

<b>Institution:</b> University of Warwick		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> D27 - English Language and Literature		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Putting Black and Asian Actors Centre Stage: Celebrating Tradition, Informing Industry, Changing Perceptions		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2010-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Professor Tony Howard	Professor Emeritus Professor	01/10/1973 – 30/09/20 01/10/20 - Present
Dr Delia Jarrett-Macauley	AHRC Research Fellow	01/01/13 – 30/09/15
Dr Jami Rogers	Various academic support roles  AHRC Database & Research Assistant Honorary Research Fellow Associate Tutor and Student Office Administrator	19/09/11 - 31/12/12; 13/05/13 - 30/06/14 01/04/14 – 11/12/15  01/10/15 - Present 19/01/16 - 02/07/19
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> August 2013 - 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Howard's Multicultural Shakespeare is an acclaimed national keystone project engaging awareness of the major contribution members of ethnic minorities have made to 'mainstream' British culture. His team's exceptional database of Shakespearean performances by BAME UK artists since 1930 has revealed historic artistic achievements and shaped national debates on diversity in the creative industries. This new research has reached tens of thousands of spectators internationally through exhibitions, performances and events—organised with national, regional or local community organisations—and many more through mass and social media. Howard's active collaborations with major drama companies have produced innovative theatre practices and performances, dramatically enhancing professional practice and public awareness of BAME contributions to British drama.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Howard and his team (research fellows Jarrett-Macauley and Rogers) have illuminated the changing role of British Black and Asian Shakespearean theatre artists through archival research, data gathering, and the recording of 40 oral history testimonies. They have established beyond question the importance of these performers' contributions to Britain's collective understanding of 'Shakespeare' in the decades after Windrush. Howard won an AHRC major three-year grant (GBP498,575) to pursue this research from October 2012.</p> <p>Research findings have documented the setbacks non-white actors faced in the 1950s and 1960s, especially in drama schools; but they also revealed the crucial role of regional theatres in opening new employment possibilities and fresh postcolonial perspectives on Shakespeare, in the eras after Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech (1968) and the Bristol and Brixton riots (1981). It has identified significant networks of inspiration and support connecting Ira Aldridge (1807-1867) to Paul Robeson (1898-1976) and Robeson to his successors (3.1; 3.4). Howard's research has uncovered and highlighted the particular significance of Aldridge's role as manager of Coventry Theatre Royal, the first known person of colour to manage a British theatre (3.4).</p> <p>The team's collective research traced the effect of positive intervention in the late 1980s while also establishing that this was followed by regression and the emergence of a 'Shakespearean Glass Ceiling', limiting opportunities and expectations for actors of colour. The research identified in detail, recurrent problems of prejudice and stereotyping in the creation and reception</p>		

of major Shakespearean work. It also, however, revealed a wealth of achievements that - though under-recorded and undervalued - have enriched British drama (3.2; 3.3; 3.5).

As Postdoctoral Fellow on the AHRC-funded project, Jarrett-Macauley explored Shakespeare's role within Britain's Black and Asian communities, involving work with memory, education and creativity. In her 2013 symposium, *Mapping British Black and Asian Shakespeare from 1930 to 2012*, held at Warwick as part of the AHRC project, Jarrett-Macauley brought together practitioners, historians and theorists. As a result of these discussions, she wrote and edited a volume during her fellowship at Warwick (3.3).

Under Howard's direction, Rogers researched, edited, and contributed to the design of the project's searchable database of British Black and Asian Shakespearean performers and directors and their work since 1930. This involved exhaustive research in archives across the UK and the database now contains entries on 1,288 Shakespeare productions involving BAME artists (as of 28.09.20). It was immediately welcomed both as a research resource and within arts organisations for the light it shed on problems of employment and ethnic representation in casting patterns. It has therefore continued beyond its original AHRC-funded closure date (3.6).

All of the research has involved dialogues, collaborations and partnerships across the performance industries. It also showcases successful educational strategies for developing new audiences in minority communities. The involvement of diverse practitioners and communities has been a priority throughout. The statistical work had not previously been attempted and the practitioners' testimonies had not been systematically collected. Howard was repeatedly asked: 'Why has no-one done this before?'

