side Story* that the film is not in any way 'about' Puerto Rican culture, migration, or community life" (84). Even though the creators of *West Side Story* emphasized that it is non-mimetic, and even though it may not have been their intention to present all Puerto Ricans as violent gang members, it is undeniable that, first the Broadway production and then the 1961 movie, left a mark on the portrayal of Puerto Ricans in the American media and popular culture.

West Side Story was revived on Broadway a few times since its premiere in 1957, most recently in 2009 and 2020. The 2009 revival was directed by Arthur Laurents, who wrote the book for original Broadway production, and who made changes by hiring Lin-Manuel Miranda to translate parts of Stephen Sondheim's lyrics into Spanish. For Arthur Laurents changing the lyrics from English to Spanish was a way in which "both gangs were perceived equally as villains" (Cohen). He emphasized that while "The original was really about how you tell the story ... [the revival is] the story of Tony and Maria and love" (Cohen). Casting actual Latinos such as Josefina Scaglione, an Argentinean actress to portray Maria, and Karen Olivo, who won a Tony award for the role of Anita, was definitely a step forward from 1957 Broadway and 1961 film adaptation casting. Stephen Spielberg's new film adaptation of *West Side Story* set to appear in movie theaters on December 16th 2020 with Ansel Elgort as Tony, Rachel Zegler as Maria, Ariana DeBose as Anita, and David Alvarez as Bernardo, proves that although *West Side Story* has its own share of problems it still remains a seminal piece of art in American popular culture (2020 Film Cast – West Side Story).

3.2. In the Heights

Lin-Manuel Miranda's first hit musical *In the Heights* opened on Broadway on March 9th, 2008 at Richard Rodgers Theatre. *In the Heights* is a story about the lives of residents of Washington Heights, a neighborhood in New York City. Central characters, Usnavi, portrayed in the original Broadway cast by musical's creator Lin-Manuel Miranda, Nina (Mandy Gonzalez), Vanessa (Karen Olivo) and Benny (Chris Jackson) tell a story of trying to navigate their lives in the neighborhood that is slowly dying. With big dreams and little financial power these characters describe how they find happiness in their community and everyday little things they enjoy. In PBS documentary *In the Heights: Chasing Broadway Dreams* Lin-Manuel Miranda describes *In the Heights* as "a classic American story. It's really a celebration of this neighborhood at the top of Manhattan. It's three days in the life. We see people fall in love. We see people fight and argue, and it's really about these three generations sort of trying to find home, and what that means to them" (*In the Heights: Chasing Broadway Dreams*).

The idea of 'home' is quite important for the story of *In the Heights,* with Nina coming back home from Stanford University; Usnavi wanting to go back 'home' to Dominican Republic; and Vanessa trying to move away from her home in Washington Heights to Bronx. Nina is the one who struggles with her identity the most in the musical explaining in the song "When You're Home":

When I was younger, I'd imagine what would happen

If my parents had stayed in Puerto Rico.

Who would I be if I had never seen Manhattan,

If I lived in Puerto Rico with my people,

My people.

I feel like all my life I've tried to find the answer,

Working harder, learning Spanish, learning all I can.

I thought I might find the answer out at Stanford,

But I'd stare out at the sea,

Thinking, where'm I supposed to be? (Hudes 65)

Nina struggles with high expectations from everyone in the neighborhood because she is "the one who made it out" (Hudes 17), with fear of telling her parents that she lost her scholarship and has taken a leave of absence, and finally with guilt because her parents had to sell their business to pay for her tuition which results in Benny, her love interest, losing his job. Usnavi and Nina are both first generation immigrants (it is not clarified in the musical where Vanessa's family comes from) and they struggle to form their identity somewhere between America and Puerto Rico for Nina, and America and Dominican Republic for Usnavi. Usnavi glorifies Dominican Republic emphasizing that he wants to go back once he makes it big in America, but in the final song, touched by Graffiti Pete's mural of abuela Claudia, he decides to stay in New York saying:

Yeah, I'm a streetlight.

Chilling in the heat.

I illuminate the stories of the people in the street,

Some have happy endings,

Some are bittersweet.

But I know them all and that's what makes my life complete. (Hudes 137-38)

The musical positions Usnavi as a storyteller of the neighborhood, and he decides to stay in New York City because it is his destiny explaining, "And if not me, who keeps our legacies? /Who's gonna keep the coffee sweet with secret recipes? /Abuela, rest in peace, you live in my memories, /But Sonny's gotta eat; this corner is my destiny" (Hudes 138).

