



racebending.com

advocating for just and equal opportunities in film and television

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Adam Goodman  
President, Paramount Film Group

Dear Mr. Goodman:

We were extremely concerned to hear M. Night Shyamalan's response to questions about the casting of *The Last Airbender* in recently released interviews held with online journalists. He has misconstrued the public's concerns about the casting. We are writing to clarify them for Paramount and the production, and to request a meeting to discuss this issue in depth.

*Avatar: The Last Airbender* featured characters of color, and the film adaptation was an opportunity for Paramount to develop leading talent from Asian American and Inuit American communities—groups the Screen Actors Guild has acknowledged as underrepresented, particularly in leading and heroic roles. Only 1.8% of lead roles in Hollywood go to actors of Asian descent and less than 1% of lead roles go to actors of Native American descent.

Yet, *Airbender* lead casting breakdowns worded as "Wanted: Caucasian or any other ethnicity" failed to provide adequate outreach to communities of color during lead casting. And the production's specification of "Caucasian" and the initial casting of all four leads with white actors further reinforced Paramount's failure to extend the rare opportunity to be a lead heroic character to minority actors.

The casting of *The Last Airbender* exemplifies the "glass ceiling" that pervades Hollywood casting. While actors of color have been cast, they are marginalized in roles as antagonists and background characters. The casting decisions in *The Last Airbender* have reinforced Paramount's lack of support for actors of color, and lack of regard for equality and diversity.

Worse, Paramount has sent a message to the rest of the industry, reinforcing that casting white actors to play people of color is appropriate--while actors of color are barred from playing characters that share their ethnicities. If Paramount chooses not to have actors of color as lead protagonists--even in a culturally inspired film like *The Last Airbender*--then when does Paramount actually plan to extend meaningful opportunity and representation to Asian American and Inuit American actors?

On behalf of our over 7,000 supporters from 50 countries around the world, Racebending.com is writing to request a meeting between M. Night Shyamalan, Paramount staff, and cultural advocacy groups to discuss the cultural competency of *The Last Airbender* and Paramount's casting practices in an open, peaceful, and reconciliatory setting.

We would like to explore how the casting of this movie resulted in a glass ceiling, and how Paramount and the movie-going community can collaborate in the future to extend opportunities to performers of color and ensure that communities of color are adequately and equally represented.

Together, with open discussion and collaboration, we can work to make cultural competency and equality a priority for Paramount Pictures.

Sincerely,

The staff of Racebending.com

Catherine Bugayong, Michael Le, Marissa Lee, Dariane Nabor, Desaree Ortiz & Loraine Sammy