This work has coincided with - and contributed to - campaigns calling for greater diversity in the performing arts and for changes in theatre employment policies. Since the project launched there have been visible and often historic advances in the casting of major UK Shakespearean productions.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

The research team's publications include articles in peer-reviewed journals and chapters in edited collections, in addition to the online British Black and Asian Shakespeare database:

1. **Howard, Tony** (2010) *"My Travail's History": perspectives on the roads to Othello, Stratford-upon-Avon 1959*. Shakespeare Bulletin, Vol.28 (No.1). pp. 93-110. doi: 10.1353/shb.0.0132
2. **Rogers, Jami** (Fall 2013) *'The Shakespearean Glass Ceiling: the State of Colorblind Casting in Contemporary British Theatre'*. Shakespeare Bulletin, Vol.31(3). pp. 405-430. doi: 10.1353/shb.2013.0039
3. **Jarrett-Macauley, Delia** (ed.) (2016) *Shakespeare, Race and Performance: The Diverse Bard*. London and New York: Routledge. ISBN: 9781138913820 (includes a chapter by **Rogers, Jami**: *David Thacker and Bill Alexander: Mainstream Directors and the Development of Multicultural Shakespeare*, pp. 110-121)
4. **Howard, Tony** and Wilcox, Zoe (2016) *Haply for I am black: the legacy of Ira Aldridge*. In: McMullan, Gordon and Wilcox, Zoe, (eds.) *Shakespeare in Ten Acts*. London: British Library, pp. 121-140. ISBN: 9780712356312
5. **Rogers, Jami** (July 2019) *Talawa and Black Theatre Live: 'Creating the Ira Aldridges That Are Remembered' – Live Theatre Broadcast and the Historical Record*. In Aebischer, P., Greenhalgh, S., and Osborne, L (eds.) *Shakespeare and the 'Live' Theatre Broadcast Experience*. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 147-160. ISBN: 9781350030480
6. **Howard, Tony** and **Rogers, Jami** (2016) *The British Black and Asian Shakespeare Performance Database (BBAS)*. The University of Warwick. <https://bbashakespeare.warwick.ac.uk/>.

Funding Grant: AHRC (Ref: AH/K000020/1) Multicultural Shakespeare in Britain 1930-2010, Oct 2012-Dec 2015, GBP498,575. Awarded to: **Tony Howard** (University of Warwick, PI).

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

*'The works of Shakespeare in their diverse points of view can help us build a bridge over the rift of a divided Britain. Shakespeare, Race and Performance: The Diverse Bard has built the framework with which to start this process.'* Timo Uotinen, *Multicultural Shakespeare*, Vol. 15: Issue 1 (Sep 2017)

Through touring exhibitions, public events, and the creation of the first online database archiving BAME performances of Shakespeare, this project has celebrated British Black and Asian history, stimulated national debate about diversity in the arts and called for greater flexibility in casting practices. Howard established close links with practitioners, campaigners and cultural organisations, and the industry response to the database demonstrates the relevance of this research for theatre today. The Black British and Asian Shakespeare Performance Database received 121,210 page views between January 2016 and July 2020, while videos available online based on the team's research had received 115,636 views collectively across social media platforms as of September 2020 (5.1). The RSC actor and film producer Rakie Ayola testifies that this project has 'enabled theatre producers to examine and address the positive and negative patterns of casting within classical theatre over the decades. It has also enabled Black and Asian actors to feel confident that they are not "the exception", but part of a longstanding tradition. They can be assured through Warwick University's Shakespeare Project that their contribution and legacy will be acknowledged, recorded and respected' (5.2).

**Highlighting the importance of the contribution of ethnic minorities to British Theatre**

'To Tell My Story: British Black and Asian Shakespeare' was an exhibition curated by Howard showcasing the history of actors of colour in Britain. By showcasing multicultural casting of Shakespeare it provided a platform for current calls for diversity and colour-blind casting. Between August 2013 and 2016 it toured nationally to approximately 30 theatres, libraries, schools, museums and cultural centres, and accompanied productions of *Macbeth* (Tara Arts: UK tour) and *King Lear* (Shakespeare's Globe: tour to St Lucia). Several exhibition visitors commented that they had been previously unaware 'of the struggles other races found performing Shakespeare' (5.3). New panels were continually added in response to spectator interest and feedback. Consequently, the British Library asked Howard to work on the Black Performance section of its major exhibition, 'Shakespeare in Ten Acts' (2016), and to contribute a chapter to the accompanying book (3.4). One review called Howard's work 'dynamic': Shakespeare 'becomes a touchstone by which to record and examine the evolution of society' (5.4).