The performance of *In the Heights* on Broadway marks an important moment in the history of portrayal of Latino people, especially so in comparison with *West Side Story*. The first thing that differentiates these two musicals is the creative team behind them. As previously mentioned, *West Side Story* was created by an all-white male team led by Stephen Sondheim, Jerome Robbins, and Arthur Laurents, while *In the Height's* lyrics were written by Lin-Manuel Miranda, and book by Quiara Alegría Hudes (both of Puerto Rican descent). With *In the Heights* Lin-Manuel Miranda executed a mixture of Spanish and English, something Arthur Laurents hoped to achieve with 2009 revival of *West Side Story*, and made it sound completely natural both for the actors on stage and the audience. While the audience had to wait more than fifty years to hear a Spanish version of songs like "A Boy Like That" or "I Feel Pretty," Lin-Manuel Miranda offers songs like "No Me Diga" and "Paciencia Y Fe" which are sung in both Spanish and English.

Antonia Cereijido and Jeanne Montalvo discuss the evolution of representation of Latinos on Broadway stage in a podcast titled *The Breakdown: A Tale of Two Musicals* in which they and their guests discuss the difference between *West Side Story* and *In the Heights*. Robert Viagas, a long time editor and author for Playbill.com, explains his opinion of Lin-Manuel Miranda's portrayal of Latinos: "He threw all those stereotypes away. He managed to get the melting pot to work in reverse, and I think that that ultimately is the great success of *In the Heights*" (*The Breakdown: A Tale of Two Musicals*). Jeanne Montalvo

concludes "*West Side Story* put us [Latinos] on stage, but *In the Heights* set a new bar about what a Latino story could be" (*The Breakdown: A Tale of Two Musicals*).

PBS' documentary follows the creation of *In the Heights*, but also gives an opportunity to actors portraying Lin-Manuel Miranda's characters to explain what being in this musical means to them. Actress Karen Olivo, who won a Tony award in 2009 for portraying Anita in Arthur Laurent's revival of *West Side Story*, gets emotional describing how she considered herself a fake Latina because she did not speak Spanish when she was younger, and "hanging [her] flags on display" on the opening night; Lin-Manuel Miranda claims that the "one of the most autobiographical sections of the show is Nina's bridge in 'When You're Home' when she goes 'when I was younger I'd imagine what would happen if my parents had stayed in Puerto Rico.' That line is like what I spent most of my childhood wondering" (*In the Heights: Chasing Broadway Dreams*).

4. Grease

Grease, written by Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey, opened on Broadway in 1972. The importance of Grease in this discussion does not lie in its portrayal of minorities, but in its embeddedness in the American popular culture, evidenced by its frequent revival on Broadway stage, the film version's status as a classic, and in its evolution from portraying a completely non-integrated high school in first Broadway production and film version, to more inclusive versions in the past few decades. Different stages of inclusion of cast of *Grease* in different popular media could be representative of the shifts in the American socio-cultural conscience.

The first version of *Grease* staged in Chicago in 1971 was "rough, aggressive, and purposely vulgar; full of cursing, sex, and grit," but the musical was transferred off-Broadway, then eventually on Broadway in a changed form "less gritty and less Chicago-

specific" (Spiegel). John Kenrick describes *Grease* as "The most successful rock musical of the decade ... a traditional musical comedy that revisited the rock and roll sounds of the 1950s" (323), but specifically asks why is a musical about high school kids in Chicago so important in American culture?

John Bush Jones attributes the huge success of *Grease* in the 1970s to American society's nostalgia for earlier eras. He points to social historians Douglas Miller and Marion Nowak, who offer their explanation of this phenomenon: "The rise of fifties enthusiasm [in the '70s] coincided with widespread disillusionment and a growing conservatism. For many people the 1950s came to symbolize a golden age of innocence and simplicity, an era supposedly unruffled by riots, racial violence, Vietnam, Watergate, assassinations" (Miller and Novak, qtd. in Jones 305). This sort of escapism from the turbulent political and social situation in America found in musicals such as *Grease* is contradicted by the previously discussed musicals which moved boundaries and challenged social norms by positioning people of color in roles previously held by white actors. In other words, at the same moment in Broadway history audiences are presented with musicals which challenge political and social views, and musicals which offer a nostalgic, rose colored escape into 'simpler' times.

