



racebending.com

advocating for just and equal opportunity in film and television

November 5th, 2010

Dear Ms. Shearmur,

We are a grassroots organization that represents thousands of media consumers who are concerned about fair and equal casting in film and television. We wanted to thank Lions Gate Entertainment for its strong commitment to diversity and also to alert you to a potential area of concern.

Our readers are excited to see *For Colored Girls* open today and we are very aware that Lions Gate plays a leadership role in producing films starring actors of color; including the forthcoming films *Will You Be My Black Friend?* and *Conan*, starring Jason Momoa. We can't thank you enough for Lions Gate Entertainment's commitment to diverse casting and innovative productions during an economic recession when other studios are making "safer" choices.

We understand that as President, you will be overseeing the production of *The Hunger Games*, which is being produced by Nina Jacobsen and will be distributed by Lions Gate. *The Hunger Games* has a built in audience of moviegoers who love the book series and are very familiar with the characters.

Racebending.com recently received a number of emails from fans of *The Hunger Games* who have seen online casting speculation exclusively centering on the casting of white actors. Of greatest concern are articles describing actresses who have reportedly received the script to read for the lead role of Katniss Everdeen—all of these actresses have been white.

Although the specific "real-world" ethnicities of characters are not explicitly delineated in the dystopian fantasy world of *The Hunger Games*, the series features several characters of color in prominent roles. Native residents from the community called "the Seam" are described as having dark hair and olive skin—including the lead protagonist, Katniss, and supporting characters such as Gail Hawthorne and Haymitch Abernathy. Characters from "District 11," including the supporting character of Rue, are described as having thick, dark hair and dark brown skin.

The characters in *The Hunger Game* reflect the diversity of the series' readers and the films' potential audience. As Lions Gate must be well aware, the Motion Picture Association of America's 2009 theatrical market statistics found that 40% of movie tickets are purchased by people of color and that Latino and "other" people of color are most likely to frequent movies.

While we have stressed to our readers that online casting speculations are often based on unfounded rumours, we share their concerns about diversity in the film adaptation and do understand their concerns. Recent fantasy franchises, including *The Last Airbender* (2010) and *Earthsea* (2004) have featured protagonists of color cast with white actors. We urge Lions Gate to break from this practice.

The Hunger Games heralds an unprecedented opportunity for young actors of color to star in a tentpole film, particularly since it is heavily implied that the lead character, Katniss, would be considered biracial by "real-world" standards. We urge Lions Gate Entertainment to affirm its commitment to diversity, encourage the production of *The Hunger Games* to pursue a fair and open casting process, and hope that the final cast will reflect the author's intent of diversity.

Sincerely,

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Co-founder

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