Howard's research revealed that in Coventry in the early nineteenth century Ira Aldridge, previously recognised only for his acting career, became the first known person of colour to manage a British theatre (see 3.4). In November 2016, in partnership with Coventry's Belgrade Theatre, Howard produced 'Against Prejudice', a drama based on original documents exploring the significance of this discovery. Participants included the RSC's Ray Fearon and the Belgrade's Black Youth Theatre. Their performance was followed by a procession to the site of Aldridge's playhouse. 130 people attended the sold-out event, and attendees commented on the importance of telling Aldridge's story: 'As a black actor, this is MY story, why did I never hear it before?' and 'Why wasn't I taught this at school? But look at these kids: they won't forget' (5.3). In 2017 Shakespeare's Globe invited 'Against Prejudice' to its Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, where audience feedback showed that even those who knew of Aldridge learnt more about his life and legacy. One Black Youth Theatre performer reflected, 'As a young person, [Aldridge] achieved so much. It gives me hope that we can also make a difference when we have passion and commitment' (5.3).

'Against Prejudice' inspired a successful campaign for a blue plaque for Aldridge, which the Lord Mayor of Coventry and the centenarian actor Earl Cameron (pupil of Aldridge's daughter, Amanda) unveiled in August 2017. This generated extensive international media interest. Writer and actor Lolita Chakrabarti said that the plaque would 'inspire Black actors ... Today, Black and

Asian actors are often marginalised, but a blue plaque to commemorate Aldridge's achievements will convey the message, "I'm not alone in carving out my journey and with effort and talent, I can achieve my goals" (5.4). Attendees commented that they learned more about Coventry's role in the abolition of the slave trade and the diversity of the city, past and present (5.5). These events formed part of Coventry's successful bid to be UK City of Culture 2021 and have shaped plans for the Belgrade Theatre's forthcoming programme: 'It felt fitting to honour Aldridge's legacy by ensuring that we continue to amplify marginalised voices' (Belgrade Theatre Artistic Director, 5.5). Following discussions with the City of Culture team, the BBC scheduled a forthcoming celebration of Aldridge's work in Coventry, including a 'Horrible Histories' episode for children, while the Coventry North MP said in Parliament (October 2020): 'I want everyone to know about Ira...Black History is British History' (5.5).

### Sharing expertise

Howard has been invited to give talks, interviews and speak on expert panels by high profile and prestigious organisations such as the British Council, Victoria and Albert Museum, The BBC, The Drum (Birmingham), HOME (Manchester) and Harlem Film Festival (New York), along with local community organisations in London, Birmingham, Bath and Bristol. These events have consistently challenged the stereotype that, as one participant put it, 'we just couldn't or shouldn't do Shakespeare, because our skin was the wrong colour' (5.3).

Howard's work has been central to debates about diversifying casting procedures in relation to Shakespeare, both by highlighting the mixed history of Black and Asian theatre makers and by raising public awareness of the lack of ethnic representation in the contemporary theatre industry. In 2014 Howard organised a Multicultural Shakespeare Day of Debates at the V&A, attended by many leading figures in the profession. This became a forum where Black and Asian artists expressed frustration at working conditions within classical theatre institutions, exemplified by the comment: 'I've had great opportunities, but I feel as though I'm constantly needing to qualify for the next job' (5.3).

Within two years of these debates, major arts bodies presented Shakespeare's greatest tragedies - *King Lear* (BBC/ Manchester Exchange); *Hamlet* (RSC/ also broadcast by the BBC); *Macbeth* (Shakespeare's Globe) - with Black British performers in the title roles. In each case the leading actors had worked closely with Multicultural Shakespeare, as had the directors of *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. According to the Director of Globe Education, Howard's collaborations with Shakespeare's Globe 'laid the foundations for the Shakespeare and Race Festivals' staged by the theatre since 2018; his work 'raised questions about inclusivity and equity before the Black Lives Matter movement pushed mainstream theatres into taking part in the debate' (5.6).