Grease, as a musical which has become a classic not just in America, but also worldwide, offers an opportunity to analyze the development of portrayal of people of color on stage, and in media. Considering the fact that *Grease* is set in 1950s America the question of presence of people of color in an all white school is one that has to be addressed. Although Supreme Court in 1954 ruled in Brown vs. Board of Education case that segregated schools were unequal, several events, such as Little Rock Nine in 1957, proved that desegregating schools in America was no easy task. Taking into consideration that in the 1950s American schools were still largely segregated staging *Grease* with interracial cast required a certain suspension of disbelief in the audience, something that *Grease: Live* proved to be possible.

The original Broadway production of *Grease* consisted of an all-white cast featuring Barry Bostwick in the role of Danny, Carole Demas as Sandy, Adrienne Barbeau as Betty Rizzo, Timothy Meyers as Kenickie, and Walter Bobbie as Roger (Vine). The original Broadway production of *Grease* changed theatres a few times, but ran for 3,388 performances until April of 1980. Moving *Grease* from stage to film in 1978 did not affect the racial composition of the cast, only the nationality of Sandy Dumbrowski. The decision to change Sandy's backstory and surname to Olson was motivated by hiring Australian actress Olivia Newton-John to portray Sandy.

First Broadway revival of *Grease* opened in 1994 with mostly white cast, but with Billy Porter cast as Teen Angel, and Janice Lorraine Holt as one of the Heartbeats and a member of the ensemble. Perhaps the most important part of casting in the revival of *Grease* was casting Jon Secada as a replacement for Danny Zuko. Even though Jon Secada was cast as a replacement the importance of his role as Danny Zuko lies in the portrayal of interracial relationship on stage. Even though this revival ran for 1,505 performances, Ben Brantley describes it as "a mindless, trashy theme park of a show, which managed to prolong its life beyond all sane expectations with revolving-door replacement casts of celebrities in career limbo" (Brantley). *Grease* was revived on Broadway once more in 2007, but this time the actors portraying Danny and Sandy were chosen on a television show called *You're the One That I Want!* The cast again consisted of mostly white actors with a few Latinos, but the production was received very unfavorably with Matthew Murray describing it as "so squeaky clean that you could eat your Sunday supper from it" (Murray).

Considering the fact that several topics and the language of *Grease* are very outdated in society today, is it so bad that creative team behind 2007 revival made it 'clean'? Murray explains:

> Judging from the TV show and what's landed onstage, Marshall [director and choreographer], Jacobs [book, music, and lyrics], and Ian [producer] weren't interested in doing the *Grease* that is, but rather the one everyone expected. The two shows aren't identical, and while those three may have gotten the one they want, their efforts are bound to leave everyone else all choked up – for all the wrong reasons. (Murray)

Perhaps the most progressive productions of *Grease* was filmed as a live event on Fox in 2016. This production, directed by Thomas Kail, starred Broadway actor Aaron Tveit as Danny, and Julianne Hough as Sandy, but more important was the casting of people of color in the roles of other members of Pink Ladies and T-Birds. In this production people of color are not just background characters as in the 1978 film, but also portray main characters like Doody (Jordan Fisher), Rizzo (Vanessa Hudens), Marty (Keke Palmer), Kenickie (Carlos PenaVega), Coach Calhoun (Wendell Pierce), Teen Angel (Boyz II Men) etc.

Grease's transformation in representation is a huge step forward, and proves that audience is willing to accept a story about 1950s high school which is not segregated. Perhaps, for the audiences today, this version of *Grease* is a rose colored look at the 1950s, or the version of the American history they wished was true. Even with an improvement in the department of representation *Grease* still has issues with crude language that is widely not acceptable today, toxic masculinity, rape culture, patriarchal view of women, etc., which makes us wonder why it is still one of the most popular pieces of American musical theater.

5. Conclusion

The musicals discussed in this paper provide an insight into the evolution of the representation of minorities on Broadway stage since the 1950s up to the present. The progress goes from blackface minstrel shows, to shows in which African Americans and their culture were presented as primitive, and then finally to integrated musicals, and to *Hamilton* which gave the opportunity to African American actors to take hold of American history and portray the historical figures in a space their ancestors were not allowed in. As it was mentioned, the Civil Rights Movement had an influence on all spheres of American society, including Broadway shows, since it boosted the future of representation of people of color on stage, and diversified the stories being told. *Hello, Dolly!* is an example of this influence, and even though all-black production of this show had its fair share of problems, it was still a monumental intervention in Broadway history. Just like *Hello, Dolly!* in 1967, *Hamilton* broke boundaries in 2015. In a 2015 interview with Lin-Manuel Miranda, Edward Delman describes the cast of *Hamilton*: "The primarily black and Hispanic cast reminds audiences that American history is not just the history of white people, and frequent allusions to slavery serve as constant reminders that just as the revolutionaries were fighting for their freedom, slaves were held in bondage" (Delman). Even though, as mentioned before, some critics point to the missed opportunities of portraying the actual historical people of color who served during the Revolutionary war, and who were crucial in winning the war, the impact *Hamilton* had on Broadway cannot be understated.

