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## Why a Sci-Fi Movie and Broadway Musical Should Provide Hope for the Future of Diversity

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When you're in the diversity and inclusion business (more of an avocation, really), the world can sometimes look like a floating montage of data points illustrating, on one hand, a shrinking yet still powerful portion of the world's resistance to change and, on the other hand, an increasingly frustrated group of women and minorities tired of being marginalized.

Most recently, the "resistance" end of that montage has included the following:

- The Jan. 20-23 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. This networking event of global networking events featured, once again, at 18 percent, a tiny sliver of women.

- The Jan. 14 announcement of the Academy Award nominations, featuring 20 acting nominees, all of whom were white.

- The continuing poor representation of women among Fortune 500 CEOs (4.4 percent) and world leaders (just 18 total), not to mention the fact that the BigLaw halls of power remain overwhelmingly white and male.



In other words, the world hasn't changed, despite the fact that it's 2016 and we all thought we'd be driving flying cars by now or, at the very least, have achieved a modest level of gender and racial diversity. The Oscars have always been white and male (except for those awards designated for women). So have corporate boards. And the World Economic Forum. And law firm equity partnerships.

What else is new?

What's changed is that women and minorities are now in a powerful enough political, cultural and economic position to have their complaints heard and, in some cases, heeded.

The fact that the Oscars were all white was always annoying, but not until this year did that fact (helped by a threatened boycott and the trending #OscarsSoWhite hashtag) prompt the Academy to announce a set of reforms to usher out of voting

membership some of the 93 percent white and 76 percent male members who have kept the Academy stuck in the 1950s.

Why did they make those changes? Of course, one could argue that it was the right thing to do. But they may have also been motivated by falling ratings for the Oscar telecast, and the fact that Oscar ratings have been some of their highest when the nominees and nominated films included at least a modest level of diversity. (Of course, the fact that Chris Rock is hosting the Feb. 28 Academy Awards may drive viewership this year, if only to see how he handles the overwhelming whiteness of the awards.)

Even the National Football League is starting to put some heft behind its push for diversity. Commissioner Roger Goodell, just days before the Super Bowl, announced a new rule requiring women be interviewed for executive positions with the league and with teams around the country. This came just a few weeks after the Buffalo Bills hired the NFL's first full-time female assistant coach, Kathryn Smith.

News like that has a way of emboldening young women. Just 10 years ago, it would have been unthinkable for an 11-year-old black girl to start a social movement (#1000BlackGirlBooks) around the fact that she's tired of being assigned to read books about white boys. There was a day in the not too distant past that New Jersey's Marley Dias would have kept her mouth shut and read what she was told.

But in 2016, she didn't, and her campaign has raised an issue that publishers have long ignored: children who aren't white rarely read about other children who look like them, eat the kind of food they eat or live the kind of lives they live. And it's a safe bet children's book publishers have taken notice of Marley's campaign.

Ironically, one of the tools that has given women and minorities a unifying voice is Twitter (hence all the hashtags). Twitter has a strong base of minority users, yet the company's management and executive ranks are, not surprisingly, male and pale—a fact that led their highest-ranking African-American engineer to resign because the company didn't take his complaints seriously enough.

His argument is that Twitter would be a better product if it were designed and run by people from more diverse backgrounds. It would anticipate problems and engineer solutions that wouldn't otherwise occur to the largely homogeneous company. As proof, he points to, among other studies, a University of Michigan study that found that groups that include a range of perspectives outperform groups of like-minded experts.

The same argument has been made about the 2008 economic collapse: that the like-minded experts who ran the various arms of the mortgage and banking sector failed to see the (in hindsight) imminent implosion of the housing sector once the wobbly building of mortgage-backed securities fell in upon itself.

One could also make the argument that the legal profession—which does business today largely the way our grandparents and great-grandparents did it—would benefit from more diverse leadership. Yet that doesn't seem in the offing anytime soon.

And that's tragic.

All we have to do is look around us and see that new blood and new perspectives are not only the right thing to do; they're enormously profitable.

Director J.J. Abrams took a chance on two unknowns—a young white woman and a young black man—to star in the eagerly awaited Star Wars sequel, and it didn't negatively impact the bottom line; the movie has broken every box office record there is to break.

Further, it's hard to ignore the monstrous success of the Broadway musical *Hamilton*, about the life of founding father and the first Secretary of the U.S. Treasury, Alexander Hamilton. Not only does *Hamilton* have a tremendously diverse cast, but the diverse actors are playing our nation's (exceedingly all white) founding fathers.

If America cannot just tolerate but celebrate a Puerto Rican Alexander Hamilton and a black Thomas Jefferson, there should be no wind left in the sails of the anti-diversity crowd.

Don't believe me? Just try getting your hands on *Hamilton* tickets.

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