In 2017 Howard was asked to be the consultant for Russell Brand's stage show 'My Life by William Shakespeare' and the guest in 'Shakespeare and Power!', an episode of Brand's *Under the Skin* podcast. In addition to being available on podcast platforms such as Spotify and Apple Podcasts, as of 29.09.20 the episode had received 40,551 views on YouTube, and approximately 25,000 views of a shorter clip on Facebook discussing Shakespeare's relevance for contemporary society (5.1). Feedback included such comments as 'I've been teaching working class young people in FE Shakespeare for over 25 years, and this will help me move some of the arguments against ("He's irrelevant! He's boring! I can't understand him!")' (5.1). Howard's research has connected with many who might feel excluded from the Shakespearean tradition and has provided an intersectional platform to address issues of identity, race and nationality. *The Stranger's Case* was a 10-minute film of Shakespeare's condemnation of anti-immigrant prejudice in the play *Sir Thomas More*, a modern adaptation starring a British Asian actor. It was directed by Peter Trifunovic after he heard the podcast, and co-produced by Howard. Trifunovic described Howard's support as 'instrumental in getting the film made.' It was launched online for World Refugee Day and won a Best Short Film award at the Leeds International Film Festival (2019), and was longlisted at the BAFTAs (5.7).



### The British Black and Asian Shakespeare Performance Database

The BBAS database documents, for the first time, the work of Black and Asian Shakespearean performers and directors since 1930, and tracks casting trends over this period. On average it had 1,156 users per month between 1 January 2016 and 31 July 2020, with 56% based in the UK and 18% in the USA. 83% of users found the site through a search engine (5.1).

A launch event was held in January 2016 at the Tricycle Theatre, London. This included a reading of *In Robeson's Footsteps* (dramatised extracts from the reminiscences of BAME performers who contributed to Howard's research) and considered the achievements of Robeson's successors. Audience comments stress both the significance of the database and the importance of commemoration. For example: 'We always think we're starting again, we always think that the actor we saw playing Hamlet is the first black actor that ever played it...We've sort of forgotten...So we need to keep saying, "You're not the first, celebrate the tradition that you're a part of"' (5.3).

The database launch received widespread national press coverage (including the *Evening Standard* (print readership: 1,640,000, circulation: 898,407), *Independent* (circulation: 55,193), *The Stage Online*, *The Guardian* (print readership: 865,000, circulation: 164,163), *Broadway World*, *Eurasia Review*) praising it for highlighting the inadequate opportunities for Black and Asian actors in Shakespeare, particularly in lead roles. *Broadway World* quoted the actor Noma Dumezweni's description of it as a resource that can inform and inspire the practice of actors of colour: 'To see those who look like me reminds me where we've been, what more we can do, and how much further we can go' (5.4).

In response to the project's findings Rogers has worked with major arts organisations campaigning for increased diversity, including Equity, the Performers' Alliance Parliamentary Group, Act for Change (as a Committee Member), and the Diversity School (Advisory Board, working for diversity within actor training). The BBAS database continues to be a point of reference, e.g. in publications such as *Digital Theatre* (2019) and a *Guardian* article (2017, print readership: 898,000, circulation: 156,756) discussing the stereotyping of Asian women in drama (5.4). The American Shakespeare Center cited Rogers' research in relation to the lack of BAME representation in US theatre; the Australian website *Shakespeare TwentyScore* praised the database for 'doing terrific ongoing work to demonstrate that Shakespeare is not and has never been owned solely by white men' (5.4).

Howard and his team have widely shared and spotlighted the historical and contemporary achievements of Shakespearean actors of colour. BAME artists have benefitted from the demonstration of the long history of their presence within the classical tradition. The theatre industry has been challenged to recognise the problem with Black and Asian actors' exclusion from leading roles, and to realise the possibilities of increased diversity. Ultimately, the wider public is now benefitting from productions that offer a more accurate reflection of the composition of today's society, correcting a situation where 'a large segment of 21st-century Britain's population feels excluded from going to the theatre...because the people on the stage in no way resemble them' (*The Times*, 5.4).

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Website and video views and comments
2. Statement from RSC Actor and Film Producer
3. Event Feedback (To Tell my Story/Against Prejudice/In Robeson's Footsteps/V&A Workshop)
4. Press Coverage (Shakespeare in Ten Acts/Plaque unveiling/Database/Richard II)
5. Ira Aldridge's legacy in Coventry (Plaque Unveiling Audience Comments, Belgrade Theatre Web Page, Coventry Telegraph Article, House of Commons Hansard: 20 October 2020)
6. Statement from Shakespeare's Globe Director of Education
7. The Stranger's Case film – Awards and Commentary