On the other hand, the representation of Latinx people, especially Puerto Ricans in the musicals discussed here, and the difference not just between the ethnic backgrounds of actors portraying the characters on stage, but also the creative team behind the musical who write from their personal experiences, represent a huge improvement. We have discussed how unresolved political status of Puerto Rico, or as Thomas calls it the "Puerto Rican problem"

influenced the status of Puerto Rican citizens on the mainland, and its impact on the portrayal of Puerto Ricans in the popular media and in American society in general.

The creative team behind *West Side Story* consisted of all white men who knew nothing about the life of these immigrants in New York City, with Stephen Sondheim commenting "I can't do this show. . . . I've never been that poor and I've never even met a Puerto Rican" (Negrón-Muntaner 84). The influence of the 1961 film version of *West Side Story* on Puerto Ricans today is visible in many articles quoted in this text, written by Puerto Ricans or Latinos, in which they look back at the film and the way it influenced their lives, and how they realized that the way Puerto Ricans are portrayed in the film is problematic. Stephen Spielberg's 2020 version of *West Side Story* has a promising cast, and audiences can hope that it will finally provide Puerto Ricans with a version of *West Side Story* they can relate to and be proud of.

In the Heights, on the other hand, was created by actual first generation Puerto Rican immigrants, Lin-Manuel Miranda and Quiara Alegría Hudes. The influence of creative team is visible in the way Puerto Ricans are presented in the musical. While *West Side Story* portrays Puerto Rican immigrants as the "other" to white Americans, *In the Heights* portrays migrants and their children as non-violent people who are just searching for a better life. In PBS's documentary about In the Heights Lin-Manuel Miranda says: "I also saw *Rent,* and it was the first time I had seen a musical that took place now. And a light bulb really went off, and I was like, 'Oh, you can write, like, a musical about you, about your life'" (I*n the Height: Chasing Broadway Dreams*). This sentence is in a complete contrast with earlier mentioned Sondheim's writing about something or someone he knew nothing about. This thesis was supposed to include a review of film version of *In the Heights*, but its premiere was postponed, so we can only hope that film version will do justice to the musical's Broadway legacy.

In a discussion of casting people of color in traditionally white roles Warren Hoffman poses the question "is nontraditional casting acceptable insofar as theater is a representational art form, or does ignoring race do a disservice to the work by failing to recognize the importance of its specific historical and social, and therefore racial context" (116)? This question is a double edged sword because the correct answer is neither no, nor yes. Hoffman explains that ignoring race "reinforces the notion that whiteness is raceless, invisible, and normative" (116), while on the other hand "pretending that race does not exist at all, that it has not shaped the course of U.S. history, is equally problematic" (116). If musical theatre is a performative art form which is influenced by the socio-political issues of the time it was created, as we mentioned before, then all the musicals discussed here at some point in time conformed to the representation of the society at the time they were written, but also at the time they were staged. This is visible in the progress of the representation of people of color in *Grease*, which improved with time even though it is historically inaccurate to portray an integrated Chicago high school. There is no doubt that proper representation and inclusion means more opportunities for the actors of color, but what is perhaps even more important is opportunities for writers, composers, choreographers, directors, etc. of color to tell the stories they know to insure that when the stories of life of minorities in the United States are told, they are told by people who know those stories from experience.

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7. Abstract

This paper is a discussion about the representation of minorities, more precisely African Americans and Puerto Ricans, in American musical theatre since the 1950s. The discussion gives an introduction to representation of these groups in the American popular media, and then discusses and reviews five musicals which present different stages of inclusion of minorities on Broadway stage. Five musicals discussed are: *Hello, Dolly!* and its 1957 version with an all-black cast; *Hamilton* in which cast consisting of people of color portray white historical figures; *West Side Story* and *In the Heights* with their different portrayals of Puerto Rico immigrants; and *Grease* as an example of quintessentially American musical and its evolution in portraying minorities since its premiere in 1972. To discuss different portrayals of minorities in these musicals, this paper relies on scholarly papers, critics' reviews of Broadway stage productions, reviews of the film version of the musicals, documentaries about the musicals, and other forms of popular media discussing topics relevant for this paper.

Key words: American musical theater, film adaptations, Broadway, minorities